

NUMBERS 6:22-27

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The LORD bless you and keep you: 25 The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: 26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. 27 So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

GALATIANS 3:23-29; LUKE 2:21

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Today, it's all about the Name. Mary's having her little baby circumcised, and that's when he'll publicly receive his name.

For babies today, of course, it's Baptism. Parents bring the little baby to Baptism, and the pastor asks, *How is this child to be named?*, and then, when the name is publicly announced, the Baptism—where the little boy or little girl is baptized into the Name of the Lord.

For Mary's baby, it was circumcision, for that is what the Lord had instituted for the church of the Old Testament. The name is publicly announced, and the baby is circumcised into the covenant, into the Lord's promise of salvation.

With the Lord, it's all about the name. By giving someone a name, by knowing them by their name, you recognize them as the true person they are. It's not just "Hey, dude," or "Hey, coach," or "How're you guys doing?," but it's "Hi, John," or "Good to see you, Sue," with a recognition that the person you're speaking to is not an interchangeable unit, not an assigned number, but an actual, particular, unique person, in comparison to whom, no one else is quite the same.

With the Lord, it's all about the name, the person. The first thing we know about the first man is his name, Adam, which means man. About the first woman, is her name, Eve, which means life. The first thing Adam is given to do is to name the animals, after which each distinct species of animal will be known by its particularity.

With the Lord it's all about the name. And so he comes to us according to our names. None of us are interchangeable human units or assigned numbers. We each have a name, and we each stand before our Lord as the persons we are, each with our own gifts, particularities, and uniqueness.

This is actually a remarkable thing in our world. Our world often wants to know a person not for who he or she uniquely is, but according to some commonness, some generalization which puts the person into some greater classification. So we know people according to sex, or race, or age, or whatever else. We even set up government offices to count whether a college or a club is admitting too many males or too many females, to count how many of this race or of that race are playing on a team or a company is hiring—and we've all filled out forms where we have to classify ourselves by gender or race or age or whatever else.

Our world knows how to group people up by different classifications, and we all end up being known by an assigned number.

If you want to rob someone of their identity, to treat them as less than a person, you refuse them a name. George Orwell showed this importance of a person's name in his book *1984*. When the totalitarian government wanted to rob a man of his personhood, they did it by assigning him a number. So Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith, became known as "6079 Smith W." His actual name, Winston, is gone. And he is no longer recognized as a unique person, but as an interchangeable unit.

Our Lord knows us by name. *Rejoice, says Jesus, that your name is written in Heaven.* [Luke 10:20]

He knows you by your name. With your name comes all that you are—your gifts, your strengths, your weaknesses, all that is unique to you. With your name comes all that you are, including all that you want to keep hidden, your sin, your shame, the things you don't like having attached to your name.

But your name, said Jesus, is written in Heaven.

You, all that you are, your unique personality, your life history, your sense of humor, your way of thinking, all that you are—it has been cleansed by Jesus, and he wrote your name in Heaven.

If there's one thing our Lord isn't good at, it's anonymity, it's generalization, it's being known not by what is given to a person and is unique, but by what is common to all.

So our Lord comes to Earth. But not as just some general human unit, not as a man interchangeable and undistinguishable from any other, but a certain, particular little baby in the arms of a mother who, herself, is particular and unique. Mary is her name, and she is betrothed to a man by the name of Joseph, and they are living in Judah at the time of a king named Herod. All very specific stuff here. It is found nowhere else on Earth, nowhere else in history. And in Mary's arms, a little baby. But we can't just call him a little baby. He needs a name. Luke 2:21:

And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was called Jesus.

He has a name. Now we can call on him. We can praise him, we can intercede to him, we can even argue with him, for that is what happens when a person is a true person with a name.

Had he no name, then we would be calling him just "The Almighty One," or "The Awesome One," or something like "The big man upstairs." That's like calling to your friend, "Hey Dude," or saying, "How's it going, man?"

He has a Name, it's Jesus, which means, "*The Lord saves.*" By his name he can be called upon, interceded to, asked questions of, even argued with, for he is a real person,

interchangeable with no one else.

We now know where the Name of the Lord has been put. That has been the promise all along, that the Lord in Heaven would put his Name at a place on Earth, would gather sinners to that place, join them to his Name, and there would bless them. Numbers 6:27:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

At the time of Moses, the Lord put his Name at the Tabernacle, at the Ark of the Covenant, and there he dwelled among his people, blessing them, putting his Name on them in circumcision. Now, in the fulness of time, the Name is put on Mary's little baby. He is circumcised, he is called Jesus, which means "the Lord saves," and now wherever this Jesus shows up, we are to know him by his Name—he is the Lord saving the sinner.

We look at Jesus, and we now know where the Name of the Lord has been put on Earth. So when he sheds his blood on the cross, it is all in the fulfillment, in the accomplishment, of his Name.

We're not circumcised—not as a command by the Lord, not as something theological. That ordering of bestowing the Lord's Name found its completion in the cross, and now the Lord gives his Name to us and our children in Baptism. *I baptize you into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*, the pastor says to a particular little baby when baptizing, and everyone witnessing it now knows that the Lord has put his Name there, on that little one, the one with a wet head.

And then the baby grows, to a young man, a young woman, to an adult, and the Lord continues calling and gathering him or her to his Name. So we come to the Lord's Service, and what are the first words spoken? It's a name. Not just *a* name, but *the* Name, the one put on us in Baptism—it is being put on us again as the pastor turns to the Lord's people, makes the sign of the holy cross, and says, *In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. We hear the Name, the Name is again spoken onto us and our families, and we know we are right where we belong, at the Lord's Service, where the Lord is serving the people he loves with the gifts of his Name.

For about an hour, usually, maybe a little more. But for that time we are hearing his word of Law convicting us of sin, we are confessing our sin and hearing his word of Gospel absolving us, we are eating and drinking his Body and Blood as he gives us to do for our cleansing, and then, when we have heard his Word and received his gifts, with his Name having been spoken onto us once again, he sends us out to our neighbor, to our vocations, to our families, with his blessing, Numbers 6:27:

**The LORD bless you and keep you,
The LORD make his face to shine upon you,**

and be gracious to you,
The LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.
So you shall put my Name upon the people, says the Lord, and I will bless them.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.