



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 1, 2008
New Year's Day
Philippians 2:9-13
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 8
Second Lesson: Luke 2:21
Gospel: Luke 2:21

The Name of Jesus

In church we use a lot of good words that end with "tion," right? All those good "tion" words—are you familiar with one that talks about (usually at the start of the service, sometimes you will see it printed in an Order of Service) the "Invocation"? Do you have a clue on what that means except maybe stand up? Invocation usually is "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," right? It's invoking the name of the God that we are worshipping as we begin worship together so it's crystal clear to everyone who is in the building who it is we are gathered together to worship. We are here to worship the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One in whose name we were baptized. That specific invocation is to take us back to our baptism and the cross that was made over us at our baptism as the pastor makes the sign of the cross over us is to remind us that we are here as Christians who believe in the Triune God.

With that understanding of the word "invocation," you could say that this whole service, the Name of Jesus, is an invocation on a new year, right? We gather together to worship our Lord, to celebrate what his name means to us, and we begin a new year in the name of Jesus. So as we look at these words from Philippians, we consider what it means to begin a new year in the name of the Jesus and to continue throughout the year in the name of Jesus.

As we look at these words from Paul, we see that the Holy Spirit had Paul tell us that the name of Jesus is a name that is exalted. It is a name that is above every name for obvious reasons. We understand that and we know that. But then if you notice in that last paragraph of what we just read from Philippians, it's a name that moves you and me to action, a name that changes us, that impels us, that compels us. It's not a name we just sit back and marvel at. It's a name that transforms us.

The words from Philippians are familiar to a lot of us. Maybe you remember studying them in confirmation class in the Second Article where you looked at how Jesus humbled himself. That's where this section all begins. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who, being of very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the very form of a servant and humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. It's talking about how he humbled himself, how he became man. That's what we celebrate during the season that we are in—the Christmas season—the humility of Christ. But on this day, as we look at his name, our God focuses on his exaltation and how it is an exalted name.

The name Jesus wasn't all that uncommon among Jewish households. It's a derivative of the name Joshua and Joshua was a very common name. Many little eight-year-olds that came to be circumcised had that name spoken over them in the 19th century since God had given them the right of circumcision. That wasn't unusual at all. The name itself isn't exalted. It is exalted because of this specific Jesus that we think of now when we hear that name—the One who humbled himself and come to this world to live and to die in our place. And because he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross, God exalted him to the highest place. And now when we think of that name, it is a name that is above every name. It is a name that on the last day, when Jesus comes again in glory, every knee will bow. Every knee will acknowledge that Jesus is the most important name that they have ever heard, some to their everlasting joy, and others to their everlasting suffering, sorrow and shame.

But everyone will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That's why it is such an exalted name. It's the only name given under heaven by which we can be saved. He is the only one that could do what God demanded—be holy in our place and then take the punishment that our sins deserve. Because he was the God-man, it could be credited to us as righteousness, and we are forgiven. We understand that. We know that. That is why we are here. We treasure that. We rejoice in that. A name that is exalted above all names. That is so very true.

Think of how often you and I forget that. Think of how often in the course of one day, either we say it or we hear it, that name is used to express frustration, anger, being upset, whatever the case may be. Think of how the devil must cackle in hell every time we use the name that is exalted above every name to express our frustration or to utter a curse. We know it's a name that is exalted, but we don't always treat it as a name that is exalted, right?

Just think of what it would feel like if for one day, wherever you go, everyone that was upset with something—let's say they are checking their eggs in the back of the grocery store and they drop them and it splatters all over their shoe and to express their frustration, what do they do? They let your first and last name rip. And every time someone was frustrated around you they said your name to express how upset or how angry they were. You might kind of wonder what is going on the first few times, right, but by the end of the day, do you think you would be absolutely sick of it? By the end of the day, if you heard someone around you doing that, do you think you might want to introduce your knuckles to their nose?

That is what our God goes through every day, doesn't he? He's given us the name that is exalted, and so often we turn it into a way to express our frustration. When we understand just how sinful we are when it comes to the name of the Lord, when we understand how we don't always in every day of our life bow and confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father, then it becomes all the more amazing that our God has sent Christ to live and die in our place and that his life and death has taken away every one of those times that we have misused the name of the Lord. When we recognize the love and the mercy and the grace, the undeserved love, that our God shows to us, that changes us and that moves us to action as the Holy Spirit had Paul direct us.

“Therefore, my dear friends,...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Our salvation is complete. We aren’t working out the payment for our sins, but the ongoing effect of our salvation is not complete. Working out our salvation is talking about growing in faith, growing in Christian living, being transformed by the name of Jesus so that we live in a way that glorifies God in our thoughts, in our words and in our actions. And it is God that works in us to do that. He works in us through the Word and through the Sacraments.

This whole section that talks about the name of Jesus, his humility and his exaltation, comes in a very specific context. There were problems in the congregation in Philippi evidently between a few people that he mentions later on. He urges them at the end of his letter to just get along. Perhaps that is what he is addressing in Chapter 2 because he says in humility, consider others better than yourself. Don’t think more of yourself than you ought to at the start of Chapter 2. Don’t think of yourself as the most important thing in the world. Instead, in humility, consider others better than yourself.

Part of being transformed, part of working out the salvation that he is speaking directly to is loving one another with the love that God has shown to us, a love that puts the other’s interest ahead of our own. That is what God is urging us to. That is what he is urging to have God work in us, so that we are loving and kind, not just when we are talking to people, but also when we are talking about people. There’s a big difference at times in our lovingness, isn’t there? When we talk directly to the person, we have a wonderful smile. When we talk about the person, quite often we don’t speak in Christian love. God urges us to do that.

Think about it, this time of the year, if you go look at the top ten New Year’s resolutions that people make, how many of them deal with how we interact with others and how many of them deal with something about ourselves? Whether it’s health or exercise or quitting this or doing that, most of our resolutions end up being pretty well self centered. There is nothing wrong with that. It just reminds us what we are. That’s why we are reminded that we need this constant reminder to be transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be renewed in the image of Christ and in his name so that we think about others as much as we think about ourselves so that, like Christ, we put the interest of others ahead of our own. Life in the community, life in the congregation, offers all kinds of opportunities to do that.

It also provides plenty of opportunities where we fail to do that. And when we fail, go back to the name that is above all names and in Christ find forgiveness. In that forgiveness, find the strength to live in a way that loves others as you love yourself.