

January 1, 2017

## THE NAMING OF JESUS

PRAYER – May the words of my mouth be meditations to our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON – Today we celebrate the holy name of Jesus. It's unusual to celebrate this particular holy day on a Sunday. And because it coincides with the celebration of a new year rarely do the churches celebrate the holy name. Most like me decided that most people would not be inclined to come to church on the first day of the new year after celebrating late at night. And so rarely do we have a special celebration during the course of the week of the holy name of Jesus. And that's unfortunate. Even today, we have fewer people today than we might normally have at the 10:30 service on a Sunday. And again, I guess that because of people being on vacation and people celebrating last night. Not too many people up and about on this Sunday morning. But we get to celebrate the naming of Jesus. And it's important in different ways, in many different ways as a matter of fact. It's probably one that we should celebrate every year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January.

We are called Christians. We are Christ's followers. And that is a good thing but does it really signify, does it really state who we are. We don't follow simply a designated anointed one. Christ simply means anointed one. We follow Jesus. And Jesus is a name that was given to this child by God not given by Joseph or Mary, it was given by God. In the time of Jesus, the naming of someone or something had deep significance. If you remember your scripture, Abram was renamed Abraham by God because he was faithful, because he was following based on God's word, based on God's promise. And so, he was renamed by God and in renaming he was being owned by God if you will. He was being claimed by God as one who was faithful and one who was following, one who was righteous. You probably remember that Jacob was renamed after he fought with the angel, after he had been wrestling with God his whole life to claim a promise that was already his. But when he came to that point where he was struggling with God to claim the birthright, to be the father of the chosen people of God. He was renamed, you will no longer be Jacob but Israel. A name that's pretty familiar to you, I'm sure.

The naming of something was a claiming, was significant and so when Joseph found that Mary was pregnant before they had been married, before they had had marital relations he was planning to put her away quietly. He didn't want to hurt her but neither did he want to take on that responsibility of an unfaithful wife and a child. Till the angel came, explained to him that this child was different from all other children. That this child he should not be afraid to claim Mary as his wife and the child that she carried because this child was the result of God and humanity coming together. And designated a name, claimed him, this will be his name Jesus. In Hebrew, it was Joshua and it means God's salvation or God will save us. Hence the name and the significance of this child, Jesus. God will save us or God's salvation. And we see in the living of Jesus' life that he presents salvation, he presents the kingdom of God, he presents to the chosen people and ultimately to the world what it is that humanity needs to be reconciled with God. Not an external law, not a series of rewards and punishments, not some kind of sacrificial system. What we needed was what we could not achieve on our own. We needed someone to stand between us and God to take away the punishment for the sins that are ours and not his.

Now, unfortunately, what we have are a lot of descriptive names about Jesus. Normally on this Sunday we would be hearing the first verses of the gospel according to John. And that begins, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He's talking about Jesus. He's talking about that divine personality that we find in Jesus through his life. Talking about that which was the creative force because God expressed his love and created all that we see. He was the word spoken; let there be, and it was and it was good. And John has recognized in seeing that in this Jesus and in God's salvation, we see the very creative force of God coming together with humanity to allow salvation to take place. To allow forgiveness of sins to be complete. We hear also in that passage that he is the light and that the darkness could not overcome it. We hear so much about who Jesus is. He is the word, he is the incarnate word. He is the word in flesh, he is the one who has come to show us who God is and what God is about. To hear what God is offering to his creation. A means of salvation, a means of being reconciled with God, that is not based on us being able to fulfill God's promise. But to be able to accept and receive God's promise. And we as followers of Jesus not just the Christ. Sometimes we hear Jesus Christ so often it's almost like a first and last name. Maybe it would be more accurate if we said Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Anointed One of God. The humanity that is anointed with the spirit of God in such a way that for all of his life God and humanity dwelt together.

In the dream that God had for creation from the beginning. What God had dreamed and hoped for humanity from the beginning. That we would be in such relationship that there would be no sin. That there would be no brokenness. What we see in the coming of Jesus is the fulfilling of that dream based on what God is doing for us and not based on our own strength of will or desire to be with God. We celebrate reflecting who Jesus is, God's salvation. We are called to reflect all that Jesus has claimed for himself or has been claimed for him. That in those who believe and those who are baptized. The spirit of God dwells. We become God incarnate. God chooses to dwell with us and in us. And we are called to reflect that presence in the world through love, through compassion, through forgiveness. To be more and more like Jesus was. To reflect more and more who God is and who Jesus continues to be. We are called to be like Jesus, the light in the darkness. To not allow the darkness to overcome it. To accept for ourselves that name of Jesus and to live and to pray and to care for all people. That is what we are called to be.

In the last year, we have had a presiding bishop who has really held up the name of Jesus more than any in recent memory. Many times, we hear so much about Christ. But rarely do we hear the name of Jesus. In so many of the years that I've been ordained I've heard so many people say that in their churches they don't hear the name of Jesus very often. Not just the Episcopal church but all the churches. They hear about God, they hear about the Christ, but do they hear about Jesus? We got to band together to hear about Jesus who came into the world of creation to accept to be obedient to God so much that he could serve and sacrifice for the sins of the whole world so that all sins could be forgiven by God. And God could continue to be just and good. Not overlooking the sins but providing for himself the punishment for sins in Jesus' sacrifice of himself.

Our presiding bishop Michael Curry calls us, the Episcopal arm of the Jesus Movement. For that is what the church is. We are called to be followers of Jesus. We are called to reflect who Jesus was and who Jesus continues to be in the world. We are called to proclaim that gospel that Jesus embodied, that Jesus lived day by day not only for the chosen people of God but for all people in all times. To offer to the world a hope and a promise of salvation of life that world cannot give or attain on its own. It's the Jesus movement that offers that because it is in that life and the living of that life, the teachings of that

life. The embodiment of the gospel of that life that shows us and leads us to what God wants for us and what God wants and dreams for the world. A place of peace, of compassion, of justice, of mercy and as bearers of Jesus name we are called to bring that to the world. To live it in our lives and to call for it in the lives of all people. To bring them that hope and that promise that we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Today we celebrate the holy name. This was the day that Jesus was circumcised according to the law of the Jews. Living that out and fulfilling it. He was given a name, a name that was given by God through the angel you will call him Jesus. For he is God's salvation to a sinful and broken world. Accept the name of Jesus for yourself. Embody it, reflect it, live it out. For only in that way will the promise and dream of God be fulfilled for you and for God's world.