

Feast of the Circumcision

January 1, 2023

Phil 2:9-15 & Luke 2:15-21

So, what's in a name?

Today, our Immanuel becomes our Jesus. The mystery in "God with us" is further revealed. Jesus' name means "God saves". There is thus the final unveiling of what God's loving purpose in our lives is to be.. by a new name.

Recall that at 75 years of age, Abram was chosen by God to leave pretty much all that he knew behind..to leave his homeland and the familiar... and to begin his journey Godward. He becomes Abraham, as within his new name, God reveals to the old man the purpose for which he was created. He is to become the father of all peoples. In him shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Abraham's name change from Abram to Abraham is linked to the law of circumcision, and circumcision is the sign of the covenant which bonds God's people to Him. God says to Abraham in Genesis 17, "As for me, This is my covenant with you: you shall be a father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations." The expansion of his name from Abram is in harmony with the patriarch's extended role as progenitor of us all.

In light of the great importance with which Holy Scripture invests name-giving, a CHANGE of name is of huge significance and symbolizes a transformation of character and destiny. In Jesus' case, no transformation is required, only the name that reveals His purpose, that He is come to save us from our sins.

Jesus underwent circumcision on the 8th day of life, just as the covenant with Abraham and his male progeny stipulated, because the 8th day of the week symbolizes the beginning of a new creation as a name is given. The giving of Jesus name is more important than the significance of circumcision since it reflects a faithful response of our Lord's parents to Gabriel's directions for naming at the Annunciation. The name Immanuel is revealed at its heart to be "Jesus", in harmony with his promised role to be the Savior of us all.

In the psychology of the ancient near-Eastern world, a name was not merely a convenient means of identification, but was intimately bound up with the very essence of being that one receives from his or her Creator.. I believe that still to be true. A name which a human receives is inextricably intertwined with one's personality and, though veiled, with one's God given purpose for each of our lives.

Jesus received the name pronounced by God's angel at His circumcision, as we receive ours at Baptism. God wants Him to be named Jesus, and thereby to become what His name expresses..Savior of us all. In today's gospel, Luke mentions our Lord's circumcision without interpreting it, because, for him, a Gentile Christian, circumcision is no longer necessary for inclusion into the people of God. Luke cannot deny that Jesus was a Jew and that His birth and childhood belong to the old covenant. But Luke's interest is directed toward how the name, "Jesus", will shape the future of the people of God, for a time in which faith and baptism leave circumcision behind.

We receive our names at our baptisms. In the midst of the the cries of an overdressed infant, the hushes, and the smiling faces bearing all the eyes of hope onto the child, I am persuaded that somehow in those tender minutes,

God manages to impart to our parents' souls and lips HIS CHOICE of our essence, our character, and our individual purpose. At Baptism, we begin becoming who God chooses us to be, and as we are transformed by grace, all we have not yet become. We find that we have, despite all our different names, a common purpose: to please our Heavenly father by working out our own salvation in fear and trembling. That means cooperating with Him, allowing Him most of all to TAKE the wills we say we surrender to Him, and thereby coming to know ourselves as He knows us.

As this new year begins, I want you to ponder: what has God hidden in your name that you may know as you are known? What of your nature and individual purpose will He reveal to as you strive to serve and please Him in 2023? Mary pondered what lay in store for her baby named Jesus. Ponder with her, how will the divine mystery hidden in our Christian names come to light? How will we flower in the light of a Life which saves us?

As I contemplate each of you prayerfully, ponder just a few examples from among you:

Sally..your name derives from the Hebrew, "Sarah", meaning a noble lady or princess. Of course, you inherit the name of Abraham's wife. She had a son, Isaac, whose name means "she laughed". Sarah really learned how to laugh in her old age when she so named Isaac, when she re-experienced bursts of joy after a long barren time. She humanized some of her matriarchal nobility in the raucous process of laughing out loud. Sally, may your nobility continue to be revealed, but may more laughter at the funny ways of God overtake you.

Dawn..A Germanic and Old English name denoting daybreak and birth. What will the Christ who abides in Dawn unveil to her at the daybreak of this new year?.. May you come to know the newness of life promised within your name.. and may that light of a new Dawn truly shine on all of us who love you.

Peter, from the lineage of the Latin “Petra” and Aramaic, “Kephas” by way of ancient Syria. May you recall with delight your own baptism as your new child, Henry, is brought among us. May it be God’s will that your essence of strength, solidity and resolution be a gift of confidence to us all this coming year.

Barbara..a name which means “stranger”. A stranger to this naughty world you are to become for God and thereby an example to us all..as a consequence, may the grace of this new year of life reveal to you how much closer Jesus wants you to be to Him..for there is no one who knows you better

As we journey Godward together this year, May we all come to serve and please our Lord in newness of life, and thereby bring a smile to the face of our expectant Heavenly Father.

Amen.