

**Holy Name Years ABC**  
**Numbers 6.22-27, Psalm 8, Galatians 4.4-7 or**  
**Philippians 2.5-11; Luke 2: 15-21**  
**Sermon**

For some of us, this is the final celebration for the holiday season. For others it is the continuation of the Twelve Days of Christmas ... the 8<sup>th</sup> day ... when “my true love gave to me 8 maids a milking”. There is one tradition that tells us that they stand for the eight beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

And maybe the gifts of the eighth day are in perfect keeping for this particular day known in the secular world as New Year’s Day. For this is the day, according

to the Episcopal faith tradition is known as “Holy Name”.

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“Now wait a minute,” my Presbyterian friend Mildred Wilson, a resident at Westminster-Canterbury Retirement Community, would remind me, “Jesus was named by the angel way back in chapter 1, verse 31 of Luke: ‘And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.’”

Yes, that’s true. But, the point here is that we move into ritualistic traditions of our Jewish lord and savior, Jesus.

This particular sentence, verse 21 of Chapter 2, reads “After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

This verse relates briefly to how Jesus was circumcised and named ... a tradition that I believe

continues today in the Jewish faith. The eighth day after birth is for circumcision and purification and the naming of the child *in the temple*. It is stressed here that, yes, Jesus was named before his conception in the final phrase of this reading, “And he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” One can interpret this as *from the beginning of time*.

There are other interesting details in this narrative as we delve further into it as well. For this would be the *second* time that we sense glimpses of the past. It was Mary’s recitation of the Magnificat that resonated with Hannah’s words of gratitude upon her pregnancy and the forthcoming birth of Samuel. Here, in this instance, we have another hearkening back to the same story, with Jesus, the firstborn being dedicated to God, much as Samuel was promised and dedicated to God.

So here we have it, the child, duly circumcised, named and presented to God, is the fulfillment of the hopes of pious Israel, the redeemer of the people of God. The name of Jesus means “*God saves*”.

And this lesson points us to the faithfulness of fulfilling Mosaic law. This marked Jesus’ acceptance into the covenant community; both by circumcision and naming give him his Jewish identity. This is an act of blessing, a dedication of Jesus to God and a declaration of the child’s heritage and character. (I liken to, when we baptize, we sign the candidate with the sign of the cross and express that we “mark him or her as Christ’s own forever.”) Herein Jesus is declared God’s own forever.

And the number 8 in Jewish tradition has significance in that it symbolizes completion or fulfillment. When the

angel declared his name, he was also declaring him savior of all people ... the fulfillment of God's plan for us.#

How is God's plan for us (as it was for Jesus) going to fit into your New Year plans? This is a good question to ponder this morning as we celebrate with centuries past the Temple rituals of naming Jesus.

Perhaps we need to start with our own understanding of the name Jesus. What do we call him? redeemer ... Emanuel ... god with us ... savior ... What do you call him? How do you see him?

Is he so far away that we think about him and only call out his name on Sundays? Or is he so close that we sense his presence every day, every hour and every moment?

Or is his name called upon only in emergencies? Is he called our savior or do we still rely upon our own selves more? Is he here for all the world or is he named for us to

keep him in our own personal box to be called on at our will for our own individual purposes? Is he greater than the walls of this church or is this the only place you can find him in your world?

Where will you find him to call him by name later today? Tomorrow? Throughout 2023? Has his name found a place in your heart?

So what is it ... or rather how is it ... that you wish your life to be this coming year? How will you both call to and call on Jesus this year.

My prayer for each and every one of you is that you can seek and serve Jesus in one another and be able to name those attributes in one another for which you are most grateful. I pray that you will grow together in your faith journeys, together as you collectively pray yourselves into your future ... as well as independently ... in your love and

support for one another this coming year. I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to descend upon you so that you may celebrate the Christ within you and around you and the Jesus who walks with you every step of the way.

And, as Blair Monie from the Benedictine community prays for us this morning: “As you leave this place may the Living Lord [we know as Jesus] go with you; beside you, to befriend you; above you to watch over you; beneath you, to lift you from your sorrows; within you, to give you the gifts of faith, hope and love [to share with all the world] and *always* before you, to show you the way.”<sup>1</sup>

Thanks be to God. *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Monie, Blair, *Benediction*, facebook posting 12/23/2016