

HOMILY FOR THE NAMING & CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS – 2023

The church calendar gives us plenty of options today on January 1st because it falls on a Sunday. We could be keeping the Octave day (or 8th day) of Christmas. We could be keeping the Sunday after Christmas. We could be keeping the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. We could be keeping the feast of the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We are keeping the feast of The Naming and Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us think briefly about the circumcision of Jesus. Our Lord was circumcised because He was a child born of the seed of Abraham. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and as St Luke tells us, they brought Him to be circumcised on the 8th day. Circumcision of all Jewish males was a command given by God to Abraham to distinguish His people from the Gentile nations. The circumcision of Jesus communicates that He belongs to God and is a recipient of the covenant promises. It's important for us to remember that right at the beginning of His incarnate life, Jesus humbly submits to the customs of the faith of Israel. His circumcision on the 8th day of his earthly life was the very first sign of the humility of the incarnate son of God. As St Paul puts it... *“when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law so that we might receive adoption as children.”*

(Galatians 4: 4-5)

Now let us turn our thoughts to the Name of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary as recorded in Luke Chapter 1, the Angel tells Mary that she would conceive a child who would be *‘the Son of the Most High’* and that *‘he will reign over the house of Jacob forever’*. There was no doubt that this was referring to the long-awaited Messiah. Prophecy had been silent for 400 years, and through this angelic announcement, the time of silence was not only over, but the words of the prophets were finally being fulfilled.

It is also made clear that it was important that this child be named Jesus. Gabriel says to Mary in Luke 1:31, *“Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus.* The name Jesus was so important that not only Mary

was given this instruction, but so was Joseph. St Matthew tells us (see Matthew 1:21) that Joseph was told by the angel of his dream, that Mary *“will give birth to a Son, and you shall give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins”*.

Now the name “Jesus” was not actually an uncommon name in the first century. There is even another person called Jesus listed among the early believers in the New Testament. His name was Jesus Justus, and he is mentioned by St Paul in Colossians 4:11 where we read... *“Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me”*.

Many people have been named Jesus before and since the biblical Jesus. But only Jesus the Son of Mary is referred to as ‘Jesus Christ’ or ‘Christ Jesus.’ The word Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word “Messiah.” It further signifies our Lord’s unique identity and mission. The word Christ means ‘*God’s anointed one*’ and it is, if I may put it this way, Jesus’ official title. In the New Testament, this title is linked with Jesus as either ‘Jesus Christ’ or ‘Christ Jesus’ some 514 times.

As already indicated, Jesus means ‘saviour’ This is the special role, the unique role of God’s anointed one. Jesus saves his people from the guilt of sin, by cleansing us in His own atoning blood. Jesus saves us from the dominion of sin by putting in our hearts the sanctifying Spirit – the Holy Spirit. Jesus saves us from the presence of sin, when He takes us out of this world to rest with Him. Jesus will save us from all the consequences of sin, when He shall give us a glorious body in the general resurrection at the last day.

Anyone who seeks salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness and have access with confidence through Jesus Christ for it is His role and His delight to show mercy. As St John says:...*“God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.”* The Name of Jesus is indeed a name of great encouragement to every single weighted-down sinner.

The name of Jesus is a name, which is especially sweet and precious to sincere believers. The name of Jesus has so often done us good. It has given us what money

cannot buy – that is, inward peace and lasting purpose. It has eased our wearied consciences and gives rest to our heavy hearts.

Hear now, dear people, just a few of the beautiful titles that are bestowed upon the name of Jesus in the Litany of the Holy Name.. Jesus, splendour of the Father. Jesus, Brightness of eternal light. Jesus, King of glory. Jesus, Sun of justice. Jesus, Son of the Virgin Mary. Jesus, most amiable. Jesus, most admirable. Jesus, our mighty God. Jesus, Father of the world to come. Jesus, angel of great counsel. Jesus, most powerful. Jesus, most patient. Jesus, most obedient. Jesus, meek and humble of heart. Jesus, lover of chastity. Jesus, lover of us. Jesus, God of peace. Jesus, example of virtues. Jesus, zealous lover of souls. Jesus, our refuge. Jesus, father of the poor. Jesus, treasure of the faithful.

Because of Jesus, God is no longer inaccessible and far away, and His very name signifies this. Because of Jesus, we have a great High Priest who can relate to us in every way. Because of Jesus, there is no longer anything separating believers from God. Because of Jesus, we have a Saviour who was tempted as we are and yet did not sin.

Here is a profound truth: Jesus is the name above all names, and the name by which we are saved, but it is also the name chosen by the God who loves us, who humbled Himself to be one of us, who dwelt among us, and who gave Himself up for us that we might have eternal life. Because of the wonderful name of Jesus, the unspeakable may now be spoken, the unknowable is now known, and we can truly live the full, forgiven life that God intended.

Well known words first uttered by St Paul to the Church at Phillipi come vividly to my mind...take them to heart this day, dear people, if you have not done so already. Speaking of Jesus, Paul has this to say.... "*God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

On this new year's day, the day of the Naming and Circumcision of Christ, and in the year ahead, may we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour who bears the name that is above all others: Jesus Christ. To Him be glory, both now and for ever. Amen.