

CIRCUMCISION / CHRISTMAS I 2013

SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH

FATHER JOHN ALTBERG

MATTHEW 2.19 LUKE 2.15



CHRISTMAS IS NOT ENDED...remnants are not to be boxed up or put on sale as the 'Secular City' would lead us to believe. Post Christmas Day 'shopping' is not a feature of the Church Calendar...!

The Twelve Days of the Christmas Season provide a rich menu...including...

- St Stephen...the first martyr whose day we celebrated Thursday
- St. John the Evangelist - Friday
- The Holy Innocents yesterday
- St. Thomas of Canterbury along with...
- Today – albeit seizing a three day advance, the Circumcision of Jesus... by the action of Joseph...the son of the Blessed Virgin Mary has a name...it is JESUS...

Turning specifically to the man who played an enormously important role as the adoptive father of Jesus...St Joseph the carpenter from Nazareth...a man with historic significance to Christ Church Parish

About Joseph we know nothing more after Jesus is just a few years old. A special fact for us is that this very building, in its original setting as San Jose Mission, was dedicated to him and known as Old St Joseph's Church. Note the remarkable statue of him at the entrance...the gift of a parishioner many years ago.

St Luke's Gospel reading for this day focuses on Joseph and the obedient, brave role he played...in giving the Son of God, born of BVM, his name...Joseph precisely followed God's instructions...

In more recent/popular practice New Years Day, January 1, is identified as *HOLY NAME DAY*...for it was on the eighth day after birth that male Jewish children were given their name. Joseph was charged with carrying out that duty...*"And named him Jesus" Mt 1.25*

The Church did not regularly begin the observation of naming Jesus until well into the 9c as the secular New Year was a substantially pagan festival and Christianity steered clear of getting caught up in the frenzy...it's not clear that we have yet been successful! The frenzy continues...many seem to have got it backwards with a belief Christmas is over instead of recognizing **THE NEW BEGINNING** we celebrated on Christmas Eve/Day...despite what many attempted to persuade in the past four days, Christmas continues for these nine more of twelve days!

Taking down of Christmas trees and lights on the 26th along with the disappearance of Christmas music is a persuasive sign we still have plenty of work in educating the increasingly secularized society. More is to come about life in the Secular City during this morning's Discussion Group.

Today we meditate upon the name JESUS, **THE NEW BEGINNING** he brings...and who we will tell.

The last sentence of Yesterday's Gospel tells us the whole story..."and Joseph (following instructions) named him Jesus"...OK, but why "Jesus" and not Robert or Henry or Michael or...

It is because his name tells us WHO he is and WHAT he does. The name JESUS is the Greek (Ἰησοῦς) form of the Hebrew JOSHUA, which means literally, "Jehovah (God) saves." Suddenly the 'Jesus Saves' bumper stickers and signs that cause some unease now make sense...make us smile with new comprehension...this is NOT just a name chosen at random out of the Big Book of Hebrew Baby Names

The naming of JESUS...his very NAME, is part of the systematic revelation of God's plan to provide an alternative for the strife and despair that besets our life.

God calls US during this Christmas Season to come to terms with who Jesus is, what his name means and follow the command of the angels to the shepherds..."Don't be afraid...go and tell others." Jesus, the promise who WILL save US is here...then and now...!

