

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name. This is a unique celebration, because it is not only the observance of the Feast of the Holy Name, it is also the Day of Holy Name. Today is January 1, a day when many people look at their lives and try to commit to living healthier: eating better, dieting, exercising, running in the fog, or the best option: going to church. It is a time when we try to be better versions of ourselves.

Names have meanings, we see this in the Bible when Abram became Abraham; Sarai became Sarah.<sup>1</sup> The name that we are called is important to us and has a story. Who we are began before we were born, and like Jesus we were given a name that was special. It is possible that the story has to do with a family name. Or perhaps, your parents thought of a concept that was important to them.

Most names have a story. Even if it is simply that someone liked the sound of a name or the character on a show. The name is given lovingly. In Luke's Gospel we hear that "was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived."<sup>2</sup> His name means that he will save us.

We know today that Jesus' name is not left at Jesus it is expanded. He is called Emmanuel, because he is God with us, A God who will walk the path of humanity: suffering as we suffer, rejoicing as we rejoice, crying, and laughing. This man will be so much more: he is the anointed one who will save us from our sins. Yet now, in the Gospel of Luke, we celebrate Jesus' Holy Name. The woman who brought it to him, Mary, would have recognized that this moment was a sign of God's faithfulness to God's beloved children. She knew the scripture from Isaiah about the "remnant" surviving. She is using her faith to recognize that the birth of this child is essential to all of humanity.<sup>3</sup> We too, all these later years recognize how important Jesus' birth is: it reminds us that God fulfills God's promises. Those names hold the power to remind us of who we are in our hearts.

Jesus was a Jewish child, as such, Mary and Joseph follow the customs of their religion. It is a way they take God's faithfulness and respond in faithfulness.<sup>4</sup> This is a reminder to us that we take God's faithfulness and respond in faithfulness. We honor God by our actions such as coming to church today, being baptized, and being confirmed. These are holy moments in our lives. When we remember them, we remember who we are as children of God: loving and kind.

The Gospel scripture we read today celebrates who Jesus is at his core and as one scholar put it "the majesty of the name given by the angels and the humble majesty of its bearer."<sup>5</sup> We are fortunate that as Christians we constantly remember Jesus' name and Majesty for us. We know he is The One who bears that name connects us in an intimate way to our creator. This news brings us more than happiness or comfort, it allows us a freedom and security that was not felt before Jesus' time. We are free to know that even without keeping to the laws Jesus kept: that we find eternal salvation. It is a comforting thought that we are able to treasure in our darkest moments. Therefore, as Christians, we take Jesus' name and are humbled by its place in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 17:1-12a,15-16

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:21

<sup>3</sup> Gafney, W.C. (2021). *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing. pp.27-

<sup>4</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1973). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic

<sup>5</sup> Gafney, W.C. (2021). *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. New York: Church Publishing. pp.27-

This section of Luke's Gospel is the summation of the early part of Jesus' existence from his time in the womb to his later time in the temple as a young boy. It seems everything Jesus does will both glorify God's place in our lives and build up our relationship with that creator God. We see this in the faith of Mary, who at this point is completing a step in her own faith development: she is treasuring all that happened to her. It is a blessing that God has used her to bring about God's will in this divine plan.<sup>6</sup> As God's vessel Mary feels the blessing and she holds Jesus. It is easy for us to do the same now. To wonder how we, as children of God, are called to be God's vessel in the world. We look at what we treasure: our faith, our time studying scripture, our time in church with fellow travelers on this path - those will lift us up and carry us through. Similarly, our families can be ways we are vessels for God: we can study and pray together about God's words and find comfort with those words.

Part of treasuring our life blessings is finding a way to follow God's path. This story, as I said, is a bit of a summary of God's work preparing us for Jesus' future ministry. We have witnessed great obedience through Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, and Elizabeth. The summation of this following of Jesus' ministry can be seen as they name Jesus' with the preordained name. The way the Greek is worded in this text indicates that God was the one giving the name; Joseph and Mary were the ones following that instruction.<sup>7</sup> In our own lives we can find ways to follow God's path and let him take control. Whether it is a simple kindness toward others or a larger point.

Our instruction in this Gospel is clear: be the people God called us to be through our birth in his name. We are called to live out the name of Jesus as our savior by being kind, by being witnesses as the Shepherds were witnesses of Jesus. We may feel as though we are humble caretakers as the parents of Christ did; or we may feel as though we are outcasts as the shepherds we heard about in the story. Wherever we are on God's path we are meant to consistently welcome God into the world of those who need a savior.<sup>8</sup> Friends, there are many people in this world who need a savior. We do so by being kind and loving others, serving at soup kitchens.

In our story, those shepherds had a choice after the angels left: would they follow God's instructions or would they continue doing what they had always done: to care for the sheep and look after the pastures.<sup>9</sup> It would not have been surprising if they thought that perhaps their calling was in that field. It was the safe and known place for them. Instead, they ventured out to do what God called them to do. Just as Mary took a chance in our early scripture readings in Advent by saying yes to being Jesus' mother, these shepherds also take a chance by saying yes to a new form of God. We too can take this chance and say yes in a new ways.

There is a story behind every name. Before being given this earthly name, we are given the power to fulfill God's calling to us: in these pews today we are called to unite everyone to God's love. This is St. Dunstan Episcopal Church's mission. My prayer for us as a church is that

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<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1973). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic

<sup>7</sup> Chen, D.C. (2023). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/name-of-jesus/commentary-on-luke-215-21-3>

<sup>8</sup> Chen, D.C. (2023). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/name-of-jesus/commentary-on-luke-215-21-3>

<sup>9</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1973). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic

we find a way to do so with joy. I pray that we remember to treasure all that you have learned in our lives.