

Title: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend" (Philippians 2:10)

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for the gift of your son, whose naming we commemorate this day; may Jesus' name always shine in hearts and minds, the golden name of Jesus, the Christ, our saviour, through whom we pray. Amen.

Today, we return to Christmas Eve. The angels have finished their announcement of the birth of the messiah to a group of shepherds. The angels return to heaven. The shepherds leave their sheep to fend for themselves and the shepherds go to Bethlehem.

Outside of Bethlehem, there is a church that commemorates the site that some think is the place where the shepherds tended their sheep over 2,000 years ago. It's a beautiful church. There is an archeological excavation site next to the church. The site is near the top of a hill. To the east is a valley. Across the valley is a Jewish settlement in the West Bank. The settlement is modern. The church is modern. But the surrounding residences are not modern. The residents are poor.

During my visit in Bethlehem, we went to a Palestinian hospital. All people who go to the hospital are treated, even if they cannot pay. As we got off the bus, a shepherd herded his sheep across an asphalt street to a small field full of green grass. It was in the field that the sheep grazed. The shepherd could not have been dressed any differently from the ones in the nativity story. It looked like an ancient picture taken with a 21<sup>st</sup> century backdrop.

When Jesus was born, Bethlehem was a very small town. Everyone knew everyone else. Joseph would have many relatives there. The shepherds seemed to have easily found the holy family. There were probably not many babies born that night in Bethlehem. The scene was just as the angel had said, there was a baby lying in a manger.

The shepherds shared their story. Everyone was amazed. I don't know if Luke was trying to politely say that everyone who heard their story thought they were full of it or not. Luke also seems to be implying that there were others there besides Mary and Joseph. Luke does not name them.

“Mary watches the strange men who arrive at her son’s cradle and demand a part in his birth. She listens as they shout about the child, telling everyone how special he is, boasting about how God sent messengers to them, explaining it all.

“Mary (may have) thought, ‘But I thought God’s messenger and God’s meaning was a gift to *me* and now I find he has been telling half the world.’ Before Mary has even started to be able to cling, to possess, to believe herself the only ‘favoured one’, the only one capable of helping God and interpreting God, already God begins to loosen her gripping fingers, and teach her that she must share what she has, or lose it. Quietly, ‘treasuring these words and pondering them in her heart’, Mary names her son. No family names, no names that make him part of her history or Joseph’s, but the name the angelic messenger gave her. God does not belong even to us, who love him, and yet he is a gift that we can share.”<sup>1</sup>

The redemption of the world was made apparent with the naming of the messiah, the Christ.

The shepherds returned to their flocks (I hope the flocks were still intact), praising God as they went on their way. It being late at night, some who heard them may have assumed that they were partying *way* too late.

Eight days pass. In the Bible, the counting of things begins where you are. In other words, day one of the eight days would be the day of Jesus’ birth. The result is that the eighth day is one week later. The Feast of the Holy Name is one week after Christmas, or New Year’s Day.

The Law of Moses (Gen 17:12) says that all males are to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. It is at this time that the child is named. Luke is telling us that Mary and Joseph were very observant Jews.

We are told the baby is named Jesus. Jesus is the Latin translation of the original Greek, *Ἰησοῦς*. Luke’s *Ἰησοῦς* is a translation into Greek from Jesus’ Aramaic name, *Yeshua*. Aramaic was the language spoken by Jesus and his contemporaries. *Yeshua*, if it was written in Hebrew is *Yehoshua*. We

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, J. (2005). *Lectionary Reflections: Year B* (15). London: SPCK.

translate *Yehoshua* in the Old Testament as Joshua. So, that is a really long way of saying that Jesus' real name is Joshua. To further complicate things, when we see someone named Justus in the New Testament, it is really Joshua.

Last year, Joshua was the 11<sup>th</sup> most popular name for baby boys. Jesus was 92<sup>nd</sup>, even though they are the same name. Craig, on the other hand, was an up and coming name in 1951. It was the 63<sup>rd</sup> most popular. It peaked in 1969 and 1970 at number 39. Last year it was the 664<sup>th</sup> most popular name, up four points from the year before that.

Craig means crag or rocks. It was given to people who lived near a crag. It is an Irish and Scottish name that is Celtic in origin. Joshua and Jesus both mean God saves. They are Hebrew names or translations of Hebrew or Aramaic names.

I wasn't born near a crag. I was born in a hospital. My family lived in a valley. To the best of my knowledge, an angel did not appear to either of my parents telling them what name I am to have. Craig doesn't have God's name in it like Joshua does.

Jesus was born, according to Luke, in a place that had a manger or eating trough nearby. That's where the baby Jesus was put. Luke does not tell us about a barn. Luke does not tell us about a stable. Luke does not tell us about a cave. All our crèches are fashioned from our imaginations. Jesus was named by God, relayed by one of God's messengers, an angel.

In high school, I was a sprinter on the track team. There was a kid at another high school who always beat us and everyone else. I was quicker than he was out of the blocks. As I ran down the track, I watched this kid go by me toward the finish line. He was a wide receiver for his high school, Granite. He went on to play for BYU and Hawaii and then to the NFL and the Dallas Cowboys, then later the Bears. His name is Golden Richards.

Now I had never heard of anyone named Golden before. I mean, who would name their kid Golden? Their last name isn't Midas. Maybe his parents thought that by naming him Golden that would spur him to some kind of greatness. He still holds sprinting records at BYU. He started in the NFL and had a couple of Super Bowl rings. He *was* golden.

His body got pretty beat up in the NFL. Dealing with the pain, he got hooked on pain killers. He was arrested in Salt Lake City for buying pills using money he forged from his father's checkbook. He served time for that. In 1994, he overdosed. As far as I know, he is doing okay now. Oh, Golden isn't even rated on the list of baby names.

Gold doesn't tarnish, but Golden Richard's life did. There is only one who was a golden light to the world. The redemption of the world was made apparent with the naming of the messiah, the Christ.

Again, Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation" or "Yahweh saves." Jesus' name describes his mission – to save the world. Can you imagine Jesus growing up and neighbor kids taunting him by asking if he has saved anyone lately? Luckily, his shoulders were big enough for the task. Such an expectation would drive most to despair.

Jesus' approach to this task was the opposite most would take. Augustus Caesar was said to have saved the world by conquering and ruling the world, the *Pax Romana*. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and it wasn't the Roman god. Jesus was the servant leader. Instead of eliminating his opponents, Jesus won by letting his opponents win, killing him on a cross. Jesus' win reconciled us to God. This makes Jesus' name the greatest in history.

Text: **Luke 2:15–21** (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

<sup>21</sup> After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Lk 2:15–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.