

SERMON TEXT FOR NAME OF JESUS/1ST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS A
PREACHED JANUARY 1, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA
TEXT: Luke 2:15-21

On the **eighth** day of his life, Jesus was **circumcised** - just like every other Jewish boy has been for centuries. Traditionally a Jewish child was also **named** on the eighth day. They **waited** until that day in the unfortunate but often likely chance that the child would **die** shortly after birth.

So on the eighth day after his birth, the firstborn son of Mary and Joseph is given a name - not a **family** name as would be customary - but the name told to both Mary and Joseph by the **angels**. Their son would be called **Jesus**, which means "the Lord saves."

The name Jesus is the Greek form of *Joshua*, *Jeshua*, and *Jehoshua* – all common, **familiar** Old Testament names. Clearly, this name was all part of God's plan of salvation, using human **actors** but transcending human **activity**. God had his son's name chosen **even before** he was conceived in Mary's womb. God did not need to wait until Jesus was born to choose a name that "**fit**" him, for God **knew** Jesus' purpose and destiny from the beginning of time. God's son Jesus would be the savior of the world.

To call this child "Jesus" then, in a time when everything was under the tight control of the occupying **Roman** forces, when everyone was supposed to look to Rome for the answer to any question, is to make a deliberate point. To call this boy "Jesus" signifies not only to everyone who might **meet** him, but to **Jesus himself**, that he was **God** in the midst of the people, **more powerful** even than the Roman Empire.

If Jesus were born **today**, his name might have been Joe or John, Jason or Jim or Jordan. Jesus would have laughed and cried, dirtied his diapers and his denim jeans, gone to school and worked side by side with his mother and father doing **carpentry** or **cooking** or **game-playing**. If you saw him on the **street** or in the **synagogue** you never would have picked out Jesus as being **special**. Yet his earthly parents knew he **was** special, because he was destined for something great.

Naming is like the act of giving birth. It's the calling forth of a new person whom God has created. Naming is a way to establish a **meaning** and an **identity** for that person. **Names are powerful things**. Certainly the name we are given at our birth can have a **profound effect** on our life, especially if it's tied to a particular **last** name like Kennedy or Carnegie, Barrymore or Kardashian or even Trump. Knowing someone's name gives us **power**, and this was especially true in ancient times. In a name is a person, a personality, a history.

You may recall that Mary recognized Jesus at the tomb on resurrection morning only after he spoke her **name**.

In the church year this day is known as The Name of Jesus. In the gospels, Jesus is our savior's **most common name** - used almost 600 times. And it was a **common name** in his culture as well. And while Jesus had a common **name**, we know that there was nothing **common** about him. He was born **human**, yes, but he was **at the same time** human and divine. He was destined for **greatness**. All those **miracles** he performed, all the **people** he healed, even the bread he broke and blessed which fed thousands, were done with **human hands**. The **hand** that touched the leper had dirt under its nails. The **feet** upon which the woman wept were calloused and dusty. His human **ears** heard the **cries** of those asking to be healed, heard the **mocking** of the soldiers as he was stripped and beaten, and heard the **crowds** shouting, "Crucify him!" And his **tears** - they came from a heart as broken as yours or mine has ever been.

Perhaps people followed Jesus because he seemed so **ordinary**, so down to earth, just one of the common people from a little town in Galilee. There is no hint in scripture of even **one person** who was afraid to come **close** to him. Oh, there were those who **mocked** him, those who **challenged** him, those who were **envious** of him, and many (including his closest followers) who **misunderstood** him. But there was not one person who considered him too **holy**, too **divine** or too "**heavenly**" to touch, not one person that we read about who was reluctant to **approach** Jesus for fear of being rejected. And the same is **still true**. **We can still call on Jesus and will not be rejected.**

What's in a name? In **Jesus'** name there is **salvation**. In and through our baptisms, we bear the **name** of Christ. We bear forever the **cross** that was branded on our foreheads in oil like a permanent tattoo. Others may not be able to **see** it, but **we** should always remember that it is there. It is part of our identity, our name. To bear the name Christian is an **awesome responsibility**, and an **equally awesome gift**. Bearing Christ's name determines **who** we are and **whose** we are. It defines our **being** and our **character** as well as our **future**. Our name may be **offensive** to some or a **blessing** to others, but we bear it just the same.

We don't know **when** or **how Jesus** realized what his true destiny was, but he did choose to **follow** the path his father had set out for him. I believe God has a destiny mapped out for each one of **us** too – not that we are **tied** to that destiny or that it has been **predetermined** as Jesus' was. But as God's children, adopted at baptism into God's family, God expects **great things** of us. We bear the **name** of God and the **image** of God. Above all, God expects that we give God our ultimate **devotion** and worship. As we are part of God's family, we are called to **love God** and to love and serve our **neighbor**. God has given each one

of us **gifts** for the kingdom. We don't all have the **same** gifts, so our paths, our destinies, will look **different** from the person next to us. We are not all called to be pastors or teachers, nurses or geologists, quarterbacks or truck drivers, moms or dads. But God has called us to fulfill our own individual destinies **in the name of Jesus**, whose name we bear.

On this New Year's Day, the beginning of a new year, a year full of potential and possibility, we gather together "in the name of Jesus" to consider the year ahead for us as Christians. We gather together in the name of Jesus to give thanks that God has adopted us into his family and given us new names. We gather together in the name of Jesus to pray that God might indeed **bless** us, so that we might live out **our destiny** as children of God. AMEN