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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
January 1, 2023  
Name of Jesus

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today, on our secular calendar...

Today is January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

Today marks the beginning of the New Year.

That is today's significance on the secular calendar.

But on the church calendar, today is the eighth day of Christmas.

Today is the day in that famous song, The Twelve Days of Christmas...

Today is day when we have eight maids a-milking.

But today specifically on the church calendar, today is the day when the church observes the Festival of the Circumcision of our Lord, or the Festival of the Naming of Baby Jesus.

And the reason why we have this festival is because it comes right out of Old Testament Scripture.

In Leviticus 12:3, the words written there are these: "On the eighth day the flesh of the foreskin (of a male child) shall be circumcised."

So, circumcision took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after the birth of a Jewish male child, and the reason Jesus is given his name on this day, the 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth, is because in Luke's gospel we read that "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus."

So, whereas on the secular calendar, January 1<sup>st</sup> is New Year's Day, on the church calendar, January 1<sup>st</sup> is the Festival of the Name of Jesus.

PAUSE

But so what? I mean, what is the big deal, right? So Jesus received his name on this day.

Why is THAT so important that the church recognizes the event on its calendar, such that today is a church festival?

Why indeed is that significant, but because it was, and still is, understood that names have power.

Names have immense power.

Yes, our names have a certain mysterious power attached to them.

Which is why, I think, parents will often keep the name they've chosen for their child a secret, until the child is born.

Because there is something mysterious, something immensely powerful about a person's name.

PAUSE

To some extent, I think we forget that truth in our everyday lives—that names have power.

We forget how significant is the name we have.

Now, yes, our name gives us our identity.

When we are born, and our parents say that our name shall be such and such, and that is recorded on our birth certificate.

And there is then legal status connected with a name.

Names give us legal status as it relates to our identity.

I remember, for instance, when Kathy and I were first married we traveled out to visit some of Kathy's relatives in southern California.

And while we were there, we decided just for fun to attend a taping of the gameshow *The Price is Right*.

And, you know, the nametags that contestants wear on the show?

Well, I remember that we had to write our given legal name on the nametag, otherwise we would forfeit any winnings we earned on the show.

So, yes, our name creates a certain legal status for us.

But, more profoundly, our name engenders a certain cosmic reality about who we are.

Think about that for a moment. Think about how mysterious and awe-inspiring that is—to have a name attached to our being.

For our name actually identifies our carved out space in the cosmos, space that is just ours to occupy—no other, only us, all to ourselves.

You and I, in our very being, in our bodies, we occupy space that no other person occupies, and that space is given a name.

And that, by the way, is the very definition of “holy,” something that is set apart for a special purpose.

“Holy” is defined as something that is set apart for a special purpose—that is all the word means.

So there is “holy” water, water that is set apart for a special purpose, namely baptism.

And there is bread and wine for communion, those elements are “holy” in that they are set apart for a special purpose, that being our communion meal.

Indeed, most anything can be understood as “holy” if some “thing” is set apart, if some “thing” is designated for a special purpose. Then it is holy.

And so, coming back to what we were talking about, the defined space we occupy with our body is holy.

This space has been set apart for a special purpose.

This space which is occupied by our body also has a name, and so the name of that space then is holy.

Joel Petruschke is holy space. (NAME) is holy space. (NAME) is holy space.

We are space that is set apart, occupied by no other, and our space is set apart for a special purpose, which is to glorify God.

PAUSE

Now, astrophysicists strangely enough talk about this reality of holy space similarly.

Astrophysicists talk about our holy space in the cosmos like this.

That given enough time, hydrogen and helium gas, which were there at that dawn of creation in abundance, will coalesce, and form stars, which create other elements in their cores, which then are expelled out into the universe when stars explode, and those elements will then form planets, and those planets may even develop life, as is the case with earth, and that life may even become intelligent life which is self-aware, as we are.

So, in essence, given enough time, astrophysicists say that hydrogen and helium, and the cosmos itself will become self-aware, so that space comes to ponder itself.

So, that seems to be the something of the endgame of the cosmos, to come to ponder itself.

That is mindboggling, isn't it? That is holy, isn't it? And that really is saying the same thing as saying our bodies occupy space that is set apart for the purpose of glorifying God.

Particular space is named, is holy then, for the purpose of glorifying God.

PAUSE

But the Bible takes the power and mystery of names a step further.

The Bible says that destiny is attached to a person's name.

And we see this to be the case over and over again in the Scriptures.

"Eve" means "life-giver" and of course, she becomes the mother of all living human beings that come after her.

"Adam" mean "of the earth," or "of the soil", and of course, as a result of the Fall, because sin enters the world, Adam will return to the ground, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

You see, destiny is attached to a person's name.

Consider as well the name "Abraham," which means Father of a Multitude.

Abraham will become the primogenitor of all the nations of the earth.

Consider the name “Israel,” which means one who strives or struggles with God.

And is it not the case that the Jewish people, Israel, have struggled to understand their relationship with God, because the Jewish people have been over and over persecuted and targeted for destruction throughout the ages? And the Jewish nation has then had to struggle with this for generations—asking “Why, God?”

And then there is the New Testament name Peter, which means “Rock,” Petros in Greek, from where we get the word petrified.

And of course, Jesus says that on this rock, Peter, the church will be built.

Peter is also the one who sinks in the water when he attempts to walk out of the boat.

Because of course, what do rocks do in water, but sink.

Yes, names have destinies attached to them.

My wife and I joke that if we had thought it through a little more, we might have named our son some other name than Jonah.

Because, what does Jonah in the Bible do when he is told by God to go to the Ninevites and proclaim the word of the Lord?

He goes in the other direction. Jonah does not give heed to God’s word.

And our Jonah can be a lot like the Biblical Jonah in this respect at times—not paying any attention to what he is told to do.

So, be careful what you name your child. Lesson learned.

Again, all of this is by way of saying that names have power, even destiny attached to them.

And of course, our Lord Jesus’ name is no different.

We may not be aware but Jesus’ name derives from the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “savior.”

And whereas we might think Jesus’ last name is “Christ,” as in Jesus Christ, the word “Christ” is actually a title.

“Christ” means anointed one. Similarly, “Messiah” is the Hebrew word for anointed one.

And a person who is anointed is a person who has been commissioned for a task, like a prophet or a priest or king.

Thus, Jesus is tasked with being the Savior of the world.

And just an aside, Jesus’ last name probably was Josephson, that is “son of Joseph.” Jesus Josephson.

PAUSE

Now, in astrophysics terms, we might say the cosmos derived from itself, derived from hydrogen and helium gases...

The cosmos, over a long stretch of time, derived from itself a savior, not only so the cosmos might be self-aware, but so that the cosmos might in fact redeem itself.

Like us, Jesus occupied his own holy space...actually, in Christ Jesus, God had come to occupy his own holy space in the cosmos.

And in God’s holy space, there was set apart a purpose, which was to die on the cross and conquer sin and death.

God’s holy space was right there (point to the cross), which then set in motion the redemption of the whole cosmos... like so much yeast that is kneaded into a lump of dough to leaven the whole batch.

Like so much light from a candle source that illumines a whole room.

Like so much salt that is used to season a whole meal.

Like so much dye that is added to the coloring process to transform whole cloth.

Like so much love, so much love was worked into the cosmos by God in his Son’s occupied space in the cosmos...

By God in his Son and the power of His cross, God worked love into our cosmos that it might be leavened, illumined, seasoned, transformed, and renewed.

Miraculous. Awe-inspiring.

PAUSE

Yes, Jesus is the name of this most holy space that was once occupied in a particular human being—who set about to achieve his purpose to redeem our cosmos.

PAUSE

And just so, our being-ness is special, too, and our name gives us identity, revealing a purpose.

How powerful is a name, how powerful is a name!, which a reputation comes to be attached to it, for good or for bad.

Your name and my name, are holy. Our name follows us throughout life and says something about our life for all time.

We know what happens to those names in which a bad reputation has come to be associated with it—Bernie Madoff, Benedict Arnold, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, Judas Iscariot, to name but a few.

We know also what happens to those with good reputations, how they have come to be honored and revered for all time—Mahatma Ghandi, Mother Theresa, Harriet Tubman, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The names of these persons, both with good and bad reputations attached, are holy, holy in the sense that they have set apart in an individual, identifying an individual for who they are.

And so, how important it is for us to protect our good name, maybe the most important thing we possess in this world is our good name.

And Luther even went so far as to say that the eighth commandment is about protecting the good name of others, that instead of spreading gossip, and speaking negatively about others, we should be always interpreting our neighbors' actions in the best light possible.

Always interpret our neighbors' actions in the best light possible.

PAUSE

So on this New Year's Day, when the secular world is looking forward to a brand new year...

And when many-a-person is making resolutions in this new year...

I would remind us that maybe the best thing we can do for ourselves and for our neighbors this year and every year is to protect the names we have been given.

And furthermore, to fulfill the purpose in the holy space our name occupies in the cosmos by glorifying God. You and I were made for this—glorifying God.

Hydrogen and helium gases and a lot, I mean a lot of time have been spent for us to exist so that we might do just that.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.