

Theme: What's in a name?
Text: **Luke 2:21**

²¹ 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.

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. Amen. (Rev 1:4)

Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet. Two names most of you are familiar with. They meet and fall in love in William Shakespeare's tale of "star-cross'd lovers." The story of Romeo and Juliet is a tale that is doomed from the start since these two young lovers are members of two warring families. But despite the tragic ending of this play (spoiler alert), there were many memorable moments that have allowed this story to endure since Shakespeare first penned it. One example is in the second act of the play, during the famous "balcony scene" where Romeo and Juliet wax poetic back and forth over what the value of a name really is. Juliet says to Romeo, "*What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.*" Juliet continued telling Romeo to "*deny (his) father and refuse (his) name.*" Romeo responds telling Juliet that if only she would call him "*Love*" – well... then he would be "*new baptized*" as he put it, taking a new name.

What's in a name?

Last weekend we celebrated the birth of our Lord. I'm sure many if not all of you attended Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services. You sang the classic Christmas carols. You heard the familiar account of Jesus birth from Luke chapter 2... Now today in our Gospel we hear the verse that follows that Christmas account, Luke 2:21 – **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.** This one little verse comes right after Luke's amazing account of the miraculous birth of Jesus and could easily be passed by. But this morning we're gonna spend a few minutes contemplating the significance of this verse. This one little verse in which the babe of Bethlehem is given his name: Jesus.

Romeo and Juliet may not have had much use for names. But when it comes to this little baby, his name means everything to us. This is the name announced by the angel Gabriel to Mary and to Joseph as well before Jesus was even conceived. And this name tells us what he came to do for us... what he still does for us... what he will do for us. In our 2nd lesson today Paul called this name **the name that is above every name** (Philippians 2:9)... So, what's in a name? Well, when it comes to the name of Jesus... everything.

To fully appreciate the meaning of Jesus' name though, it helps to understand another name we heard in our service today. Our 1st lesson had some familiar words... words which you likely hear every time you come to a worship service. **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace** (Numbers 6:24-26). Aaron, the high priest of Israel, was told to speak this blessing 3,500 years ago, and it's been used ever since by believers. God told Aaron that when he spoke those words God himself was putting his name on his people. And it was not just any name.

If you take a look in your service folder or on the screen you'll notice that the name God told Aaron to speak over his people was "**the LORD**". But you might have noticed that this name is spelled with all capital letters... and there's a good reason for that. You see, God had revealed himself to the people of Israel by a special Hebrew name: *Yahweh*, or sometimes we see it as Jehovah in English – same name though. This name was

God's covenant name, that is, it was the name that reminded his people of who he is and what he promised to do.

The name Yahweh was not used by the Jews though, they were so afraid of using God's name improperly that they decided not to use it at all. And so instead, whenever the name Yahweh came up as they were reading the Scriptures, they would read a different word instead. This word was *Adonai* – a Hebrew word which means lord. Most English Bibles have followed this Jewish practice and print the word *LORD* instead of Yahweh, but they'll use all capital letters so that you know that God's special name is being used.

Now if you're thinking, "Ok pastor... that's interesting I guess, but what's this have to do with anything?" Well... let me tell you. This special name for God not only has a special history behind it... but it also has a very special meaning. In the book of Exodus God explains exactly what this name, Yahweh, or the LORD, means. **"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."** (Exodus 34:6-7)

The LORD is the name that reminded God's people that he was a God who always kept his promises. Both his promise to punish sin, but also his promise to forgive sin. This seeming paradox, that God could both hate sinners and love them... that he would punish sin and yet forgive sin... it seems impossible to resolve for our finite minds. Yet the LORD had a plan that would make sure both of these promises were kept. He had a plan which included someone who would come to rescue sinners by stepping into their place under God's law and ultimately God's wrath. And by the time that Jesus arrived God's people had been waiting thousands of years for this person who would rescue them from their sins... who would be their Savior. And in Jesus... that's exactly what they found... a Savior.

That's what the name Jesus means after all. Okay, you ready for one more look at a Hebrew name? Now that we've gone over the meaning of that name of God – Yahweh or LORD – we can truly understand the name of Jesus. The name we know as Jesus was a common Hebrew name given to a very unique Hebrew baby. It would have been pronounced "Yeshua" and it meant "Salvation is from the LORD." How would rescue come from the God of the promise? It would come from the child whose name means "the LORD's salvation."

Rescue from the God of the promise, the God who always is – the LORD who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. The LORD who refused to let sin remain unpunished... And yet in his mercy he let the sins committed by every living person go unpunished so that he could pour out his holy anger on his Son. This is how salvation came from Yahweh.

From the moment he was conceived Jesus was our substitute. And from the moment he was born he was subject to the law of God, which, by the way, is why he was circumcised on the 8th day... that was the ceremonial law of the Jews. And as he was circumcised... his blood was shed for us for the first time... not to remove our sin, but to fulfill God's law... Even as a newborn... Jesus began his work... to deliver that needed rescue, that promised salvation.

And he would continue his work with about 33 years of perfect obedience which was done on our behalf... 33 years of perfect devotion to his Father in heaven... 33 years of pure thoughts and kind words... 33 years fighting temptation and never once slipping up. And he ended his 33 years of work by allowing all our impure thoughts and cruel words, all our failures to each other and to our Father in heaven... all of it he allowed to be pinned on him. The only innocent person to ever live took the blame for everyone and then suffered and died for it all.

And the LORD, the LORD... who promised that punishment and forgiveness were coming for sinners found his satisfaction at the cross where God's righteous anger and unfathomable love met. Through Jesus, salvation had

come from the LORD. And we can be completely certain Jesus did enough because God validated his sacrifice by raising him from death three days later. God would guide the apostle Paul to explain it in that letter to the Philippians we heard earlier in our service today: **[Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father** (Philippians 2:8-11).

This is why Jesus is the name above all names... because he lived up to his name for us and our eternal salvation. He truly is “the LORD’s salvation” – he and he alone. As God tells us about Jesus in his Word: **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the name we trust, Jesus – the name by which we are saved... Jesus – the name which gives us certainty of forgiveness... Jesus – the name which has guaranteed that our names will be written in the book of heaven.

My dear friends, as you consider the name of our Savior in his Word, and call on his name in prayer, I pray that you find renewed appreciation for the beauty of the name of Jesus... Some people might say, “What’s in a name?” But we can know that when it comes to Jesus’ name? It means everything! Jesus is salvation from the LORD! Amen.

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13b)