

## 245 What's In A Name?

*(Note: This blog entry is based on the text "What's In A Name?", originally shared on December 28, 2022. It was the 245<sup>th</sup> video for our YouTube Channel, Streams of Living Water (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB7KnYS1bpHKal2OseQWCnw>), co-produced with my wife, Rev. Sally Welch.)*

In Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", Juliet says "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet." But, would it? Today, we're going to find out.

Sally and I hope you had a wonderful Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

We celebrated Christmas with a bi-lingual Christmas Eve worship service in Monterey Park. Trinity-Faith Lutheran Church, the Mandarin-speaking church using the facilities of St. Paul's Lutheran Church where I serve on Sunday mornings and a few hours during the week, worshiped together with St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Mandarin and in English. I don't think that happened in very many places in the world!

Sally and I celebrated Christmas Day with Holy Communion at St. Paul's. Later, we had a festive meal and shared gifts among those gathered in our home.

For an increasing number of people in our world, that's it. It's over. The presents are opened and put away. The tree already seems a little out of place, and it will be gone by the end of New Year's Day.

For many, Christmas ends on Christmas Day. New Year's Day at the latest. Christmas is over, for many, when the season of commercial preparations ends, and then it's done, it's really done.

In fact, some businesses and TV programs marked the 12 days of Christmas as a countdown **to** Christmas. So when they're over, they're really over.

The Christian Church, however, **starts** the Christmas season on Christmas Eve and celebrates it for 12 whole days, until January 6th, the Day of The Epiphany of Our Lord, as in the song "The Twelve Days **of Christmas**"!

So, now we have Christmas pretty much all to ourselves and those with whom we share it.

There's no more holiday stress. The long nightmare of excess and expectations is over. Now comes the Christmas blessing and we open our hearts to receive it for 12 whole days.

BTW, the cost of the 12 gifts listed in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" went up 5.7% last year and 10.5% in 2020, to \$45,523! Or, if you bought the items over and over each day as the song suggests (that's 364 total gifts) that will cost you over \$197,000!

You know, those exotic pets like turtle doves, geese, and French hens are expensive, increasing the most largely because of increased labor and food costs. 😊

So continue to have a Merry Christmas and don't be embarrassed for celebrating Christmas as a Christian. Be counter-cultural. Don't take down your Christmas tree, your lights, or your decorations. Leave them up until January 6<sup>th</sup>, and be a witness when you are asked why or when you get funny looks. 😊 As Jesus said, in **Matthew 5:14-15**,

*<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

Be bearers of that light. John describes it in terms of the birth of Jesus, in **John 1:3-5**,

*<sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

God makes that work personal and God gives a name to that work, and His name is Jesus. We see it at the end of the Nativity story in the Gospel of Luke. The context is part of the supporting story to the birth of Jesus that has to do with the shepherds and Mary's reaction to it all in **Luke 2:15-20**,

*<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Then the story shifts to giving the baby a name, in **Luke 2:21**,

*<sup>21</sup>After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

We saw this when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her what was about to happen and said, in **Luke 1:26-31**,

*<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*

Which is kind of funny because this makes the answer to the question of the popular Christian song "Mary Did You Know?" an emphatic "Yes! The angel Gabriel told me!" 😊

But why does his name matter? Wouldn't a rose by any other name smell just as sweet?

Well, there are thousands of people who get paid big bucks because the answer is no, it would not.

There are **hosts** of marketers whose job is to sell things by giving them names that would be attractive to consumers.

Would you buy a car that is named "The Sloth", or a beverage named "Sludge?"

Would you be more likely to watch a movie with a leading man named "Archibald Alexander Leach" or one named Cary Grant? (They're the same guy.)

Would you be drawn to an action movie starring Marion Robert Morrison (or John Wayne), Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connell (or Billie Eilish), John Roger Stephens (or John Legend) Dua Lipa (Wait, that's her real name)?

Would you rather eat an Alligator Pear (what it's called in Florida and was proposed for Southern California) or an Avocado?

Names are important, but they were even more important in Bible times, both the Old and New Testament times.

When we think of how to describe a human being's true self, we may use the words "heart" or "soul" or "spirit". But in Bible times people would say it is in a person's name.

That's why God does not have a proper noun for a name. The "name" of something was believed to contain the fundamental reality of the thing it named in Bible times. That's why when people went through some life-changing experience their name had to change, i.e. Abram and Sari was changed to Abraham and Sarah and Jacob was changed to Israel. Saul's name was changed to Paul.

When Moses asked the voice from the bush that was burning but not consumed for its name, God answered "I am". He gave a verb not a noun because it is impossible for a human being to know anything of God's fundamental reality, except that which God chooses to reveal to him or her.

When the angel Gabriel, a messenger from God, told Mary and, separately Joseph, to give the child a name, and a specific name, "Jesus", that's a big deal.

"Jesus" is a masculine given name derived from the name "Joshua". In Hebrew the name Jesus is "Y'shua", and it means "The Lord is salvation" i.e. "Savior".

Jesus was given his name at his circumcision, as we give names at a person's baptism.

It was done 8 days after his birth, as baptisms have frequently been done, though not always today, throughout Christian history. Martin Luther was baptized on the eighth day of life after his birth.

It was and is done on the 8<sup>th</sup> day because that was commanded for male circumcision in Genesis 17:9-13, sometimes thought to be the week of creation plus one day, to bring the child into the Jewish community.

In the Christian church, baptism brings us into the Christian community, and it happens traditionally on the eighth day for male and female children because, as Paul writes, in Christ there is no male or female. And, that's why baptismal fonts are often made in an octagon shape. Eight sides.

People spend big bucks to put their names on buildings. You see them everywhere. Walk around any college or university campus. Look at the name on the top of multi-use commercial buildings. Think of buildings like the Lucas Oil Stadium, or the Sofi Stadium, or the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Probably the weirdest is the change from the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles to the Crypto.com Arena. Many thought that most people would eventually call it "The Crypt". (!?) Which seems strange from a marketing point-of-view.

But you can be named with the most significant name in history and it won't cost you anything!

The name of Jesus can be written on your heart because Jesus paid the cost on the cross.

You can take on the name above all names as a gift!

You can receive the true self of God. You don't have to be a rich donor. Just open your heart and ask Jesus to enter in.

We will celebrate the Name of Jesus Sunday this coming Sunday as part of the Christmas season. It's a reminder to us not just of what happened, but what the birth of Jesus means!

We hear it in Paul's letter to the Philippians in what is thought to be the words to one of the first Christian songs. It tells the story of Jesus birth and it shows us what is truly in a name, in **Philippians 2:4-11**

*<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

*<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,*

*<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,*

*<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.*

*<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name  
that is above every name,*

*<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and  
under the earth,*

*<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

The meaning of Christmas is found in Jesus' name. Amen!