

# *“A Name Above All Names”*

*New Year's Day*

*Luke 2:15-21*

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From the Pulpit

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*Prayer for Illumination: Light of All Light, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, so we may hear with joy what you have for us this day! Amen.*

Well, here we are. We made it! It's a New Year. After the ups and downs of 2016 and this busy season, I know more than a few of you who are eager to turn the page of our calendars. Many of us are ready to put the twelve months of 2016 in the circular file (some may have even set it ablaze!). This last week, may have been out of routine for you, time off, perhaps a bit bumpy with the extended family. It can all be a bit jarring and painful. But here we are, ready to begin anew.

What's in a Name? Money. This time of year at least, there are big rewards if you are a business and want to advertise your name out in the public arena. It's called "naming rights" and there is big money in it. Like on a sports venue (Huntington Park or Nationwide Arena), or on a post-season football bowl game. I'll be the first one to say I am concerned about the glorification of collegiate athletics and the dangers of the High Collision Sport of football, (and I'll save that for another time) but I really am amazed each year at the list of bowl games with interesting sponsors.... First of all the list is too long—but I thought I would share a few of my favorites with personal commentary.

This season, you have the:

- The San Diego County Poinsettia Bowl, everyone gets a free plant at the end no matter who wins-Happy Holiday.
- The Famous Idaho Potato Bowl-concession stands include a full loaded baked potato bar.
- The Motel 6 Cactus bowl, good thing they leave the light on because you'll have to watch where you sit or lay your head.

Then there are some interesting pairings:

- Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus bowl (Would you like some cool refreshing lime-aide to wash down those inferno wings?)
- Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl (I didn't know Chickens liked peaches)

You get my point---big names-big money, a bit ridiculous!

But it's not just this time of year and it's not just sports. The *CoGo* bicycle share system in Columbus is sponsored by an insurance company. You can even rent a digital sign truck and have it driven around town with your name on it. Big money, big reward. Theaters, Music Venues and even Hospitals are

caught in it too. Emergency rooms entitled for name brand clothing, critical care units named after golf tournaments. A lot goes into a name.

What's in a Name? Power, Prestige, Recognition. Getting your name in front of a billion of people around the world on New Year's Eve may cost a pretty penny, but the recognition is immense. Last night—it was Planet Fitness, the fitness corporation, with naming rights to the Times Square New Year's Eve celebration in New York City. *Toshiba* had the Countdown clock, *Waterford* had the crystal ball, *Phillips* had the LED lights, the “*Barefoot*” *Wine Cellars* had the “Barefoot Bubbly” Champaign, and the *Shred-It* document recycling company, well, they know a thing or two about confetti.<sup>1</sup>

What's in a Name? Maybe a new start. If you are a newly married couple---some choose to take the other person's name, or merge names with a hyphen. Taking a new name can bring about some worry about identity. How will he or she be known now that there is a new name? Yesterday, First Church members Tina Fry and Ted McIntyre were married here. There was community and there was love. There were sparklers on the exit from the church. In the end---they celebrated the joining of their lives as one, with one name and a new hope for

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<sup>1</sup> [www.timessquarenyc.org/events/new-years-eve/sponsor-new-years-eve/index](http://www.timessquarenyc.org/events/new-years-eve/sponsor-new-years-eve/index)

the future! It was a new chapter in their lives together blessed by God and the gathered community. Ted and Tina McIntyre began anew.

What's in a Name? From a biblical perspective—everything!<sup>2</sup> A name was believed to represent the essence of a person's character. Today is the eighth day of celebrating Jesus' birth. In this morning's reading from Luke, we hear how Mary and Joseph honor the Jewish tradition of circumcising and naming their child eight days after he is born. When Mary and Joseph do this, they already have the name. They didn't choose it. His name is Jesus. The name was given to Mary by an angel before Jesus was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21). But they honor the covenant with God and consecrate him to the Lord in the temple. Jesus' name is holy.

We heard most of this same text on Christmas Eve. I read this on Christmas Eve three times, stopping just short of verse 21. We focused on the shepherds coming to see this great thing that had happened and we hear about Mary. Other scripture readings on Christmas Eve gave descriptors of who this child would be, like this from the Prophet Isaiah, "and he will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org), 2012.

Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), but today.... We hear his name -  
- Jesus!

The name Jesus was actually a fairly common name in ancient Palestine. But that ordinary name has become infused with extraordinary significance. The name Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, “He saves.”

The birth of a baby comes with an opportunity to name the child. I always think about this scripture reading (v. 21) when we baptize babies here at First Church and ask the parents to name their child. We ask, “What is the Christian name of your child? When parents name their child they are already beginning to shape who that child will be. Sometimes, they name their child after a beloved relative and the name is a call for the child to remember the family into which they were born. Sometimes it is a name chosen to influence the character of the young one, such as Faith or Hope.

The parents name the child, the child is baptized and then we carry the little one through the midst of the congregation, promising to do our best to help form the child in the Christian faith. With every baptism, another person is claimed with that same name of Jesus—being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are named with our

Christian names (first and middle names)----but not last names---because we all get the name of Jesus. We are reminded of that same name which we carry with us---it's Jesus, our Savior!

When the shepherds come to Mary and Joseph and Jesus in the manger and share with them the words of the angels, it says “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

This is what we should do with the name of Jesus in this season of Christmastide, ponder it and treasure it in our hearts. As we discover how best to respond to this great gift in our midst, I am struck by how Mary and Joseph handle this new responsibility in days following the birth of the Savior of the world. They went to the Temple to present Jesus. Mary was purified. Jesus was circumcised. As scripture says, “Every firstborn male shall be holy to the Lord” (Luke 2: 23). And, “They offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.’”

I would never advocate returning to animal sacrifice as a way of demonstrating our gratitude to God, but you do have to admit it was a rather simple and specific bit of business. Luke is making it abundantly clear to us that Jewish law was

completely fulfilled in response to Jesus' birth. So how do we respond appropriately to this birth of a savior in our midst?

Now that we are thinking about packing up the ornaments, taking down the tree, and wrapping up the manger scenes, how do we claim the season with Christ among us?

This season of Christmastide teaches us that the holy has flooded the world. God's choice to become human has filled the world with the divine presence. Temples and their rituals; sanctuaries and their worship serve a vital and critical role in our faith as places set aside to recognize and praise God, but this season reminds us that they are stepping stones back out into the world.

God is just as much out on Broad Street as in this holy space; God is just as much out on Cleveland Avenue as in this place; just as much in West Franklinton or even in that manger all those years ago. God is deeply at work in the midst of the ordinary. God is calling us to open our eyes to recognize that presence. Perhaps we can use the name of Jesus to help us get there.

As we have turned over the calendar and stand at the beginning of a New Year, we can carry the name of Jesus through our

days and ponder it in our hearts like Mary did all those years ago. We can be reminded of the passage we heard Marty read from Philippians where it says that “he has the name above all names.” “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend” so that we can walk through our days with a tad more humility and bit more grace.

In this season we do not need big advertising or to go to the far off corners of the world to find our God. Jesus is here in this place right now and in the email that awaits us when we return to work, in the errand running and the family dinners, and even our coffee time after worship.

What’s in a name? Everything--if we are willing to carry it with us into the world.

The incarnation, the birth of Jesus, shows us that God is present in the most mundane elements of our human living. Let’s carry the name around with us in this season.

As we go from chore to chore, what if we say to ourselves, “Jesus is here.” As we grow frustrated in the midst of too many things to do and not enough time to do them, let us say to ourselves, “Jesus is here.” As we enjoy a moment of relaxation with family or friends, let us say to ourselves, “Jesus is here.” As

we volunteer in service to others, “Jesus is here.” As we lay our heads down on our pillows at night, “Jesus is here.” As we climb out of bed to begin another day, “Jesus is here.”

Let us ponder the name of the one who has promised to save us and treasure it in our hearts. “Jesus is here.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

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