IN JESUS’ NAME

Luke 2:15-21 [When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. 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.]

In the name of the One who made us for love, saved us by love, and loves us still.

Happy New Year’s and Happy Feast of the Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ! Even though today is Holy Name Sunday on our calendar, January 1 has several other designations through the centuries. In earlier Prayer Books today was the Feast of the Circumcision, a day of more penitential character developed in the 6th century in response to the raucous pagan celebrations. January first has also been known as the Feast of the Presentation and popularly referred to as Candlemas for the procession of candles that were once a standard feature of this day in honoring Jesus being presented in the Temple.¹ January 1st has also been known as the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And some of our Roman Catholic sisters & brothers continue to honor Mary today. I share the history of this day because it speaks of our rich heritage and evolving history.

But in 2017 in the Episcopal Church we commemorate today, the name Jesus, given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. This morning you won’t hear about circumcision – the cultural practice of a mother being quarantined for 40 days after

Names are so very important, such significant designations potentially laden with meaning. When each of my three daughters was pregnant much time, prayer, and pondering went into deciding the names of each child—as their father and I did in naming each of our four children. And I invite you to think about your name and its significance, for whom you were named, and what went into the choice of that name was there a hope or longing? Jesus’ name is significantly rich with meaning too, and selected in a most special way, in mystery, you might say, much like his conception. It was God’s doing.  

Philippians 2.10

4 “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” John 14:14 “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” 1 John 5:14 “Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” John 14:13 “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” John 15:16 “In that day you will not question Me about anything Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. "Until now you have asked for nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.” John 16:23-24 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” John 14:13-14 “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.” Mark 11:24 “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.” 1 Corinthians 1:2

http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/centering-prayer We have two weekly times of communal Centering Prayer here at Saint Marks—Monday nights and Thursdays at noon.

The name Jesus is from the Hebrew Joshua, God is salvation or God will save. Our opening prayer, the collect of the day, speaks of Jesus as a sign of our salvation. But from what does Jesus save us. This is a question that seemed to come up a lot when I was growing up. For in the little Southern Baptist church, which I attended, we had an immense 9’ by 6’ cross just outside my Sunday school classroom alit with the words ‘Jesus saves.’ I was told then it had to do with Jesus saving me from the fires of hell and damnation because of my wickedness and wretchedness. I know differently now.

My friend Jake Owensby, the bishop in Western Louisiana, eloquently pointed out

6 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/john-pavlovitz
7 https://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=6276402058518810952#allposts/src=dashboard
8 Doing an internship when he was rector in Alabama while I was a student in seminary, I found his sermons engaging and profound then as I do now. From his blog, Looking for God in Messy Places. https://jakeowensby.com/2016/12/20/white-trash-christmas/
in a recent sermon entitled, ‘White Trash Christmas’ that in different ways, church theologians “Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin each saw Jesus as God’s Plan B.” Their theology asserts, “God sent Jesus to die for our sins. If Adam and Eve had never eaten the forbidden fruit, there would have been no Jesus. Grace enters the universe” in this way of thinking “as a repair kit.’ Owensby goes on to point out that “The Franciscans—especially in the writings of John Duns Scotus—offer an alternative view. Grace governs the creation from before the word go. Jesus was not part of some Plan B. When God decided to bring the world into being, Jesus was God’s very first thought.”

And so, if Jesus means God saves and this saving is not related to Adam and Eve’s sin in eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden being passed on to you and me, how does this salvation thing work? One of the ways, these days, I understand how Jesus saves me is that he saves me from my narcissism, ego, hubris—putting myself instead of God at the center of the universe. Simply put, Jesus saves me from my narrow self-centered attitude, thinking, and ways. And in turning to Jesus, I trust in that ongoing, love relationship that is on this side of the grave and continues on the other. Salvation is eternal life in the fullness of God’s love. It is deliverance—being saved from--- anything that threatens to prevent fulfillment and enjoyment of our relationship with God.

Salvation is an ongoing process. This union with God is not yet complete, and as we know, the Kingdom of God has not yet fulfilled. But this Kingdom was revealed in Jesus, who ate with outcasts, forgave sinners, healed the sick, and raised the dead.⁹

In the Catechism, An Outline of the Faith, found in our Prayer Book, we are reminded that Jesus became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God’s kingdom. And in today’s daily meditation from the Society of St. John the Evangelist, Brother Curtis Almqvist says that Jesus is intent … on saving you from whatever it is that just kills you.¹⁰

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¹⁰ http://ssje.org/word/
And so, as we begin another year, may we all trust in that ongoing love relationship and follow in the name of the humble and compassionate One whose family themselves were refugees for a time. May we trust that Love that embraced the poor, widows, orphans, the forgotten, the outcast, the marginalized—that One who respected women, and stood up to evil and evil systems. Let us put Jesus at the center of our universe—because we have to but because we can. And in Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.