

Luke 2:21

²¹After eight days passed, when the child was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

His Name

I.

Do you know what day it is today? I'm sure that the first thought that comes to most minds is New Year's Day. While that's not an incorrect answer, that's not the answer I'm looking for.

Does this help? I'm always saying that Christmas isn't over until January 6. While most radio stations have abandoned their Christmas music they've been playing since before Thanksgiving, we're still in the Christmas season. Today is the Eighth Day of Christmas. If you got it right, give yourself a gold star.

This year the Eighth Day of Christmas is a Sunday. That means today is also the First Sunday after Christmas. Today's theme of the day reminded us that **A Savior Is Born to Be the True Son**. Today's gospel gave the record of another event in Jesus' early life, but an event later than the Eighth Day of Christmas; he was taken by Joseph to Egypt to escape Herod.

On the Eighth Day of Christmas, however, Jesus was circumcised and officially given his name. Jesus' naming day isn't a day we always take note of. It happens on New Years Day every year. On that day people tend to be thinking of their hopes and dreams for the new year.

Today's sermon text is not the gospel for the First Sunday after Christmas, but the gospel for the circumcision and naming of Jesus. It's still part of the Christmas narrative, but without the photo op of the angels and shepherds. There's no mention of sheep or donkeys.

It was probably a very small gathering that day, the eighth day after Jesus was born. Just the two earthly parents of Jesus and an officiant or two. It's about as noteworthy as the nurse coming by a mother's hospital bed to verify the information that will appear on her newborn child's birth certificate. The baby is lying there in a basinet. Besides mother and baby and the nurse, dad is perhaps the only other person around. No one else even notices what is going on.

Jesus' circumcision and naming day didn't make any headlines. No news anchors were going on and on about it. Not even a minor blog post or tweet. Still, this day of Jesus' life was significant. "After eight days passed, when the child was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." (Luke 2:21, EHV). By God's command in the Old Testament, every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day—seven days after his birth, as we would count it.

God's promise in circumcision was that in this way a male child was brought into God's covenant with Israel. It started all the way back with Abraham. Abram was 99 years old and God made his covenant with him, using circumcision as the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17).

The very next verse after our short text today, Matthew begins to tell about the time when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, but that was when Jesus was 40 days old. That's when Simeon and Anna saw Jesus and told Mary and Joseph what they had seen about this child.

The day of circumcision and naming was much more low-key. It was done wherever the family lived, without any fanfare.

Remember what I said just a few moments ago about people thinking of New Years Day and their hopes and dreams for the new year? That's not such a bad thing for Christians,

either. On this day we are reminded of the new beginning God gave us in his Son.

So...on that eighth day Jesus was named. "What's in a name?" we might ask. It seems to be just a convenient label—a way to identify someone or some thing, or even some place.

While that might be typical for us, God does things differently. We start our worship with the invocation, beginning the service with the Name of the Triune God. The closing blessing we use for so many services is called the Aaronic Benediction. It's the way God instructed Aaron and his sons to bless the people and put God's name on them.

Scripture reminds us that where God's name is, so is his presence and his power. We speak God's name frequently during worship—at the confession and absolution, in the Lord's Prayer, speaking the words of whichever creed is used that particular day.

"After eight days passed...he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21, EHV). Mary and Joseph followed the ceremonial law according to the tradition dating back to Abraham. They not only had Jesus circumcised, but gave him his name. God's angels had given the command to name the child Jesus, and they followed that command.

Jesus is the way his name is pronounced in the Greek language. In Hebrew it's Yeshua, or Joshua. That name takes a part of from God's proper name of Yaweh—Ya—and adds the Hebrew for "saves." taken together, the given name Jesus means: Yahweh Saves.

How did you get *your* first name? I remember coming up with names for my children. Some names were out because of the initials that would give them. Some names were rejected because of the possibilities kids would have of butchering the name and finding ways to tease with it. In many cases, your parents simply liked the way your first and last names sounded when said together.

It hasn't always been that way. Once upon a time a person's name was a literal definition of who they were or what they had done. Many last names have been handed down from the vocation of some long-forgotten ancestor, like Sawyer or Cooper. Some come from where people lived, such as Rivers or Hill. Some come from the first name of a previous ancestor, like Stephenson.

Names are important. Companies spend lots of time and money making sure their brand names are recognized and respected. A poorly chosen name can haunt a product for years. Some companies have even changed their name before anyone realized what bad connotations the original name might have had.

Sometimes the name of a person or place is linked inseparably with something, whether favorable or unfavorable. Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Pearl Harbor, Eden, Sinai, Calvary.

II.

Over 1,000 times the Bible uses the word *name* or *names*. It might refer to some person or place or animal, but often it's pointing to the name of God, the name of Jesus, the name of the Lord.

On this day when we celebrate the naming of Jesus, remember that the One named the Lord, or God, has blessed us every day, and will continue to bless us into the new year.

Children who are alone or afraid will call out for "mommy" or "daddy." We call on the name of our God the same way. He has promised to hear and answer our prayers. We want his presence, his power, and his blessings to be poured out on us.

The name of God is more than just an abstract representation of God. His name is genuinely his power and presence in all its fullness. That's why his name is to be hallowed, or treated with care because of its holiness. Scripture tells us to rejoice in the name of the Lord, to trust in the name of the Lord, to call upon God's name and exalt in God's name. This is only true because the name of God is an expression of God himself.

Think of Elijah, standing there surrounded by the prophets of Baal and Asherah. They tried to get their gods to answer them (1 Kings 18). They even cut themselves, trying to

appease their gods. After having water dumped on the sacrifices Elijah was making to the true God, he called on God's name, and God sent fire from heaven to show the people who the true God is.

Think of David, the young shepherd boy, who went out to fight against the unbeatable Goliath with nothing but a sling and some rocks. It wasn't really David's sling and rocks, but the power and promise of the name of the Lord who went with him.

So important is God's name that it ranks second in all the commandments. Even ahead of keeping the Sabbath. Certainly ahead of all the ways we interact with other people. Scripture repeatedly warns us against taking any actions or saying words that profane the name of the Lord. Blasphemy is falsely claiming a right to use God's name but without his authority. Blasphemy was punishable by death in Israel. It was this charge that was brought against Jesus.

III.

Everything about the name of the Lord is good and holy. Our *use* of names, however, both regular names and God's name, is *not* always good and holy.

The people at Babel wanted themselves to be thought of as godlike. They wanted to make a name for themselves, not unlike many people these days. It's also common to use names to label people: stupid, lazy, selfish. Sometimes the labels are accurate, but our use of that kind of name is to hurt people.

God's name is the name that gets misused the most. In Jeremiah's day, the people had begun to trust in their celebration of ceremonies and the fact that they had the special building of the temple. They thought their use of God's name would serve as some sort of magic formula to keep them safe. In every case of Israel suffering disaster, God promised he would come to save them only if they would repent and rightly confess and use his name, rather than misusing or denying it.

Misuse of God's name these days can be as simple as saying "O my God!" without a second thought. It becomes nothing more than saying "Wow!" Another common misuse of God's name is to wish someone or something would spend eternity in hell. The most minor thing can go wrong and a person asks God to damn it. Children of God don't want to use the name of the Triune God with the same casual attitude so many do. We don't want to use it "in vain," that is, making it common, taking it out of its rightful place of uniqueness.

IV.

All these things show us why we need another name. We need the name that is above every name. We need Yaweh Saves—Jesus—the Anointed One. At our Christmas Eve service we revisited the names Isaiah prophesied: "For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, EHV).

We spoke last weekend about the prophetic perspective we use to look at Christmas through the lens of what God sent Jesus to do. Some of his other names will come into prominence as the Church Year progresses: Lamb of God, Son of Man, Redeemer.

Jesus told his disciples that those who spoke in his name would be called Children of God. That label fits us because we believe that Jesus is God, as John said in the Christmas Day gospel: "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" (John 1:14, EHV). We believe that he spoke with the authority of God in the name of God. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the One who died with the sign over his head—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

On this Eighth Day of Christmas we begin a new year in his name. In his name we have been given the right to be called children of God. In his name we pray, always remembering to subject our will to the will of Christ who lives in us. Because of the name of Jesus our names are written in the book of life in heaven. That's the way we start the new year. Amen.