

### **At the Name of Jesus**

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Feast of the Holy Name, Sunday, January 1, 2017.

*Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus Christ and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend... Philippians 2:9*

Christmas is not just for children; it is for both the child and adult in and among us. It is about the birth of the Savior born to save us from ourselves. The nativity scene in our homes and here at church is imprinted on our minds as a memory going back to our childhood that God came to us in the birth and life of Christ.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus. The twelve days of Christmas that began on Christmas Day continue to the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6. Joseph and Mary followed the ancient Jewish tradition that on the eighth day after his birth he was given his name. (Luke 2:21) When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell that her that she was to bear a son, she was told that he should be named Jesus. (Luke 1:31) It was in a dream that an angel appeared to Joseph to tell him that he should name the child Jesus, 'because he will save his people from their sins.' (Matthew 1:21) When we say or hear his name we remember that this is the name of him who saves all that is good and right in us.

This year the Sunday after Christmas falls on the eighth day after Christmas, January 1, thus it is on this New Year's Day that we commemorate the naming of Jesus. We honor the name of Jesus because it affirms our finite link with the infinite God.

According to ancient Jewish practice, forty days after she gave birth Mary, presented herself and her child in the temple for her rites of purification and his dedication to God. (Luke 2:22-24) That occasion is commemorated in the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, or Candlemas, observed on February 2, forty days after the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas.

It was at our baptism that we became full members of the church and received our Christian names that gave us our identity. Our name that we received at our baptism is important to us. We like to be called by our right name. We like to have it pronounced and spelled correctly. We like to hear our name spoken in greeting because it identifies us and like to have it remembered. It affirms who we are. Most of you know that I prefer Robert and not Bob. Our name establishes our identity even more than our surname because it represents our individuality. We don't want to do or say anything that would reflect badly on our reputation and good name. A custom that originated with the Puritans in New England was to name their children after the virtues of faith, patience, honor, solace, grace, and prudence.

Jesus had only one name. Christ is not his last name; it is his title that means, 'Anointed One.' Ordinarily, the child of Joseph and Mary would have been given a name like Josephson or Jesus bar Joseph, being the son of Joseph. Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew, Jehosha or Joshua, or Yeshua in the Aramaic. In any case, the name Jesus means 'Yahweh saves.'

It is in the name of Jesus that we find our salvation from all that is wrong, untrue and unjust. After his dramatic conversion from being a persecutor of Christians, Saul began his new ministry of defending Christ by changing his name to Paul. The name of Jesus carries with it images of his powerful reconciling love, his teaching and his selfless sacrifice. Because it is holy to the Christian faith it is important that we invoke the name of God only in teaching and prayer and never in cursing or swearing. To ask God to condemn or destroy anyone or anything in all creation is blasphemous and insulting to God. As Jesus was given a name that we honor, we must also live our lives in a way that honors God's name as well as our own good name. God knows each of us by name because we are one of God's own.

This month of January is named for Janus, the two headed Roman deity who looked both forward and backward. New Year's Day is a time to assess who we are, where we have been, and where we are headed. It is a time for retrospect as well as prospect. This first day of the New Year reminds us that the Christian view of history is that we are not going around in meaningless circles with no purpose or objective. We are moving forward in the events of our time to fulfill God's intent and purposes for us.

When you are worried in anticipation of a challenge, invoke the name of Jesus to remind you that God's grace has brought you this far. If you have behaved in a way that you know is wrong, insensitive or dishonest, pray the name of Jesus to be assured of God's forgiving grace. When you experience a loss of a loved one, pray in Jesus' name to know that death is not an end but a beginning in the peace of God's presence. In all your thoughts and actions, invoke the name of Jesus to take you beyond yourself to an awareness of people and issues greater than yourself.

As we stand today at the door of this New Year we anticipate the inevitable beauties and joys as well as the problems and challenges that come our way. God gives us the strength and courage to face these challenges in the name of Jesus. Whatever our endeavors, they must be worthy of Jesus' name. We best fulfill God's purposes by working together for what is right and good and noble. Think of what you do in your daily tasks in your vocation or studies as a holy task. Whatever you do in the name of God, you have set your course on getting it right. I leave you with these lines:

#### A Way to a Happy New Year

To leave the old with a burst of song,  
To recall the right and forgive the wrong;  
To forget the thing that binds you fast,  
To the vain regrets of the year that's past;  
To have the strength to let go your hold  
Of the not worth while of the days grown old,  
To dare go forth with a purpose true,  
To the unknown task of the year that's new;  
To help others along the road  
To do their work and lift their load;  
To add your gift to the world's good cheer,  
Is to have and to give a Happy New Year.

Robert Brewster Beattie