

The Holy Name of Jesus  
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Numbers 6:22-27  
Psalm 8  
Romans 1:1-7  
Luke 2:15-21

Today, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day since we celebrated the birth of God, we remember the day when Mary and Joseph presented him to be circumcised – marked in the flesh as belonging to the covenant and people of God, and marked in human language with a name – Jesus.

In Aramaic, the language he was probably named in, that is “Yeshua.” It means “God saves” – a perfect name for this child. And it is the same name as a familiar Biblical character – Joshua – Moses’ assistant, who brought the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

“Yeshua” comes to us as “Jesus” through the Greek and then the Latin of early Bibles. And ever since Jesus received that name – really even before he received it, since Mary and Joseph both individually received angelic messages that this would be his name – the name has become special.

In English, we even reserve it specifically for the Son of God. Out of reverence for God’s name, you don’t see families give it to their children. Jesus’ name is reserved to Him.

Many people observe the devotion of bowing when the name of Jesus is spoken. It is believed to have power, and to be a name that makes the demons tremble. It is held in honor, and St. Paul tells us that one day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is honored in his name. But it is also a sign of his humanity. The hymn we will sing a little later in this service – “At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow,” says that Jesus was “*Humbled* for a season to receive a name from the lips of sinners unto whom he came.”

A name is quite a human thing. When we call God, “God”, that’s a strange kind of name. Not really a proper name at all, it is a word that describes what He is: God.

The ancient Israelites hesitated to say the 4 letter proper name they had for God, and so instead they simply called Him the LORD. This is what we mark in our Bible translations when God in the Old Testament is called the LORD with the L, O, R, and D capitalized. Out of reverence for God, His proper name was not even spoken by humans.

And yet, God took a proper name as Jesus. He was called it daily in His earthly life. And many of those times, I’m sure, it wasn’t even uttered in respectful tones. His name marks His humanity, that He was called by a normal name, a common name at that time, by common people, just like every other human child or adult.

We named a human child before God just last Sunday, when we baptized an infant girl named Mary. In that rite, we imitated Jesus' own parents, naming Him before the Father. Each baptized human has a similar experience they share with Jesus, whether they were baptized by name as a child or as an adult.

And the naming in this ritual points to how a name – even the name “Jesus” – marks not only shared humanity, but also establishes intimacy.

A name makes a deep connection between people. It is a mark of closeness when we are invited to call each other by first names. And it is a mark of intimacy with God when we are named before Him, or when He calls us by name.

Jesus proclaimed his resurrection to Mary Magdalene by the act of speaking her name. He said, “Mary,” and in that moment of intimacy, she recognized him, and knew Resurrection had come.

Jesus called out to Saul of Tarsus, “Saul, Saul,” when he called him on the road to Damascus, turned him into an apostle, and then gave him a new name as a Christian – Paul.

With our human names, Jesus calls each of us. And with His human name, we can call on Him. This ability to mutually name each other marks us as brothers and sisters and friends of Jesus.

The name, Jesus, can remind us each day of the deep, intimate love God has for us, that He came down to be among us – to live and teach and heal and die, and rise again for His human brothers and sisters.

And so we bow or kneel at the Name of Jesus, in reverence for that love. Or we sing and pray “Jesus,” in awe and joy and delight for God's love and God's humanity and God's intimacy with us.

And because God has taken on this name, we can cry to Jesus in anguish – in fear or pain or frustration, and know that He is near, that He hears, and that He can sympathize, having known anguish himself.

And always He is calling our names, too. Sometimes in the silence of our prayers. Sometimes in the voice of another human expressing love or need. By His name and by ours, we are bound to God, and called to follow Him.

Amen.