

Sermon Draft

Text: Numbers 6:22-27

Sermon: "A New Name"

Today is the Sunday in the Church year given the title: "The Circumcision of Our Lord." Circumcision was a mark of the relationship God had with the people of Israel, that he would be their God and they would be his people. Jesus, the Son of God, came to fulfill what it means to be a child of God by his perfect life, a life in sync with the will of God the Father. The Lord's circumcision was also a sign of how Jesus would shed his blood on the cross to make us sons of God through faith in him.

At his circumcision, ***"He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."*** (Luke 2:21b) Jesus' name literally means "God saves." With Jesus' name and his Word come all the blessings of God.

In Holy Baptism, we are given the Lord's name, and the blessings that come from the Father, through the Son, are ours by way of the Holy Spirit in and through this name.

Every Lord's Day, we invoke the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in and through which we have access to Jesus' forgiveness, life, and peace. Likewise, we are sent out every Lord's Day with the blessings of his name given in the Benediction, which is our Old Testament reading for today from Numbers. The blessings of the Lord's name are delivered and have a positive impact on our everyday lives in this fallen world. ***"So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."***

(Numbers 6:27).

The psalmist rejoices in the authority of God's name, which we have received when he says, ***"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."*** (Psalm 8:1)

Today marks a new year of the secular calendar, a time that directs us to think of endings and beginnings. Highlight the importance of accessing the blessings of God's name, not only at the beginning and ending of every year, but also at the beginning and ending of every day of our lives.

Today, as we begin a new year, let us think about the day we were born. I don't know about you but I don't remember a thing. We were utterly and totally dependent on our mom and dad for every aspect of our life. They did the work to provide food for us; they fed us. They changed our diapers, provided a home for us, comforted us when we cried out in distress, and protected us from harm and danger. It's estimated that the cost of raising a child these days is two hundred fifty thousand dollars. Yet, we never received a bill for their work on our behalf. Why? It's because we belong to them; we bear their name.

It's the same with our relationship to God. Think about the day you were baptized into Christ. Whether baptized as an infant or as an adult, we were and are utterly and totally dependent on God for every aspect of this new life that was won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Not only did God do all the work to make it possible for us to be saved; he does all the work necessary to make that salvation ours. He did the work of saving us by his death and resurrection.

He does the work of delivering this salvation to us through the proclamation of his Word and the administration of his Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. He washed the "dirty diapers" of our sin in Holy Baptism and continues to wash them clean every time we return to those waters as we confess our sins and receive absolution. He hears our prayers and comforts us with his Word.

He feeds us with his very body and blood. He has made his house our home.

The life with God and one another that we now have in the family of God cost Jesus his life. Yet, we will never receive a bill from him. Why? It's because we belong to him; we bear his name. All this comes as a result of being given God's name. That's what we see on this day of the circumcision and naming of our Lord, that God blesses us with everything He is and has through His name.

God gives his blessings through and only through his name. We are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. God gives us his blessings through His name.

This day matters and not just because it's New Year's. On this day, one week after Christmas or by the Hebrew counting eight days after Jesus' birth, the baby Jesus was circumcised, as all Jewish boys were. On this special day, he was also given his name.

This in Jesus' case was even more significant because he was given his name by God, as the angel had instructed both Mary and Joseph. Jesus, God's own Son, was given God's name. The name that Jesus, which means "Savior."

It was no coincidence that on this day when Jesus was named, he was also circumcised; the first drops of blood were shed, a sign of the spilling of all his blood yet to come on the cross. Having God's name means having a special relationship with God, just as having our parents' name means we have a special relationship with them.

Every religion in the world except Christianity treats God as if he were our employer. This is a temptation for us Christians as well, due to the old Adam in us and our inability to know who God is apart from Jesus Christ. The idea is that we render our services to God and he pays us accordingly.

At the workplace, you're compensated for the work you do. In other words, you earn your pay. However, if you're unable to do the work expected of you or if you do a poor job, you'll be demoted or even fired.

If we treat God as if we expect him to be our employer, we wouldn't even qualify to "hire on" with his "company." Why? Because of who he is and what he expects. Jesus said, ***"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"*** (Matthew 5:48).

The apostle Paul reminds us that we are far from perfect when he says that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

We don't earn our salvation. We don't earn it first and foremost because of the fact that the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ is not our employer; he's our Father. As this year we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it's worth noting that this is exactly what the Reformation was about.

It was about how God loves us not because of what we do or don't do but for who we are, his beloved child. He has put his name on us so we are a member of the family of God and will enjoy the blessings of God in Christ throughout eternity.

Having God's name means everything, because outside of the name of God there is nothing but the curse of sin and death.

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:18)

But in Christ Jesus we are all sons and daughters of God, through faith. (from Galatians 3:26) God gives his blessings to us by putting his name on us.

You hear the words at the end of every service: ***“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”***

In the wilderness, the Lord authorized Moses to deliver this blessing to the children of Israel. Today, God authorizes his servant to do the very same, to put his name with all its blessings on us.

Pastors are called and ordained to say whatever the Lord says, just as Moses and Aaron were. Like Moses and Aaron, pastors stand in their congregation as Christ's servant (Numbers 6:23).

The vestments we wear indicate that we are not speaking on our own but as one sent and authorized to represent Christ Jesus.

As the authorized representative of the Lord, in continuity with the prophets, apostles, and evangelists, pastors stand in your midst to deliver the blessings of God's name, that is, the forgiveness, life, and peace of God.

As the Lord tells me, as your pastor to speak the familiar words of the Benediction, as we do at the end of every service, the Lord promises, ***“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” (vs. 27)***

Every time you invoke the name of God, whether through me as your pastor in the Divine Service or in your daily prayers, you have God’s ear, and he gives and bestows the blessings of his name.

The Divine Service today began in his name, and during this time that God has brought us together, our Lord Jesus Christ has served us the blessings of his name through his Word and with his very body and blood. These blessings include his forgiveness, goodness, his very life that conquers death, and his peace that surpasses all understanding. Before you leave, he will bless you one more time as he sends you out so that the blessing of his name has its way in your everyday lives. Amen