

Christmas 1-A; December 30, 2007

Theme: "The Holy Name of God"

Text: Luke 2:21 "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."

Let us pray: O God, our Father, take these feeble words of mine and make them yours; fill the gaps of my inadequacy; forgive my pride and error; and grant that whatever is said in honesty and truth, may be used for the upholding of your people and to the glory of your Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN!

Two days from now, the world celebrates the secular holiday known as NEW YEAR'S DAY. The old year draws to a close and we usher in a new one. But notice I stated that Tuesday will be a secular holiday a secular celebration of a new year. For the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, the New Year began a month ago with Advent Sunday.

The Chinese New Year is based upon a lunar calendar, and for 2008, the Chinese New Year celebration begins February 7.

Closer to our spiritual home, the Jewish New Year, known as Rosh Hasha nah', occurs in the autumn of the year, usually in the month of September, after the harvest has been brought in. Last September 14, the Jews celebrated their New Year – Rosh Hasha nah', a feast of more than 2,000 years of tradition.

The rabbis built into Rosh Hasha nah' the understanding that a person's fate is determined by Providence in the year ahead. Symbolically, the rabbis understood the individuals' actions in the past year as having been recorded in a "book of memory." Out of this book of memory would flow an ultimate verdict for the future year: life or death. Built into this tradition was room for repentance, prayer and charity to avoid the dreaded decree of death. Eight days later is the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, the day of sacrifices offered for the atonement of the sins of the people.

I found interesting similarities of tradition with our own New Year's celebration and that of Rosh Hasha nah'. The Jews looked back at

the year that was and were offered opportunity to repent, to renew spiritual promises. For our New Year celebration, it is traditional to make New Year's what? Resolutions. The act of making a New Year's resolution strongly implies imperfection, the correction to which is to make resolutions to improve ourselves during the coming year.

Apparently, we have adopted many more customs stemming from our Jewish roots than we once thought.

Two days from now, on the eighth day of Christmas, which also is New Year's Day, the Christian Church celebrates "The Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus."

After my second grandson was born, I would affectionately address them as my favorite number one grandson or my favorite number two grandson. And when my granddaughters were born, I did the same: favorite number one granddaughter, etc. After all, how many favorite number one or number two grandsons or granddaughters can a grandfather have? However, after reading the following story, I may need to rethink how I address my grandchildren.

A census taker stopped at the door of a woman who had six children. He asked her how many children she had. The mother began to name each of her children. The census taker interrupted her to explain that he only needed the numbers.

The insulted lady responded angrily, "I love each and every one of my children. They each have names and I have never considered giving them numbers!" She then slammed the door shut.

Names are important, so much so that God used names instead of numbers to identify the finest fruit of his creation – you and I. As God gave much thought to naming our first parents in the newly created world, there also are many parents who give much thought about the naming of their children. I know Barbara and I did. You see, we had a choice of names to give our children.

In the scriptures, there is one person who was told what to name his son. There was no choice. When the angel Gabrielle visited Joseph

to tell him that Mary was going to become pregnant with a boy, the Son of God, Joseph **was told** to name him Jesus. And just so that Joseph had no misunderstanding, Gabrielle told him what the Name means – “He will save his people from their sins.” It is from this scripture passage, Matthew 1:21, that we know Jesus as the Christ, the Savior.

When did we get our name? Most likely, we were named after our birth and before leaving the hospital. But when did we get our Christian name? At Baptism. When Barbara and I were young parents, we did not take our babies away from the house for a number of weeks. The first place our newborns were taken was to church, to their baptisms, to the receiving of their Christian names.

What about Jesus? I invite you to turn into a pew bible to page 933, to Luke, chapter 2, verse 21, to the lower right hand column. I invite you to read this verse with me:

2:21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel **before** he was conceived in the womb.

Eight days after his birth, Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus to the Temple for his circumcision. Why eight days? The Hebrews knew enough about the practice of medicine to know that it was necessary to wait eight days before circumcising a male child. Eight days after birth, a baby’s blood attains coagulating attributes. Circumcision could be achieved without fear of the baby hemorrhaging.

On the eighth days after Mary gave birth to the Son of God, Joseph and she brought the baby to the Temple for the first time, and there he received His Name – Jesus. Today, we do just as Joseph and Mary did when we bring our infant babies to the church for baptism and to receive their Christian name.

And while there at the Temple, something extraordinary occurred. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon came into the Temple, took the baby Jesus into his arms, and offered a prayer that we now call the Nunc Dimittis, or the Song of Simeon:

29 "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

30 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation  
 31 which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

By revelation of the Holy Spirit, Simeon knew that Jesus is the Savior, not only to the Jews, the House of Israel, but also to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, you and I.

Many of us know John 3:16, but forget to include verse 17, as these two verses were never meant to be separated. I invite you to say these two verses with me:

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Once again, we hear the meaning of Jesus' name – Savior of the world. God so loved the world that he staked the life of His only Son to save it. Tragically, many will not accept this wonderful gift from Jesus.

In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the Temple rulers. Peter stood up and delivered a blistering, in your face, witness as to what they, the Sanhedrin, did to Jesus on that first Good Friday, and how they thought they had won, only to learn they actually lost their battle as God raised Jesus from the dead three days later. And what does Peter say of Jesus? I invite you to open a pew bible to page 994. Acts. Chapter 4, verse 12, to be found in the middle of the right hand column I invite you to read this verse with me.

12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

"There is no other Name under Heaven given among mortals by which" what?? "We must be saved." We often times think we are in control. We are not. Only God is. We often think that we are masters of our own destiny. We are not. God is. (Oprah?) Only in the Name of Jesus do we have hope of everlasting life. Nothing, which means *no thing*, nor any thing or any one else is able to give us what Jesus the Christ can – eternal life, just exactly what His Name

means. “There is no other Name under heaven by which man can be saved.” No other Name... We’d better get really acquainted with that Name or...

Oh, and by the way, on this the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, “Merry Christmas!”