



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 2 January 2022

Naming of Jesus^(trans)

As the Israelites bore the name of God, so God's people continue to bear his name. In the worship of our lives, we are called to live up to that name, and to know its blessing, so that our worship bears witness to God's presence and promise amongst us and in the world he created. Let us worship the one who is with us and has called us to be his.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." Luke 2:21

An Illustration to set the scene

The song "A Boy Named Sue" was written by the poet Shel Silverstein and made popular by Johnny Cash.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA1Pey1bHFk>

It tells the tale of a young man's quest for revenge on the father who abandoned him when he was young, having named him Sue.

Ridiculed and ashamed of his name, Sue grows up tough, a hard-nosed fighter.

When he later meets his father, Sue confronts him by saying, "My name is Sue! How do you do?" and the two men end up brawling.

In his defence, the father says he knew that he would not be there for his son, so he gave him his name to force him to **“get tough or die”**.

At the end of the song Sue reconciles with his father, but swears that if he has a son he will name him **“Bill or George, anything but Sue!”**

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Among the people of the ancient east a person's name carried huge significance.

To name something was to know it in its essence, and consequently to have power over it.

We can find a good example of this in the book of Genesis, where Adam names the animals.

It was possible to hurt someone through their name (hence the existence of “taboo” names among some ancient peoples); or, conversely, to do them good.

It was believed that a name revealed not only the essence of its bearer, but also their character and destiny.

In Old Testament times a child would be given a name immediately after birth and the name was generally chosen by the mother, but sometimes by the father.

The circumcision of a male Jewish child was a huge landmark in his young life, as it marked his official acceptance into the covenant community.

The custom reflected in today's Gospel, where the two rites – circumcision and naming – are combined, is more recent, and not recorded until New Testament times.

Although both rites – circumcision and naming – are recorded in today's passage from Luke's Gospel, the emphasis is on the conferring of the name.

The significance of this for Jesus is underlined by the writer's reminder to his readers that this name was given not by his mother or father at his birth, but by the angel of the Lord at the annunciation.

The name Jesus is the Latin form of the Greek Jesus, which is derived from the Hebrew name Joshua (**"Jehovah will save"**).

Thus the angel announces Jesus' destiny before his birth: he is to be the Saviour of all people.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

In 1969, Johnny Cash played "A Boy Named Sue" to the inmates of San Quentin State Prison, and you can hear the audience's raucous laughter on the recording.

Although intended to raise a laugh, it demonstrates the power of a name throughout the world.

When Jesus was given his name by the angel, the Gospel makes clear that it was not for himself alone, but for the benefit of the whole human race.

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, Peter addressed the high priest, scribes and elders in Jerusalem. He urged them to accept Jesus, **"for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved"**.

Throughout history we find similar encouragement for our trust in the name of Jesus – from the earliest days of the Christian Church, through many traditional hymns (**"How Sweet the Name of Jesus"** and **"At the Name of Jesus"**), to modern choruses (**"Jesus is the Name I Love"** and **"His Name is Higher"**).

Whether we are ambivalent, happy or indifferent about our own name, the name of Jesus is offered to us as a gift.

Indeed, we often round off our prayers “**in the name of Jesus**”.

In good times and in bad the name of Jesus presents us with a beacon of hope and promise, and an anchor for our trust.

“He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” *Luke 2:21*

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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