

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church

2368 Eggert Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150

“The Holy Name”

Saturday, December 31, 2011 and Sunday, January 1, 2012

The Rev. Richard Molison, Preacher

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 most Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Good Morning!

Merry Christmas to you on this the 8th day of Christmas. Also, Happy New Year to you!

Once every seven years or so, The Feast of the Holy Name falls on a Sunday that otherwise is known as the first Sunday after Christmas. Today is such a Sunday. The appointed scriptures are for the Feast of the Holy Name. Our Gospel passage from Luke begins with a continuation of the Christmas story and ends with the Holy Family taking Jesus to the Temple to keep the circumcision covenant and to be given a name. Today is the 8th day of Christmas, and the Church celebrates this 2,000+ year old event of the naming of the Christ child.

Names are important. Names are likely the most personal thing we have. And not only to us, but also to God. If you are a parent, remember the process of choosing a name for your child? I do. Choosing the name of a baby is a happy time for parents. This process of choosing a name is entered into with great seriousness, much thinking, and with much discussion. I well remember the many discussions Barbara and I had when choosing the names for our children, and especially remembering the rationale used for choosing the name of our first daughter. One criteria used was that this name would be difficult to change into a slang form, such as Elizabeth being changed into “Lizzy,” and the like. We decided upon the name Krista (K-r-i-s-t-a). We felt that there was not too much one could do with this name.

Of course, we did not know at that time two more babies would follow Krista – Karen and Stephen. And wouldn't you know, it was our son who undid everything we thought was preventable. At the time Steve was attempting to speak his sisters' names, the letter “s” proved to be a challenge. “Karen” was

not a problem for him; however, “Krista” was. When attempting to say “Krista,” the “s” was dropped and out came “Kritta.” To this day, we often hear our eldest called “Kritta” or just plain “Krit.” Best laid plans....

Names are labels, albeit convenient labels to be sure, and are used to distinguish one thing or person from another. In the Israelite tradition, a name represented the inner most self or identity of a person. Thus the naming of a child was a significant event. For example, Ezra in Hebrew means *help*; Zechariah means *Renowned of the Lord*; Yeshua means *the Lord is our helper / Savior*, from which we get the name, *Jesus*.

In New Testament Israel, a male child is named during the ceremony of the Covenant of the Circumcision held on the 8th day after birth. We now know that it takes 8 days for the blood of a new-born baby to develop coagulants required to prevent a hemorrhage. But this bit of medical information was not known in ancient Israel. So, how did the people know to wait 8 days? Our God is an awesome God!!!

The full Hebrew name was used for all religious and legal documents. The usual formula was the given name would be first, which for me would be *Richard*, to be followed with the father’s name. Therefore, in ancient Israel, legally I would be known as *Richard ben Julius*.

However, this tradition did not apply to Jesus! We do not know Jesus as *Jesus ben Yahweh*; we do not know Jesus as *Jesus ben Adonai*; and we do not know Jesus as *Jesus ben Elohim*!

By the way, who gave God His Name? He did! There is no other who could! Want an illustration of absolute authority, power and control, there it is! And what did he name himself? Yahweh – *I AM*.

So, who named Jesus? We just heard read in Luke’s Gospel that the Holy Family brought Jesus to the Temple for Circumcision and being named. But who chose His Name? For the answer to this question, we must go back to when the angel Gabrielle visited Mary at the time of her conception. Mary was told that she would give birth to a Son and she was to give him the Name, Jesus. Mary was given the directive to name her son the Name God’s messenger had given to her. In Exodus 3:14, God names himself. At the birth of Jesus, God as Father, God as Parent, names His Son, Jesus. By so doing, as Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, “God exalted Him to the 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.”

God gave Jesus a name that is higher than any other name on earth, and not just any name, but a name given by God the Father himself. This fact alone

makes the name of Jesus as Holy a name as the name of God himself. And if the ancient Hebrews so respected God's Name that they neither spoke it or wrote it, then what is our expected behavior for the Name of God's only Son, Jesus? To use God's Name, the Lord's Name, only in prayer and in proclamation of God's Word.

Used in any other way is wrongful use. To use God's Name for our own uptight, angry or emotional outburst purposes is wrong. God said so. And that is all that needs to be said about it! We either know or are familiar with the Third Commandment, the only commandment that has a sentence of judgment attached to it. Most of us can recite from memory the first part of the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain..." Even in our prayer book, this is all that is written. Ah, but there is more to this Third Commandment: "...for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His Name in vain" (NASB). Let's make this sentence of judgment more direct by removing the double negatives: "...for the Lord will leave him punished who takes His Name in vain." This is strong language, indeed. Sad to say, there are many souls who do not take this Commandment or its sentence of judgment very seriously.

If we have a personal relationship with God, then it naturally follows that you love him as directed by the first General Commandment: "That we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and soul." And so loving God, if we hear His Name being used improperly, something within us ought to hurt! Our hearts ought to twinge with sadness at the misuse of our Lord's Name. If it doesn't, then just what is your relationship with God and His Son, Jesus, our Lord and Christ?

You know, there are other ways of using God's Name in vain other than the usual "swearing" done most likely in anger or in some other emotional outburst. Author Marv Rosenthal wrote in a article entitled, "Elohim,":

"To believe that God is something other than what He truly is – is to take His name in vain.

"To deny His existence is to take His name in vain.

"To deny His creative power is to take His name in vain.

"To deny His holy standards for life is to take His name in vain.

"To deny His redemptive work at Calvary is to take His name in vain.

"To deny that He is coming again is to take His name in vain."

Hopefully, there is now a greater understanding that this third Commandment goes far beyond the simple interpretation of prohibiting cursing. To deny anything to everything His name – Yahweh: I AM who I AM – represents is taking His name in vain.

God says, "Don't do," and that is exactly what we do. I am reminded of Paul's words as recorded in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 7:

19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Yes, it is through the Holy Name of Jesus that we have forgiveness, mercy and hope of everlasting life. There is no other name by which we can be saved.

God says don't do and that is exactly what is done. 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 the character and nature of God in that culture and society. No longer holy and respected, that's for sure.

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, if we truly love Him, then it is our duty to remind others to honor this most sacred Name. Remember the Third Commandment and its sentence of judgment. Jesus has only you and I to be messengers of His Word. When hearing the Lord's Name taken in vain, it is not easy to correct others, especially if it is when the others are family members, or even your boss. It often takes great courage and inner spiritual strength. On this 8th day of Christmas, God grant you the strength, courage, and the will to proclaim His Word, to lift up His Name wherever you may be, and to keep His Commandments.

And to do so in the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the people of God said, AMEN!