

The Third Wednesday of Advent December 14, 2022

JESUS—NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

Luke 2:21

Scripture Readings

Numbers 6:22-27

Romans 1:1-7

Hymns

85(1-6), 114, 116, 106(4-7)

When eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Dear fellow Christians:

A lot of thought goes into naming a child. Parents spend months trying to find a name they like, a name that sounds good, a name that has a significant meaning, or a name that is trendy. Mrs. Bernthal and I didn't finally decide on our firstborn child's name until we were on the way to the hospital. Our oldest daughter was to be named Katrina, but during Mrs. Bernthal's pregnancy, Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast causing \$125 billion in damages and over 1,800 people lost their lives. So we decided to name our daughter Ella instead and save Katrina for another girl if we had one. We did have another girl. My wife and I always had the practice of not ever telling anyone what we were going to name our children, but our four older children kept asking over and over again what we would name this new child, our fifth. We got tired of saying, "We aren't telling," that we finally just said that her name would be Katie Jane. It was a joke, but it was close to the name Katrina that we had decided on years before. We still call Katrina, Katie Jane as a nickname.

Parents struggle with naming their children. I'm sure your parents have stories about the name that they chose for you. One set of parents did not have to struggle to come up with a name for their child. They did not have to search the internet for popular child names in 2022 to find a name like Liam or Noah which are the two most popular names of 2022. No, Mary and Joseph already had the name of their child chosen for them. Our sermon text tells us of an important event that happened on the eighth day of that first Christmas. Now, Scripture doesn't tell us much about the Lord's childhood, but we *are* told about that particular day. An important day in the life of Jesus, it was the day of His circumcision.

Circumcision was the outward sign God had given to the Jews that they were children of the promise. It was similar in significance to the New Testament sacrament of Baptism. It reminded the Israelites that they had been set apart as the people from whom the Savior of the world would be born—that they were the people of the covenant.

The eighth day was also significant in the life of Jewish boys because it was the day they were officially given their names. In the case of Jesus, there was no suspense or surprise about the name He would have. Before He was born, even in an age without ultrasound machines, Mary already knew she was having a boy, and she knew what He would be called. Nine months earlier she had been visited by the angel Gabriel who had told her “*You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus*” (Luke 1:31 NIV).

I.

Notice *when* Jesus’ name was chosen. Luke recorded for us in our text that this was “*the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*” See the timing of the choosing of Jesus’ name. The name was chosen before Jesus had ever been conceived. It was picked out beforehand. Can this tell us something about God? Does it mean something for us?

This tells us that God was sure this was going to happen. Imagine a mother saying to her friends, “Yes, and the name of my next child will be...” when she doesn’t even know if she will even *have* a child in the future. There was no such trouble in the case of Jesus. God knew this was going to happen, because He had been planning this birth for a long time. He had been getting ready for it in many ways. He was sure of it.

Down to the last detail everything had been made ready. For hundreds of years the prophets had been announcing that the Savior would be born. They had been telling the people to get ready. The wheels of history had been turning in this direction—turning faithfully toward the manger and the swaddling clothes and the shepherds in the field.

Mary, the mother, and stepfather, Joseph, were in place. They were descendants of King David as had been prophesied. The family had been brought to Bethlehem by royal decree, so that too had been worked out and fulfilled prophecy.

God knew what He was doing, and this birth was no accident. It was planned and carried out in the mind and by the power of God. It was specially engineered by the

Father in Heaven—specially engineered *for you*. It is because of you that God got everything ready like this. Because you needed someone to save you from yourself. You're not perfect. You never have been and you never will be, so someone needed to come for you and live a life that really could please God. This Jesus came to do.

God was sure about all this. He didn't change His mind back and forth even when He saw mankind on earth sinning against Him and straying away from Him like foolish sheep. That isn't the kind of God you have. You don't have a God who one minute determines to help you and the next minute decides to withdraw that help. That's how we are sometimes, and so we tend to think of God in those terms too. We think sometimes that God gives things to us and takes them away on a whim without any thought for our feelings and needs. But God isn't fickle that way. You can count on the fact that He is absolutely unchanging with regard to His decisions and judgment. That's a great blessing for it means also that His love toward you does not change and you need never doubt it.

Jesus was named before He had been conceived. This tells us too that God was excited and anxious to send this child.

When you see a husband and wife paging through a baby name book before a child is officially "on the way," it means they are very anxious to have a baby. How much more does it mean when God chooses a name for His Son even before the child has been conceived! It means God was eager for this Child to come into the world! God was not only sure He was going to save you, but He was eager to do so! God couldn't wait to send Him to you!

That's how the Lord is with you. He can't wait to share with you His greatest gifts. When you sometimes think that He is slow and forgetful with His blessings, He perhaps has them named already in preparation for sharing them with you. Have you ever thought of that?

It does not give our Heavenly Father any joy when He sees His children depressed and sorrowing any more than we earthly parents are joyful when a child of ours is hurting. So it did not give God joy to see the world fall under condemnation for its sin, so He sent His only begotten Son—not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Indeed, God wanted with all His heart to do this for you.

II.

The name “Jesus” also fit this Child perfectly. We have something of an interest in names “fitting” people too. My sister and I had a game we would play sometimes. We would see people in a mall or in a grocery store and we would try to guess what their names were. Sometimes we were able to find a sneaky way to tell if we were right. For example, by getting behind them in a checkout line and overhearing a conversation. During this game we would ask each other things like, “Does she look like an *Amy* or a *Nancy*? I don’t know, what do you think? With that color of hair she has to be an *Amy*!”

Did you know people have certain stereotypes in their minds when it comes to names? Many hear a name and they make some kind of association, sometimes without even thinking about it. I found a survey on the computer about name stereotypes. I discovered that 45% of people think the name *Alfred* suggests a grumpy old guy. 63% think *Brad* suggests a high school athlete. *Ashley* is a cheerleader. *Mary* is a Sunday School teacher. *Shelly* is a hairdresser. *Mario* is a drug dealer, and so on.

What do you think the Lord’s mother thought when the angel said to her, “*Jesus*”? Would she have thought: Shepherd? Businessman? Farmer? No, none of these. For there was a clear association with that name. *Jesus* is the same name as the Hebrew *Joshua*. They mean, “Jehovah saves.” Jesus’ name suggested that through Him God would save all people. It was a name that fit Him perfectly!

It is the name the Apostle Paul proclaimed to the Philippians when he said of the Lord: “... *being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to 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*” (Philippians 2:8-10 NIV).

At the name of *Jesus* we bow down—for He is our Savior. At the name of *Jesus* we rejoice, we enjoy forgiveness, we find peace, we have hope for all time. Bless His holy name! Amen.

—Pastor David P. Schaller