

Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

1st Week After Christmas

January 1st, 2012

Numbers 6:22-27

What's In A Name?

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What's in a name? Parents will often agonize over what to name their children. It is a difficult decision because that is the way a person will be recognized for the rest of their life. Everyone will refer to that person with the name given to him by his parents. And of course there can be more to it than that too. Some of you have a special story around why you were given your name because names mean something. They identify the person, and they carry

information about that person too. Think of some famous name you know and the information they carry to you. Abraham, Ronald, Adolf, Osama. A name can tell you a lot about a person.

So, what's in a name? Well according to Moses and according to God a lot! That's what this text here is all about; it's about a name. It's about the name of God. "So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them." It's about God giving His name to people. And to have God's name is to be blessed by God.

The Israelites were given God's name, and He rescued them from slavery. They were hopelessly trapped in a way of life that was oppressive. They couldn't free themselves. It was "cruel bondage" according to the book of Exodus. But God said to Moses at the burning bush, "I have heard the cries of my people in Egypt. Take my name, "I am" and go to Egypt and I will rescue them." For the people of Israel, their salvation from slavery is the most significant event in their history. God marked that event, not only by setting up a festival to remember the day, but also by giving them His personal name to use. God's name, given to them is YHWH. It means, "He is." He is the God who brought them out of Egypt. He is the God who provided for them in the desert. He is the God who gave to them the Promised Land. He is the God who saves them. To know and use God's name is to be blessed by God. "Put my name on the people." God says, "and give to them my blessing."

It is important to note that anywhere in the Old Testament that when you see the word "LORD" in all upper case letters that is where you find the name YHWH. If you look again at the text printed in your bulletin you'll see that that's the case with God's Word for today. The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make His face shine upon you and the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace. In this English translation we lose some of the effect that this text would have had on the Israelites. It isn't just a generic blessing from someone whose title is Lord. It is God himself, YHWH the one who rescued you from Egypt, is promising the blessing. YHWH will bless you and keep you... YHWH will turn His face toward you... YHWH will give you peace...

See how the blessing is clearly from God, and not just any god but the God who has acted in His people's history to save them. The focus of the whole blessing is on God. It's based on who He is, and what He has done. He is their God. He is the one who rescued them. He is the one who blesses them and puts His name on them.

How do we get God's name put on us? "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived" (Luke 2:21). It isn't just a coincidence that the naming of Jesus is attached to God blessing people by giving them His name. Remember that God chose the name that was to be given to His Son born of Mary. "You are to give him the name, Jesus." Why? "Because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) Did you know what the name Jesus means? It means "YHWH Saves." In Hebrew it's pronounced YA-SHUA. In Jesus' name you can almost hear the name given to the people of Israel. The "YA" at the beginning of the name is from "YHWH." "SHUA" means to save. God made sure that Jesus' name reflected what He was going to do: Jesus is God saving His people again from slavery. Jesus is God saving His people from the slavery of sin.

Jesus Christ, "YHWH Saves" has done that for you, by giving you His name. Look at your life over the past year. Is it filled with failure and broken promises? Why is it that no matter how hard you try you can't seem to work everything out the way you want to? Why is it that most often when you hurt someone it is the people you love the most? You may resolve to do better this year, you may resolve to do lots of things, but you and I both know that our resolutions lack the power to get the job done. You know that when temptation taps you on the shoulder you don't have the power to resist it. And on top of all of that, Satan is relentless; telling you that God can't possibly forgive someone like you, and constantly reminding you of your failures and sins. You see, just like the people of Israel were in slavery to Pharaoh, you and I are in slavery to sin.

But, God promises differently for you. He has given you His name, "YHWH Saves." The blessing that we say at the ending of our service is the reminder that you have been released from sin's power over your life. "YHWH bless you, and keep you." You have been given God's name. "I baptize you in the name of the Father,

and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It’s like the blessings in our text. God’s name placed on His people. The focus is on God and what He has done. The focus is on Jesus, “YHWH Saves.”

Jesus saves! He breaks the bands that hold us in slavery to sin. Just like the Passover lamb whose blood saved God’s people from death, and released them from Pharaoh’s slavery. The blood of Jesus, our Passover lamb saves us from death and releases us from our slavery of our sin. Jesus shed His blood on the cross for us, to free us. The blood on the doorposts marked the homes of the people of God who were in Egypt. The blood on that wood of the cross marks God’s people today. Pharaoh was defeated through the blood of a lamb. Satan is defeated through the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. And we are given His name. After all that is what we are called, Christians.

Think again about the blessing where God puts His name on His people. It is not just about making people His. Look what He promises to do in His blessing: He promises to keep you, to turn His face toward you, to be gracious to you, and to give you peace. That is what it means to have God’s name. When we have His name, and we can call upon Him especially when we are having trouble, He promises to answer. Think about the 2nd commandment and the what does this mean:

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, lie, or deceive, or use witchcraft, but call upon God’s name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

God has given to us His name. He has put it on us in our baptism. He comes to us right here in His word whenever we worship together in his name. That’s were we find strength whenever find ourselves enslaved to sin in our life.

When you are struggling with a sin and God feels a million miles away remember that He promises to keep you. Call upon him, using the name He has given to you, YHWH Saves! “Jesus save me and keep me from sin!” God promises to keep you. When Satan’s lies cut your heart and make you doubt and question the love of God for you, call upon Him with the name that He has given you, YHWH Saves. “Jesus! Turn your face toward me and remember me!” God promises to turn His face toward you and remember you. When your failures and shortcomings destroy any peace you hoped to have, call upon God with the name that He has given you, YHWH Saves! “Jesus give me peace.” God promises to give you peace. That’s what this blessing in God’s name is all about.

What’s in a name? A lot, if it you are talking about God’s name. In God’s name you find promises. And He has put His name on you. That means He gives those promises to you. Carry those promises with you into the new year in your heart and on your mind and on your lips. The Lord bless you in 2012. That’s his promise! Amen.