

Rev. Luke C. Werre
Peace, Sun Prairie
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Christmas 1 – The Name of Jesus

Luke 2:21

“JESUS” IS A NAME WITH A PURPOSE

One of the thrilling and awesome responsibilities of new parents is to choose their child’s name. Parents might choose a name because it’s biblical, or because it’s a family name, or they might name their child after someone they admire. Sometimes they simply pick a name because they like it. Whatever the case, it’s exciting.

God picked a name for His newborn Son too. He took sheer delight in it. And as we see in Luke chapter 2, Joseph and Mary carried out God’s adamant instructions through the angel to name the child “Jesus.” God did not merely pick that name because He liked it, or because it was significant to Him somehow. He picked the name “Jesus” for our sakes. The name means something for us. Today, let us consider that “Jesus” is a name with a purpose. First of all, its purpose is to designate the person, and secondly, to indicate his work.

The name Jesus literally means “Savior” or “salvation.” Such a name designates who this person is. This is the one God Himself selected and appointed for the purpose of our salvation. God Himself named Jesus. He left no options, no room to mull it over, no possibility for Mary and Joseph to contribute their two-cents-worth. God reserved for Himself the right to pick the name because God is the Father of this child. If God is the Father of this child, then the child must be God also. Out of eternity, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Yet we also see that this child developed in His mother’s womb, and was born in the natural way. We are told here in Luke 2 that He was circumcised on the eighth day like every other Jewish boy

that came before him. He bled and cried like any infant. He was given a human name –a name that is understandable and tangible to us. One time, when the Lord appeared to a man named Manoah, the father of the Bible hero Samson, Manoah asked, “What is your name, so that we may honor you?” The Lord replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.” But that is not the case with Jesus. In fact, the name Jesus was fairly common. In Hebrew it is “Joshua.” It is a name we can grab on to. We can see already from the very start that this child is fully human in every way as we are.

Therefore “Jesus” is a name with a purpose. It’s purpose is to designate the person, to reveal who Jesus is –as the Athanasian Creed describes, *“fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh, equal to the Father as to his deity, less than the Father as to his humanity.”*

God named Him Jesus, Savior. It is Jesus that God specifically holds before us. It is Jesus on whom God insists we focus. It is in the person of Jesus that God reveals Himself to us and makes contact with us. It is Jesus and Jesus alone from whom we are to expect anything good, especially good will from God and eternal salvation.

The Gospel of John tells us, *the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*. That means for the truth regarding our status with God and our salvation everything other than Jesus is a lie: my feelings, hard work or laziness, all science, public opinion, a salary or lack of it, savings or debt, good weather or bad, psychology, my own efforts, healthy or unhealthy eating, all pleasure or suffering. Jesus is the one God has designated by name to be the only source of truth for my salvation. “Jesus” is a name with a purpose.

That might seem obvious enough, but Martin Luther once observed that even as believers we are so engrossed in our earthly lives – you’d think we don’t believe in a heaven, or salvation, or God. In our hearts we slip right into breaking the First Commandment without even thinking about it. We instinctively seek our sense of

wellness apart from Jesus Christ. We even open our minds to the possibility of God reaching out to us through other ways than Jesus. If we felt the slightest hint of how shockingly wrong such notions are to the Holy One, we'd go into cardiac arrest in an instant for sheer terror. For if He threatens agony with no relief for such sinfulness.

But God gave Mary's baby to us and gave Him the name Jesus for a purpose. It was not only so that we could identify Him as God's Son and our Savior, but also to indicate His work. The name "Jesus" means Savior. Savior from what? The angel who spoke to Joseph when Mary was pregnant explained: *"You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins."* That is the work and what we are to expect of Jesus.

Already only 8 days old the Baby Jesus was saving us from our sins. As God from eternity Jesus lives beyond our existence, outside of our dimension, above and out of the reach of so-called Mother Nature. He was beholden to none, under no one's rules, not even His own. But here we see Him, from whom all things came, things visible and invisible, wearing human flesh and putting Himself under rules such as circumcision. He had no need to do this for Himself. He did it for us. The name Jesus means He is our Savior. So He placed Himself not only under the Jewish rule of circumcision. He placed Himself under the Ten Commandments and kept them for us.

Imagine it was your job to haul a large two-wheeled handcart full of rocks across a worksite. But you are weakened by illness. In your weakness as you attempt to put your shoulders to the handles of the cart, you only succeed in tipping it over onto yourself, where you lay helplessly trapped. If no one finds you, you will die. But Jesus comes along, puts His own shoulder to the cart lifting it off you and carries it to its destination. In the same way Jesus shouldered the Ten Commandments for us and carried them by keeping them perfectly on our behalf. Where we have failed, He fulfilled. Where we sinned, He succeeded. Where we transgressed, He triumphed. The Bible says, *"All of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."* His holiness earned

as a human with much labor, toil and sweat, covers our sin in God's eyes –even our sin of failing to look to Jesus for everything we need. Jesus the Savior saves us from our sins by covering us with the righteousness He earned so that our status before God is clear and innocent. We are rescued, saved from our sins.

In His circumcision we also see Him taking on our sinfulness as His own. Circumcision for the Jews before Christ was a lot like baptism for Christians after Christ. God's promise of grace was given to children who were circumcised. But Jesus has no sin of His own. So why would He need to be circumcised? Because already as a baby He was being identified as a sinner for our sakes. That way, when Jesus suffered and died on the cross He took the blame for the sin of the whole world –though He had no sin of His own. He was punished by His heavenly Father. He died in our stead so that anyone who looks to Him and relies on Him is saved. Whoever looks to Jesus and trusts in Him has kindness from God, forgiveness, peace, life, rescue from death and the devil, and God's promise to care for us. Martin Luther preached, *"If God is well-disposed towards you, how can it harm you that the whole world rages against you?"*

From this let us learn that Jesus came not to be merely an example to us, a ruler, a teacher, a leader, or an influence. He was all these things without ever coming to earth. Jesus was born for one purpose only and His name tells it all: to be our Savior.