

Holy Name--St. Luke 2:15-21  
January 6th, 2019  
St. George's Bolton  
Fr. Chris

## **What's in a Name?**

“After 8 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.”

Having a name makes a difference. A name personalizes you and makes you unique. A name separates you from the nameless, almost faceless masses, and aids in recognizing you as you, that unique individual.

A name can determine much about your future, when you think about it. If your name is Charlie Gates, Jamie Bloomberg, Linda Buffet, Johnny Rockefeller, Bobby Vanderbilt, or Suzie Zuckerberg, it means you are being born into a family of extreme privilege. You will likely have a financially secure and successful life, with many opportunities that others could never even dream of being afforded. These are names that are instantly recognized by many, and surely the so-called “right” people are well acquainted with them. They can grant you admission almost anywhere.

But if I were to say Bill, Nelson, Warren, William, Mark, or Michael, such distinction might not be so readily made without their surname attached. They do not produce the immediate name recognition. Surnames indicate your family of origin, but first and middle names say more about you. They are what separate you from everyone else in your family, and in your wider community. We don't give this much conscious thought, but unconsciously, we use this rule to process what we think about people even before we meet them. If I say the name Bernard, nothing comes to mind. But if I say Bernard Madoff, immediately you think of a greedy, manipulative sociopath who robbed many poor average people of their retirement funds as well as devastating a number of non-profits who invested with him. His name does not evoke happy thoughts, but thoughts of disdain and judgment. This is the opposite of what his name evoked when he was on the top of his game or scam, when many were falling over themselves to invest with his company.

What is in a name? I was told my parents named me Christopher for religious reasons. In a way, it may have sealed the deal on my future occupation as an Episcopal Priest, which I have been for 40 years. The name Christopher means

Christ-bearer, and while I am far from either a successful or even good example of a Christ-bearer, it does give me a mark, a goal, an identity to shoot for. What's in a name?

If I were to now talk about bar-Joseph or bar-David, what or who would you think of? Would you think of the most famous human being to ever live, that is Mr. "Yeshua bar-Joseph? (i.e. Jesus of Nazareth) Maybe he is a less well-known member of the Israeli government, or a prime minister? What's in a name?

Names have been important since the first pages of our Bible. Adam was given the task of naming all the animals in Genesis 2:20:

"So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals." Names give identity and uniqueness, and perhaps more in shaping who we are in life.

What's in a name? A bad name can give you a bad reputation. You can take a good name and make it a bad one by your own actions. A good name is the opposite. It implies honor, character, honesty, and fairness. A good name is a name you can trust. This is true in business as well as with persons. If I mention the name, Yugo, those who are old enough remember, is one of the worst, most untrustworthy cars ever manufactured. This list could go on and on about businesses and products. You fill in the blank.

However, when it comes to people's names, we realize it is possible to wear out your name, even make it a bad joke. A name is an important thing not to sully or stain.

After 8 days, the Jews would hold a circumcision and what was known as 'a naming ceremony.' The key part here is the latter. After 8 days, it was assumed that the child would survive outside the womb. Without modern medicine, many babies were likely lost during this period, as well as a number of their mothers. So it was reason to celebrate, like a successful space launch that just reached earth orbit. NAME THIS CHILD. The common belief is that not only the identity began at this moment, but also that the Spirit entered into the child and they became a whole, real person. The Ruark of God blew into the child. –A powerful moment, when spirit and life began. At Baptism, you may recall I ask the parents and Godparents to 'Nam this Child' just before I perform the actual Baptism. So Baptism, among other things is linked with a naming ceremony

Name is our identity. It is who we are.

And so this day when we are celebrating the Holy Name, what is the name of God? Ruark- was one name for Spirit or the person of the Holy Spirit. Yahweh- the unwritten, unspeakable name of God as it is too holy. To this day, when Jews write God, [G-D] they leave out the O as it is too holy to put on paper. Geist or Spirit or Mind or Word. This is the German name for the Spirit of God.

And then there is the bar Joseph fellow. What is in a name? His is a name that has not been forgotten for more than 2000 years. His is a name that almost every living person knows.

So what is in a name? Let me leave you with this quote from Philippians 2:10-11: "...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." AMEN!