

IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI

Happy New Year! 2019! It's going to take a little while to get used to writing that. However, more than Happy New Year, I'd like to wish you a very merry 8th Day of Christmas! And I don't say that as if New Years Day isn't important, but the eighth day of Christmas is *hugely* important and it often gets overlooked.

See, in the Bible the number eight carries a special significance. We all know a week has seven days. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh - which is why the Sabbath was so important. However, even the Israelites realized that the week doesn't just start over after the Sabbath Day. After resting on the Sabbath, the light of the new day is different from the first light. Many Israelites recognized the eighth day as the Day of Resurrection. The eighth day symbolized the eternal day.

And of course, Jesus Christ - spoiler alert - after resting on the Sabbath Day in the grave did rise on the eighth day, the Day of Resurrection. He rose on Sunday, the Day of New Creation, the day we Christians gather together to receive the gifts of the New Creation.

But this back-of-the-book spoiler knowledge is what makes being a Christian so fun. We can look back into the Old Testament and see these little "Easter Eggs" hidden in plain sight. For example, on the eighth day after the birth of a male Israelite, the baby was circumcised and named. That is why today on the eighth day of Christmas we celebrate the Circumcision and Name of Jesus - which is just what makes the eighth day of Christmas so hugely important!

Like any good Israelite parents, Mary and Joseph had their baby boy circumcised on the eighth day of His life. This was according to the Law of Moses as is written in the Book of Leviticus. Circumcision showed that a baby was born into the Covenant of God. We first hear of it in Genesis when God commands Abraham to circumcise himself and his household, slaves and all and enters into a covenant with him. To be circumcised was to be a descendent of Abraham, to be a descendent of the promise of salvation that God made to Abraham.

But, how ironic that Jesus was circumcised. After all, He wasn't just born into the covenant with God, He was God Himself in the flesh! He is the very promise of God in human form, the promise that circumcision itself pointed to! Despite that; despite the fact that Jesus is God of God and Light of Light, He humbled Himself and He placed His sinless self so fully under the Law of Moses - He was so obedient to the Law - that even here at only eight days old, He sheds His blood to fulfill the Law.

And it was in this shedding of blood that He received His name, Jesus. Ἰησοῦς in Greek as you can see written on your bulletin cover. Or Yeshua, as it was pronounced in Hebrew, which means "salvation," as the angel of the Lord told Joseph: "*you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*"¹ Already at eight days old, Jesus' destiny of atonement is revealed in His Name and in His circumcision. He will shed His blood to save His people. This is what we celebrate on this eighth day of Christmas!

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However, before I get ahead of myself, I want to discuss what it means to "name" a child, especially in Biblical times. Names are much more than just how you refer to someone. When you think of the name of your best friend, or your sister or brother or cousin, you are thinking of far more than just the syllables and the sounds that are coming out of your mouth. It's more than just a way to get their attention when you're in the same room. A name has deep, deep meaning. When you think of someone's name, you think of *them*. You recall their personality, their likes and dislikes, their talents and their quirks.

Phrases like "your name is mud" tell us that names carry a person's reputation. It's not a good thing to be told "your name is mud." Your reputation is tied up with your name. Your personality, your reliability - everything that is unique about you is brought to mind when someone simply says your name.

We see this in the Bible especially. Names are incredibly important and often point to a person in a significant way. This is why God sometimes changes a person's name. Abram becomes Abraham, "the Father of Many Nations" - (Interestingly as a side-note, his name is changed at his circumcision.) And of course, there's also Simon who becomes Peter, "the rock" for his rock-solid confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

¹ Mt. 1:21

Names carry weight. They carry meaning. They point to a person and often to the core identity of that person. The very same is true of God Himself. God reveals Himself to His people of old in the burning bush by His name YHWH. This revelation was so holy that pious Jews refused to say it out loud - in fact, it's written without the correct vowel-pointings in Hebrew, so no one actually knows exactly how it's supposed to be pronounced. When read aloud they'd often just say "*Adonai*" - "my Lord." Or "*HaShem*" - which simply means "the Name." In reality YHWH means something along the lines of "I Am Who I Am." That is to say, God *is* the ultimate reality. He constitutes all that is and was and is to come. Without Him nothing can exist because He is pure existence. Everything else is dependent upon Him.

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So, if a Name carries all this weight, all this significance - if a name tells us who someone is at the core of their being - then how important is it that God, who revealed Himself in the Old Testament as "I Am Who I Am" now reveals Himself in this little infant as "Jesus" - as "salvation"? All of this God revealed to His People on the eighth day of Christmas when Jesus publicly received His Name.

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As God's plan of salvation is unravelled throughout the Old Testament, revealing more and more as time goes on, so He reveals more and more of Himself because *He is* our plan of salvation. And now, in the fullness of time, God has revealed Himself to us by the name Salvation. With the fullness of time, God has revealed Himself to us more deeply than we ever imagined. He reveals His triune nature. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

However, God goes beyond simply revealing His triune Name to us. He actually *gives* us His holy Name. He places His Name upon us in baptism. We are baptized *into* the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. He nows hands His holy Name over to His people so that we also can be holy.

And in turn, *you* receive every good gift that comes with that Name: your character, your reputation, your whole self before God is covered and perfected by His holy Name upon you. In holy baptism, you receive the name "Christian." *That* is your identity. *That* is who you are. You are a reflection of Jesus Christ, your Salvation. All that you do as Christians is done in His holy name.

And God gives us His name; He places it upon our tongues so that we might proclaim it to the world.

... Yet while we live here in this sin-ridden world and carry this sinful Old Adam with us through this life, we are ever tempted to hide the name of God. We are tempted to take it for granted, or count it as nothing. We are tempted even to misuse it as we are warned in the Second Commandment not to do - Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

How easily do you find it to curse your neighbor or speak ill of him, though He is made in the likeness of God? How easily is it in difficult situations for God's name to roll off your tongue in a way that is not so pleasing to Him, or as a curse even?

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You've been given a mighty and powerful thing, the very name of the Lord of lords. And so we pray in the Lord's prayer: *hallowed be Thy name*. Of course, God's name is in and of itself holy, but we ask in this prayer that His name would be kept holy among us, His people, also. It's easy for our sinful selves to misuse this holy name. We pray God would keep us from this and forgive us when we do. And indeed for His Name's Sake, He does! That is to say, on account of Jesus, He does! How very important is this saving Name of Jesus that was revealed to the world on this 8th day of Christmas!

And so, how is it then that God's Name is kept holy among us also?

God's name is kept holy and not misused when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and when we live according to the Word of God. So, what we're praying for in this petition of the Lord's Prayer is that God would keep our teachings true to His Word and that we would carry out our lives in accordance with that Word.

And so we see that the Lord's Prayer truly is a baptismal prayer, a prayer we can rightly offer to God *because* we bear His Name. In this prayer, we ask the Lord to keep us in our baptismal grace. We address God as He has revealed Himself to us, praying, "Our Father, who art in Heaven."

He is our Father in heaven and He has granted us the right to become His children through holy baptism, by placing His name on us.

Everyone knows that your children are your own because *you* gave them their name and because they bear your last name. In a similar way, we proudly confess that we are God's people because He has given us His holy name to bear in holy baptism.

Not only this, the Lord Himself keeps us in that baptismal grace by sealing us in His name every week. At the end of the service you hear Jesus proclaim to you through the mouth of your pastor: *"The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."*

This isn't just a cute phrase. This is more than a happy wish. As our Old Testament reading from which this blessing comes tells us, through these words, spoken by the priests of the Old Testament and now the pastors of the New, God Himself, our Father, places His own holy Name upon His people, upon you, blessing you.

Every week when you hear this blessing you are being sealed into His holy name, recalling that baptismal grace, when you were first sealed into His name, so long ago.

Every week when you hear this benediction, you know that God Himself has come to You, He has appeared to You through His Word, through bread and wine.

It is God placing His stamp of approval on You. You have been washed and fed, healed and forgiven. It is God saying to you: you are my child, with you I am well pleased.

Today begins a New Year. Whatever this new year may bring, let us go into it with the name of Jesus upon our lips and upon our hearts, sealed in the name of the Triune God with His holy blessing.

In the name of Jesus.

Amen.

THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS
NUMBERS 6:22-27; GALATIANS 3:23-39; LUKE 2:21

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SOLI DEO GLORIA