

Kimberly Reinholtz
January 1 2017
GHTC
Luke 2:15-21

When I was pregnant with our daughter - my husband and I talked a lot about names- I had a list of names that I had dreamed naming a child accumulated from movies, tv shows, and literature. I had a list of names I could never use exes, former students, and youth group members fell on this list either because I loved them or because I had a bad association with that name. Andrew had a similar list - but he also had the qualification that he had to be able to yell the name. These lists and guidelines lead us to name our daughter Audrey after much careful consideration and deliberation.

With our son, we had a name picked out before we even got pregnant. It wasn't Owen. We lived with this child of ours growing in my womb with a different name than we gave him once he was born. When we met him we knew the original name wasn't right.

With both kids we didn't announce their names right away- much to the family's disappointment at the time- We felt we needed some time to get to know them to make sure their name fit their personality. I imagine that for Mary the 8 days after Jesus birth had much more to do with the nature of Judaic custom about ritual cleanliness and a very high infant mortality rate but I imagine she must have needed time to get to know her son as well and find a name that fit this child who was born to be called Emmanuel- God with Us.

Yet she couldn't come right out and name him Emmanuel could she? That would make him a clear target in Roman occupied Jerusalem- in Matthew's gospel we hear about how Herod sent out a decree to kill all Hebrew children in Bethlehem under the age of two after being visited by the magi. In Luke's gospel we see that even though Mary and Joseph knew this child was God incarnate through Gabriel's visits Mary still took time to ponder the meaning of this in her heart and was intentional in naming him Jesus as Gabriel foretold.

Sixteen centuries later in Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare penned the often adapted phrase- what is in a name? would not a rose by any other name smell so sweet ? And we continue to find the name of Jesus a focal point of spiritual reflection.

Jesus, an abbreviated form of the name Yehoshua is Hebrew and means YHWH is salvation. It is the name of the successor of Moses an honored name in Jewish tradition which in English has become Joshua. Essentially the name of Jesus would be equated to naming a child Josh.

But we know that Yehoshua ben Yosef , Jesus son of Joseph of Nazareth wasn't just any Josh. This child who was presented in the temple 8 days after his birth, once his mother was deemed ritually clean, once he had survived his first week of life, once the angels had shouted Glory to

God in the Highest and on earth peace and goodwill towards humankind, once Mary had kept these words in her heart, and nursed and swaddled and rocked him in her arms then this boy-child this god-incarnate became Jesus.

Now there are historians and theologians and others who have studied this question more than I who argue that Jesus was always Christ or that Jesus became Christ at his Baptism in the Jordan or that Jesus became Christ at his Crucifixion or his resurrection or ascension. But I think that the simplest answer which is most often right is that when we ponder the name of Jesus we should keep in mind the first line of John's gospel- in the beginning was the word and the word was with god and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us ... i believe that the word which John centers his meditation on is the name- Jesus. Yahweh is salvation.

It is Jesus who many of us call upon when we pray. Jesus who embodies the promise of Isaiah, who fulfills the prophecy that a child will be born who is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

It mattered what Jesus is named because our names have meaning. In naming human beings have often kept tradition and intention and history alive and at times have abandoned those same elements intentionally. In current popular culture children have been named after directional markers, fruit and other seemingly odd things, it is not uncommon for children to grow up and either change their names or go by a nickname. Through scripture we have learned of generations of individuals who are named and renamed most notably - Abram becomes Abraham; Sarai becomes Sarah; Jacob becomes Israel; Saul becomes Paul. So much of our identity is tied to our names- this is part of why the question of if an individual will keep or take or change their name after marriage is still a big deal. What you are called is a big deal.

For Christians we have adapted the naming ceremony from a child's 8th day at their circumcision if they are a boy-child into the liturgical act of baptism where we proclaim the name of the child and mark them with the sign of the cross made in holy oil and marking them as Christ's own forever.

Despite what Bruce Willis' character, Butch, in Quentin Tarantino's film Pulp Fiction says even American names are filled with meaning. I spent this past week with my nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles in laws out laws and everyone in between. And as I reintroduced Audrey to her family many of whom she only knows from photographs I was running through the family history in my head and making connections from myself to her to the rest of the family. Her cousin Luke jack - is named after my grandfather jack. She is named after maternal grandmothers on both sides her brother has a Maternal great grandfather and grandfather as namesakes. Her aunts names derive from our parents'. And so on.

When we are baptized we are baptized by name. We are known to God from the time we are knit together in our mother's womb- as the psalmist tells us in Psalm 139 but we are known to

the community once we are baptized. Today we are introduced to a new member of the Church Ainsley Elizabeth Ann who will be marked as Christ's own forever. S/he will grow in faith and light and we commend her parents and godparents as well as all of us who witness this sacrament of rebirth to ponder in our hearts what this moment means.

What does it mean to believe and to pray. To participate and learn. For this child it means something unique and special for this child it means that Jesus - son of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth the boy born in a barn who defeated the devil and rose from the dead will know her and we will know her. For this child and all of us who have been baptized it means that we can call upon Jesus and he will recognize us and likewise will call us by name.

I invite each of us gathered here today to take a moment to call upon Jesus. To speak the name he was given 8 days after his birth, to invite him to call you by name that was shared with the church at your baptism and initiate or continue a conversation a prayer for whatever it is you need- healing, reconciliation, nourishment, discernment whatever it is let us take a moment now to call Jesus' attention to it.

Now Let us call upon our lord by name and hear him respond in kind with our names, as he calls all of his disciples by name.

(Pause for a few moments)

Jesus, I am Kimberly and I am yours forever.

Amen