

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. (Luke 2:21)

Know Jesus' Name

What does your name mean? I googled mine the other day. While there appears to be some controversy about how the Middle French emerged into English, most people think that "Geoffrey" means "The peace of God." I didn't know that until I looked it up. Do you know what your name means? If you have a biblical name, you might because modern Bibles often put in a footnote to tell you. But your parents probably didn't choose your name because of what it means. It's more likely that you're named after someone or that they just liked that name. That's the way we choose names today. It's been true in Western culture for a very long time. But many societies have had a different approach to choosing names for their children. In many cultures, names come from the language the people speak and so it's obvious that they mean something, just like Joy or Grace or Rose mean something to our English speaking ears. The society that Jesus grew up in used names that meant something in Hebrew or Aramaic, languages the people knew. Quite often, in a situation like that, names make a statement about the person who holds them. In the church, New Year's Day is a special holiday that celebrates Jesus' name, because that name most certainly does tell us something about him.

I.

My friends, **know Jesus' name. It means Savior.** OK, that's a little bit of an oversimplification. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua. Joshua was a famous Old Testament figure and there were lots of Jewish babies named after him. In Jesus' day, when every educated person and every person who was involved in trade and government spoke Greek, lots of Jewish babies had the Greek version of the name. History records several Jewish people named Jesus, a couple of whom even appear in the Bible.

Why did God choose that name for his son? Joshua was important. He led the children of Israel after Moses died. He conquered the Promised Land and assigned the twelve tribes to their territories. And he was a faithful believer – one of the very few Old Testament believers who does not have a really negative incident recorded in connection with his name. But there were more important Old Testament guys than him. Abraham and Moses certainly tower over Joshua. You could point to King David, the founder of the line of kings that the Christ was supposed to come from. You might think that Isaiah, who gives us all those rich prophecies of the coming Christ, would be a good name for the Savior to have. But God chose Joshua – Jesus – for his son's name. Why? Because Joshua means "the LORD saves." God gave his son a name that pointed to what he was going to do. So it is appropriate for us to summarize that name by saying it means Savior. In fact, that's kind of what the angel did when he announced the name to Joseph. He said, **"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** The LORD saves. Jesus is the LORD who has come to save us. His very name tells us that he is our Savior.

Joseph heard that command from God and obeyed it. Luke tells us this morning that they gave the baby the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. Strictly speaking, Luke isn't talking about the angel's conversation with Joseph. That happened after Jesus was conceived, when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant and he was thinking about ending their engagement. Luke is talking about when Gabriel came to Mary and announced that she was going to be with child. He told her, **"You are to give him the name Jesus."** Joseph and Mary showed their faith in God by carefully following all the commands God gave them about this child. God made sure that we would have this unique and deeply treasured name. Is there any other name that provokes a greater reaction in our hearts than the name of Jesus?

But notice when they gave him that name. It was eight days after he was born, when it was time to circumcise him. God had given circumcision to Abraham two thousand years before this, as a sign of his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Originally, it was a mark of faith. It was something the children of Israel were supposed to do to show that they were waiting for the promised savior. God also included

circumcision in the Mt. Sinai covenant. The Jewish people converted it into a law based attempt to earn heaven. So the New Testament has a lot of negative things to say about the practice. But it did come from God and he did give it as a sign of faith in his promises. Jesus shared that faith, even as he came to fulfill the promises.

And the Mt. Sinai covenant *was* a part of God's law. So Jesus had to fulfill it. When the priest came and made that little cut and spilled his blood for the very first time, Jesus was taking his first steps toward saving us. Saving us didn't start at the cross. That was the completion of his sufferings. But before he laid his life down for us, Jesus had to make that life perfect. Now it was already perfect in the sense that Jesus was born without sin. But he still had to obey God in the way that you and I never can. The very first Old Testament law to apply to a Jewish baby was the command to be circumcised when he was eight days old. God carefully chose faithful, believing Jewish parents who would obey these commands. So they called the priest to their home on the very day God had specified and had their son circumcised. When he was forty days old, they presented him at the temple. When he was twelve, he went to the temple for the Passover as God commanded every Jewish male to do. And on and on it went. Jesus kept every ceremonial law and every other law that God gave. He honored his father and mother. He didn't lie or steal or even lust. He remembered the Sabbath day and kept it holy. He honored God's name. All of which is to say, he had no other gods. His Father was his only God and he dedicated his entire life to serving him. Then he laid that life down on the cross just as God had demanded.

Why did he do all that? Because we simply can't. Last night, we had our annual Remembrance Rite in which I read the names of all our members who God called home in 2016. It was the longest list in years. Some of those people were wonderful Christians who showed their faith in kindness and thoughtfulness to others. Some people might be offended by the very idea that they were sinners, because they were such nice people. But my friends, the wages of sin is death. Every one of those people died. Most of them were elderly. Old age and disease come from sin – all suffering does. As much as I loved those people, as much as I respected their lives of faith, they were sinners. Just like you and me. Unless Jesus comes back first, we're all going to age and get sick and finally die. Because the wages of sin is death. Not just physical death, not just the parting of the soul from the body. But eternal death, eternal separation from God in hell.

That's what is coming to all of us – or it least it should be. But Jesus came to rescue us. He came to save us. And he did. He lived the perfect life we can't live. He stood in our place and God gives us credit because Jesus fulfilled every commandment God ever gave. Then Jesus laid that perfect life down on the cross. He followed the drops of blood from his circumcision with the blood that flowed from the scourging and the crown of thorns and the nails that pierced his hands and feet, and with the blood that flowed from his side when he was dead. That blood paid for all our sin. That blood washed all our sin away. Jesus rose to tell us that. His body was renewed. Then he ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us. He will take us there when we die. He will return to undo all that sin has done to us and to our world, to undo all the aging and sickness and pain and death. All that is what that the name Jesus means. Know your Savior's name.

II.

I once had a conversation with a young couple about my preaching. They were members of the church I was serving and they were generally positive. But they told me that they had noticed one thing: I tended to use "Christ" instead of "Jesus." They weren't offended, but they told me that those two names hit them differently. *Christ* reminded them of Jesus' power. But *Jesus* reminded them of his love. Jesus was his personal name and calling him by the name that his mother used just seemed so much more personal to them when they were listening to a sermon. Now, I don't know if I would agree with that or if other people feel that way or not, but I thought it was an interesting observation. Jesus is the personal name that our Lord took when he entered this world to save us. What impact does that name have on us? Whether you agree with that young couple's perspective or not, knowing Jesus changes everything about us. My friends, **know Jesus' name. It makes you God's child.**

Once you know a person, their name becomes more than just a collection of sounds. It represents all that you know about that person and all that that person has meant to you. When we were naming our children, sometimes there was a name that either I or my wife liked, but the other person didn't. Sometimes, it was because of someone else who had had that name. That collection of sounds now had a negative emotional

impact. The reverse is also true. I've known lots of Hannah's, lots of Benjamin's, lots of Joseph's in my life. But none of them has had the same impact on me as my children who share those names. Now, those collections of sounds represent all that I've experienced of them and with them. I think of them first when I hear those names.

The name Jesus is more than just a collection of sounds to us. That name means all that he has done for us. It has that meaning because God reached into our hearts through the Gospel. God used that message of who Jesus is and what he did to give us faith. Now, in a very real way, Jesus' name is written on our hearts. It represents all that we hope for and all that we need. It's the first place we go to when we are afraid or in trouble. Jesus will never leave us. And we count on him to bring us home.

But it's written on our hearts in another sense, too. God sees it and he claims us as his. Twelve or thirteen years ago, we took our kids on a family vacation to Yellowstone. We camped and while we were making plans, we saw that even in July, it can get very cold at Yellowstone. So we went out and bought really warm sleeping bags for everyone in the family. And my wife made cross stitch labels for each one. She chose colors and wrote the kids' names and sewed them on. So now, we always know whose sleeping bag is whose. Well, when you were baptized, God wrote Jesus' name on you. You can't see it, but it's there. God labeled your heart as his. So when he looks down from heaven, he sees the name Jesus written on you and he says, "This is my perfect child. This one I will protect. This one I will answer. This one I will love and care for and bring home to live with me forever." That name moves you into his family.

That name changes who we are. When God gave us faith, he made us a new person. He replaced the old, unbelieving sinner that we were with a new believer. That believer loves having Jesus' name stitched onto his heart. That believer longs to live for Jesus. That is who you truly are, even when it's hard to see that about yourself. Today is the beginning of a new year. Whatever sins lay in 2016, whatever failures haunted your faith, today God's mercies are new. They will be new every morning in this new year. Let this be a year in which your faith lives and shows itself. Let this be a year in which people all around you can see the name of Jesus written on you in great big letters. You belong to Jesus. Strive every day to show that.

What does your name mean? You can't always find a clear answer. The meanings of some names are lost in time. But there is one name that will always mean the same thing: Jesus means Savior. It means that God became man to rescue us from all our guilt and all our crimes against him. It means that God adopted us and we will live with him forever. You can never know too much about that name. Know it. Love it. And live so that everyone can see that name on your heart. Amen.