

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church
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Sermon Preached on the First Sunday after Christmas, December 27, 2009

"His Name is Holy"

Fr. Richard Molison, Preacher

Let us pray: O God, our Father, take these feeble word 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 most Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN!

Good Morning and Merry Christmas!

Today is the third day of the twelve days of Christmas.

This is the first time since Barbara and I returned from our three week visit to our son's home in Hopewell Junction that I've had the opportunity to address you as a congregation. And I wish to take this opportunity to share with you my most heart felt thanks to Fr. Ward for his compassionate understanding of my request to immediately leave for our son's home. Our son, Steve, called me the Friday before Thanksgiving while driving home from work. We had a nice conversation, but that parental intuition kicked in: "Why has he called me?" I asked how Stacy was doing. For those who may not be aware, Stacy was then due to give birth at any time. It was then that Steve shared she was not doing so well. After we finished our conversation, and even though Stacy's expected delivery date was not until December 7, Barbie and I knew that we had to leave early the next day, Saturday morning, for Hopewell.

There was just one major item that needed to be addressed before we left: I was scheduled that coming Sunday to preach and share a children's homily with the children. I called Fr. Ward, briefly explained the situation, and asked to be excused. Without any hesitation, we had his blessings.

We later learned that Steve and Stacy had three plans to care for the three grandchildren while Stacy was hospitalized. Barbie and I were plan "A". Steve also had plans "B" & "C" in place just in case as well. The week before we traveled to Steve's, Stacy was hospitalized with what later proved to be false labor, but the application of plans "B" and "C" which were to arrange for care of the three children remaining at home did not work out so well. When we learned of this, Barbie and I now understood why we observed a noticeable relaxing drop of the shoulders and a huge smile when we arrived. Stacy's last week of pregnancy proceeded without difficulty. At 8:30 Tuesday evening, December 1, Barbie and I became the proud grandparents of a beautiful 9 lb., 11 oz. boy, Jacob Quinn!

We left for home Thursday morning, December 10. Hearing the news that a snow storm was heading for Western New York, I checked the weather forecast on Steve's computer before starting out. From what I read, if we left early, we just might make it home before the storm hits. Well, we didn't leave when I

hoped to, and just west of Rochester, we found ourselves right in the middle of a full blown blizzard. Speed dropped to less than five miles per hour. Visibility was near zero. Snow was accumulating on the windshield faster than the defrosters could handle it. Ice built up on the wiper blades. Bad enough not to be able to see out of a clear windshield in a blinding snow storm, let alone attempting to see through one accumulating ice and snow. Barbara kept her eyes on the road markers on right side of the road while I focused on the flashing red lights ahead of us. We latched onto the blinking flashers of an eighteen wheeler and worked earnestly to stay with it. At one point, the wind would create a whiteout, during which I slowed down. When the whiteout dissipated somewhat, I prayed that we would still see the lights of the trailer in front of us. After one intense white out dissipated, I could not see the flashing lights of the trailer in front of us. All we saw was snow and darkness. We knew that we were not alone on the road, but yet, we were. There was no one ahead of us to guide us. We were on our own. Darkness all around us, except our headlights revealing the blowing snow in front of us. We were looking for the flashing red lights to guide us. We were looking for a light to shine in that darkness. Pray? You better believe it! We prayed for a light.

We prayed for the light you heard about what the evangelist John wrote in today's gospel: "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it." The darkness has no power over the Light. We prayed for God's Light to shine upon us, to remove the darkness and to lead us. Some three hours later, we were safely home.

In our hour of need, we called upon the Name of the Lord, the Holy Name of the Lord. Remember the setting of last week's gospel reading from Luke, in her answer to Elizabeth's question as to why the mother of her Lord would come to her, Mary responded with, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has had regard for the humble state of His bond slave, for behold, from this time on, all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and Holy is His Name."

"Holy is His Name." The Name of Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, is like no other. Who named you? Your parents did. Who named your children? As parents, you did. (Ah, sorry about that, Kids.) Who named Jesus? Not Mary, nor Joseph. Who, then? His Father named His Son Jesus. His name was given by God the Father from heaven. Mary was quite correct – "His Name is holy." This week Friday, our New Year's Day, is also the church's day of "The Feast of the Holy Name." Therefore, it behooves us to take a moment to reflect upon the Holy nature of God's Name.

In the Israelite tradition, that is the Old Testament tradition, a name represented the innermost self or identity of a person. On January 26, 1986, Fr. Amend wrote an excellent sermon entitled, "What's in a name?" We may have his sermon in our archives and I highly commend to you the reading of Fr. Amen's work. For the ancient Israelites, the naming of a child was a very significant event. Moses experienced this while at the top of Mount Sinai. He

asked God, “When I go back to the Israelites and they ask me your name, what shall I say to them?” And we read from Exodus 3:14, God replies to Moses, “I AM who I AM. That is my Name for all time.” The name of God, as given to Moses by God, was, is, and always will be, “I AM.”

The Old Testament language, Hebrew, in its original form, was written only in consonants; the language contained no vowels. There is evidence that the ancient Hebrews used only the letters Y-H-W-H to name God. Much later, when vowels were added, this spelling became Y-A-H-W-E-H, pronounced, Yahweh. But one thing we ought to remember about the ancient Israelites: because God’s Name is holy, His Name was neither written nor spoken. O, for such reverence and respect we, too, ought to possess.

Eventually, descriptive terms were applied to the Name of God in an effort to expand the meaning of “I AM.” One such descriptive word is **Adonai**, meaning, “The Lord.” Another term is **Elohim**, meaning God. But what is truly interesting about this term **Elohim** is that this word is what is called a uni-plural noun, such as the word family. A single family is made of two–three or more members. God, one God, consists of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ancient Hebrews understood, possibly from the very first chapter of Genesis, that God is a multi-person God head. It is Jesus who clarified the Godhead to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So we have **Yahweh**, “I AM;” **Adonai**, the Lord; and **Elohim**, God. Now, let’s put these terms to work. I invite you to open a pew Bible to page 77. To the Second Book of Moses, commonly called Exodus, to chapter 20 and verse one. I invite you to read with me verses 1,2 and 3:

“Then God spoke these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”

We all recognize these words as being what – the First Commandment. Return to verse two, to the words, “I am the Lord your God...” What Hebrew word did we say meant **I AM**? **Yahweh**. The next two words, “The Lord...” What Hebrew term did we say meant, “The Lord?” **Adonai**. And what term did we say meant God? **Elohim**.

Please repeat with me: Yahweh; Adonai; Elohim. Again...

Now I am going to read the beginning of verse two again, pausing for you to say the Hebrew terms, Yahweh, Adonai, Elohim. I AM (Yahweh) the Lord (Adonai) your God (Elohim)...

For Israel, and for us, Yahweh is our God and we are to serve no other. God the Father gave Jesus a name that is higher than any other name on earth, and not just any name, but a name given by God Himself! This fact alone makes the Name of Jesus as Holy as the Name of the Father. And if the ancient Hebrews so respected God’s Name so that they neither spoke it nor wrote it, then what is God’s expectation of us regarding His and His Son’s Name. St. Paul said of the name of Jesus, “God exalted Him to be the highest place and gave Him the

Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth.” Mary stated, “His Name is Holy.” And if Jesus name is holy, then so is the Father’s and the Holy Spirit’s. Now, what is God’s expectation of our use of His Name?

Flip over to page 77 of your opened pew Bible, to the top of the left hand column, to verse 7. I invite you to read verse 7 with me: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." We recognize this as the third commandment, the only commandment with a sentence, like a court sentence when pronounce guilty. We are only to use God’s Name, and that includes His Son’s Name, within an act of worship or adoration and proclamation. Any other use, God says for that person, God will find him guilty of sin, and if no repentance, as learned from Paul’s letter to the Roman’s 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

When then are we to use God’s most holy Name? Only in prayer or in the proclamation of His Word! To use God’s Name or His Son’s Name in any other manner is wrongful use. God said so, and that’s all that needs to be said. It’s non-negotiable!

You know that if we have a personal relationship with God and his Son, Jesus Christ, then it naturally follows that we ought to love Him as directed by the first Commandment. And in so loving God, if we hear His Name being misused, His Name being profaned, something within us ought to hurt. Our hearts ought to cringe with sadness at the misuse of our Lord’s Name. If it doesn’t, then just what is your relationship with God?

God says, “Don’t,” and that’s exactly what we do. If God’s holy Name is allowed to be dishonored, if God’s holy Name can be reduced to common place swearing and culturally accepted profanity, then what does this do to the character and nature of God in the mind of the culture and society accepting and using such language? A parishioner stated to me that he and his wife were watching a movie Christmas Eve during which nasty four letter words were bleeped out, but the profaned use of the Lords’ name was allowed to remain in the film. I ask you this question: “Why is it that only our God, the God of the Christian faith, is the only God whose Name is profaned so prominently in our culture and society?” Just asking...

As children of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we are to remind others to honor His Name. Remember the third commandment and its sentence. Jesus has only you and I to be messengers of His Word. God grant you the strength and courage to proclaim His word and to keep His commandments. And He will, when you reverently and respectfully, and in faith, call upon His most Sacred and Holy Name.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be ascribed as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power, and glory, world without end. AMEN.