

Christmas I

Monday John 3: 16,17

A Christmas Without Gifts

Can you imagine a Christmas without gifts? You come into the living room to your Christmas tree, and there is nothing under it. No brightly wrapped gifts, no bikes, no trains, no dolls. How horrible! But you know what would be worse? A Christmas without Jesus.

Maybe the pastor at your church makes a big deal about not putting the baby Jesus figure in the manger scene till Christmas Eve. That is fitting. It reminds us during Advent that we are still preparing for the birth of Jesus. But what if the baby Jesus figure never shows up? The shepherds, the wise men, Mary, Joseph, and you are all staring at an empty manger. A Christmas without gifts would be bad, but it would still be Christmas. A Christmas without the gift of Jesus would be nothing. It would be worse than nothing. A Christmas without Jesus would mean we would perish; we would not have eternal life, and the whole world would not be saved.

Look for Jesus in that manger. The manger scene is still up at church, and it is probably still up in your home. See Jesus; see the Gift of all gifts. Jesus in the manger means we do not perish because He will die in our place. Jesus in the manger means we do have eternal life because He suffered our eternal punishment. Jesus in the manger means God so loved the world that He gave up His Son to save it.

Actually Jesus in the manger means that you can never, ever have a Christmas without gifts. No matter what gifts you may lack on Christmas, you always get for every Christmas forgiveness, life, and salvation from the Baby Jesus in the manger!

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Tuesday Luke 2: 8-14

Why Tell Shepherds?

When parents have a child, they normally send birth announcements. They normally send them to relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and friends to share the good news that a baby has been born to them. When God sends a birth announcement, He does it in a BIG way. He does not send a card, a postcard, a telegram, or e-mail; He sends angels and not just one, but "a great company of them."

That is a neat thing for God to do, but why does God send His birth announcement to shepherds? Would not it be more fitting for God to make the announcement of the birth of His Son to the church, to her leaders, to the people like the Pharisees who paid attention to all Laws of God? These shepherds did not do that. In fact, these shepherds, because of their occupation, were considered religiously unclean by the Pharisees and the church leaders of that day. They would not have been welcomed in the church without lots of cleaning up. They were looked down upon by church leaders.

So why does God send His birth announcement to them and only to them? Why do the church leaders and Pharisees only get to hear this announcement through the shepherds (17)? Because God loves to tell His Good News, His Gospel to the unworthy, to the outcast, to the down and out. God loves to show mercy and grace and forgiveness to those who do not think they deserve it. God is the Friend of sinners. Because Jesus is especially given to sinners, to people who have no hope of going to heaven, of being saved by their keeping of the Law, by their going to church, or by their being good boys or girls. This news of Jesus being born is good news of a great joy to the down and out type of person the shepherds were.

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Wednesday Matthew 1:21

What is in a Name?

The Collect for this first week after Christmas makes a big deal about the name of God. The name of God that is always on the lips of Christians is Jesus. His name is the only name under heaven in which there is salvation (Acts 4:12). His name is the only one in which we pray. Both Mary and Joseph were told that they were to name the Child carried by Mary, Jesus.

So what is in a name? Plenty. The names people today give their children very often do not mean anything. But people in the Old Testament often gave their children names that meant something. God too did this you might recall. He gave Jacob, Abraham, and Sara special names that meant something. It is kind of like you might have heard about in American history. Indians would name their children Running Bear, Wild Wolf, Soaring Eagle etc.

The angel told Joseph to name the Baby, Jesus "because He will save His people from their sins." But it gets even more interesting than that. The first two letters of Jesus' name, "JE," stand for Jehovah. Jehovah is the One who walked with Adam in the Garden in the cool of the evening, the One who met with Moses at the top of Mt. Sinai, the One who showed Himself to Elijah in the "still, small voice." The last three letters of Jesus' name, SUS, stand for "saves."

O what a beautiful name! Jesus means, "Jehovah saves." What grand and glorious news. The God who created us, who sent the Flood, who delivered His church from Egypt, who was David's Lord, and whom Isaiah saw surrounded by six-winged seraphim (Isaiah 6), is our Savior. This little Baby who lies in the manger, who nurses on Mary, is none other than Jehovah. And He is not here to punish, to scare, or to whip us into shape. He is here to save us.

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Thursday Luke 2:21

More Than a New Year

New Year's Eve and Day always fall the week after Christmas. They are big events in the world, at least to all who follow our calendar. The Church does not. The Church has a calendar of its own. You might remember that our old year ends and begins at the end of November or the beginning of December. However, New Year's Day is still a big deal to the Church. New Year's Day is always the eighth day after Christmas. The Old Testament Church was directed to circumcise their babies on the 8th day. So, New Year's Day is the day the Church celebrates the circumcising of Jesus.

His circumcision is a big deal because it shows that Jesus, although True God, was really underneath the Law. He really was obligated to keep it even though He as God was totally above the Law. Since you and I needed someone to keep the Law for us, it is great news to us that Jesus is circumcised because that tells us that He is going to keep every single Law of God. And if Jesus keeps it, if Jesus fulfills it, it is no longer hanging over our heads.

But there's more. In order to be circumcised, you have to be cut and you bleed. The circumcision of Jesus is the first time He sheds His holy, precious blood for sinners. Yes, it would not have been enough if Jesus just kept the Law for us. We still needed someone to pay for our not keeping it, to bleed for us. We still needed something to cover the broken commandments. Our blood would not do it. It is too thin and there is not enough of it to cover all our sins. We needed Jesus to bleed for us because the Blood of God is thick enough and rich enough to cover all of our sins.

On New Year's Day the Church remembers that Jesus shed His blood for sinners and began to keep all the laws that weigh so heavy on sinners. What a great way to start a year: with the Law off our backs and our sins completely covered by Jesus' blood!

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Friday John 12: 27-32

Glorify Your Name

We pray in the Collect for this week that "We may glorify" God's holy name. We pray this same prayer every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. We say, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the GLORY, forever and ever. Amen." Jesus prayed this same prayer in our Bible reading for today. Our concern in life is not that we glorify our name, our parents' name, our school's name, or our country's name. Our concern is that the name of God be glorified.

Most Christians would agree with this, though many would tell you that you glorify God's name by doing things for God. You glorify the name of God by working around the church, giving a lot of money to church, or even by being a good child, student, and/or church member. There is nothing wrong with these. But that is not what Jesus meant when He prayed in John 12, "Glorify Your name."

The Name of God was glorified by Jesus being nailed to a cross. The Name of God was glorified by Jesus suffering and dying in the place of sinners. The Name of God was glorified by Jesus being abused, misused, mocked, and ridiculed. The Name of God was glorified by Jesus being attacked by Satan, crucified, dead, and buried. That is what Jesus says in our Bible reading.

Jesus also tells us how we glorify His Name, by being drawn to the crucified Jesus. Not by doing this or sacrificing that for God, but by being drawn to the One who did everything for us and sacrificed Himself for us. We glorify the Name of God when we worship Him as the Savior and sanctifier of sinners. God's chief glory is to save sinners who in no way deserve it. We glorify God's Name by being saved by Him.

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Saturday Philippians 2: 9-11

Name Recognition

I know you have been watching TV, and noticed how the same commercials keep coming on over and over till you are sick of them. You might have even thought, "Why do they keep putting on the same commercial?" Companies are not trying to get you right then and there to go out and buy their product. No, they are trying to get their product first in your mind when you do go into the store. Say you are going to the store to buy soft drinks. You know of many different brands. What soft drink companies who advertise so much want is for you to go into the store and as soon as you think "soft drink" you think of their particular brand.

Some churches try to market the name of Jesus that way. They think by their efforts they can make Jesus' name first place in people's minds. It does not work that way. Jesus comes to people in very weak, foolish things. Through your pastor preaching, through the waters of Baptism, through the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion. It is very easy to overlook Jesus in these things. In fact, it is an outright miracle that everyone does not! Some hear the voice of Jesus in the pastor's sermon. Some do recognize the name of Jesus in Baptism. Some do recognize Jesus Himself in the Holy Communion. But most do not. When the Name of Jesus comes wrapped in ordinary things, it can easily be overlooked.

But it will not always be that way. Our Bible reading speaks of a time when every knee in heaven, on earth, and even in hell will bow before the mighty name of Jesus. There will come a day when Jesus will not approach people through Water, Words, or Bread and Wine but in all of His glory. Then no one will be able to think of anyone or anything else but Jesus. Then all will bow before Him. Those who have known Him in Baptism, in Absolution, in Holy Communion will bow with great joy. Those who have not will bow also but not with joy. The day is coming when the name of Jesus will be recognized by all. But today is not that day.

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our actions by Your gracious favor, and further us with Your continual help that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in Your name, we may glorify Your holy name and finally by Your mercy receive eternal life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen