

Title: Why the Name of Jesus is Holy and Exalted

Sub-Title: Those who believe in God's name will take on a new identity.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/BgAutV-zGTQ>

David McCasland, who tells stories of Christians and world leaders who have inspired others, once wrote, “Cleopatra, Galileo, Shakespeare, Elvis, Pelé. They are all so well known that they need only one name to be recognized. They have remained prominent in history because of who they were and what they did. But another name stands far above these or any other name!”¹ That name is Jesus. For this reason, the church has honored the feast of “The Holy Name” as a day of commemoration for special observance. This feast day takes place eight days after his birth when Jesus was circumcised and “called by the same name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”²

So what is all the fuss about this Holy Name? In ancient Jewish history, a name was given to a child for the significance attached to it. So before the Son of God was born into this world, the angel told Mary and Joseph to name Him *Jesus* because “*he will save his people from their sins*,”³ and “*he . . . will be called the Son of the Most High*.⁴

Our Collect (prayer) opened today with the words, “*Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation.*”⁵ His name is a sign that is full of meaning. It signified who Jesus was and what he came to do. In

¹ David C. McCasland, Our Daily Bread, 1/7/2018, article entitled, “One Name”

² Luke 2:21

³ Matthew 1:21

⁴ Luke 1:32

⁵ BCP, Collect for feast of The Holy Name, p. 213

the Jewish culture, Jesus is the Hellenized form of Joshua. It was one of the most common names given to young boys because he was the leader of the Israelites in their conquest of the Promised Land. In the Hebrew language, that name means “Yahweh is salvation.”⁶ When Jesus was given that name, it signifies that Jesus is, first and foremost, our Savior; the deliver who would defeat the root cause of all evil, namely, sin.

When God chose to bring about this deliverance, he did not do it as anyone would have ever expected. He gave his Son a common, ordinary name. He grew up in Nazareth, a place from which respectable people despised. He had brothers and sisters and worked as a carpenter. When he began his ministry, He went to weddings and dinner parties. He had cookouts by the lake and hung out with friends. He even got tired and slept in the back of a boat. Yet in all of life’s routine and ordinary activities, he was “God with us.” He lived with a purpose, and his teachings engaged ordinary people where they lived and worked with pictures and parables that demonstrated God’s ways.

This past week, I read an article by Joseph Campbell, an American writer and literature professor. He describes the essential narrative elements in his writings in what he calls “A Hero’s Journey.” His detailed description of this journey inspired George Lucas when he wrote his Star Wars saga and developed the character of Luke Skywalker.

One theme that resonates powerfully with people in Campbell’s description of this journey is how the main character is usually raised in obscurity. This theme that emerges in our Gospel today with the way the birth of our Lord was revealed to common, ordinary shepherds, who were *“out in a field, keeping watch over their flock by night, when the angel of the Lord appeared to them and announced the good news of great joy,*

⁶ Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, p. 957

that a Savior, who is Christ the Lord had been born.⁷ It was to such lowly, everyday people as these that God chose to reveal himself when he was born.

Our Gospel further describes how the shepherds left the nativity scene and spread abroad, ***“the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.”***⁸ The verb “wondered” sprang off the page when I read these words. I love that word because it always contains an element of surprise and amazement. That word goes hand and hand whenever the Gospel is perceived for what it truly is, even when it is far from how you or I would have ever imagined it. Consequently, I, like Mary, have done my own “pondering” at what all of this means to our everyday lives.

We have to use our minds in creative ways when we ponder something as wonderful as this. Our New Testament lesson from Philippians affirms this when it exhorts, ***“Have this mindset among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.”***⁹ Such imitation of Christ is one of the basic principles for living the Christian life. His obedience extended through every detail of his holy life. It was because he ***“humbled himself and served, even to the point of death, even death on a cross,”***¹⁰ that ***“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name that is above every name.”***¹¹

Jesus came into this world as a baby, helpless and needy. He was circumcised and named. He had to grow, learn, suffer, and

⁷ Luke 2:8-11 paraphrased

⁸ Luke 2:17-18

⁹ Philippians 2:5-7a

¹⁰ Philippians 2:8 (paraphrased)

¹¹ Philippians 2:9

live; so, too, must we do the same, for “***The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.***”¹²

And even as Mary’s “yes” to God changed human history, our “yes” to God can similarly make a difference that boggles the imagination.

When Abram said “yes” to God, his name was changed to Abraham, “the father of nations.” When Sarai said “yes” to God, her name was changed to Sarah, which means “princess.” When Cephas (the fisherman) said “yes” to Jesus’ call to follow him, his name was changed to Peter, meaning “rock.”

In following God, we, too, take on a new identity, which Paul describes in our alternate New Testament lesson as “***adoption as children.***” Through this claiming of our identity, we take on “***a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry ‘Abba Father,’***”¹³

We share in the captivating adventure of Joseph Campbell’s description of “a Hero’s Journey” whenever we embark on the way of service and humility. The Apostle John wrote that “***all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.***”¹⁴ And then later in his 1st epistle he wrote, “***For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.***”¹⁵ The way of faith opens the door to these blessings. In his name, “***the Lord will bless you and keep you; the Lord will make his face to shine upon you and give you peace.***”¹⁶ It is a blessing that changed my life, from feeling inferior and defeated to someone who dares to take hold of what it means to be a child of God and a joint heir with Christ Jesus. The Hero’s Journey is meant to be your journey and mine. So let’s take hold of it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

¹² Matthew 10:24

¹³ Galatians 4:5

¹⁴ John 1:12

¹⁵ 1 John 5:4

¹⁶ Numbers 6:24-26