

Luke 2:21

December 31, 2007 – NEW YEAR’S EVE

## This Year’s Greatest Name

- ✦ *Jesus – for deliverance*
- ✦ *Jesus – for the deepest love*
- ✦ *Jesus – for lasting fruitfulness*

In the name of Jesus, the only Name, dear children of the eternal Father:

What’s in a name? Each generation is different. My mother wanted mono-syllabic names like Beth, Roc, Mark, Ruth and Chris – mostly to avoid nicknames. By six and seven – she didn’t worry about that anymore. She had nicknames for the first five and always called Nathan and Ramona, “Nathan and Ramona.” Roc’s nickname to his friends became “Pebbles,” but their spelling was off. It was not R-O-C-K, but R-O-C, the rescue bird in *Sinbad the Sailor*. My mother and her sister both liked that name and agreed whoever had the first boy could use it. I was number two son, boring “Mark,” as in, “make your *mark*,” or “Mark” means “*hammer*.” But unless you know these people, who cares?

We can do without all the other names. “Joseph” is a fine name until you put “Stalin” behind it. “Adolph” used to be much more popular until “Hitler” ruined it. More important than the spelling is the reputation behind the name. And that’s why hands up or hands down, once again **This Year’s Greatest Name** is...*Jesus – for deliverance, Jesus – for the deepest love, Jesus – for lasting fruitfulness*. You think this is the **Greatest Name** for only the last 2,000 years? Let me show you better.

### ✦ *Jesus – for deliverance*

*“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.”* Told to the virgin Mary before Joseph found out.

Our English Bibles like the NIV, can be a little misleading here. Luke 2:21-40 is titled *Jesus Presented in the Temple*, but according to the Law of Moses, Mary could not go to the temple until Jesus was at least forty days old. She was ceremonially unclean. (Leviticus 12:2-6) But the Law also said that *“on the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.”* (Leviticus 12:3) So Jesus’ “Presentation” in the temple (Luke 2:22-38), was actually a separate event. His circumcision probably happened at home according to Jewish custom as was the case for his cousin and forerunner, John the Baptist, who was six months His elder. (Luke 1:59) Jesus’ circumcision under the Law, mandated on the eighth day, helps explain the shape of our baptismal fonts. Since Christian Baptism has replaced the Old Testament entrance rite of circumcision into God’s family, our baptismal fonts reflect this in their eight-sided, octagon structure.

Since Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Law, circumcision is no longer necessary for God’s holy people. But it was the Law long before Moses (1500 B.C.), back to the time of Abraham (2200 B.C.), the father of all believers. The LORD commanded Abraham: *“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”* (Genesis 17:10-14 NIV)

Others besides the Jews practiced circumcision. The Egyptians, Ammonites, Moabites, to name a few. But theirs did not make them part of God’s family because it had no command or promise from God. Nor did the surrounding nations realize the significance of *cutting off* sin from their lives and sin’s

deadly consequences. See how serious our sin is that God's own Son had to shed His first blood under the Law when He was only eight days old! I can see why God would be angry at my evil thoughts, selfishness, lust, greed, covetousness – even if my hands have not done what my heart desired. All this sin brings us condemnation under God's Law – bloody and painful for infants and adults. This is not man's way of looking at sin because we can't even see what tomorrow will bring. But in view of eternity this is God's way as He said in our Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah: ***“My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation (שׁע) is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation (יְשׁוּעָה) will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.*** (51:5-6)

That's why we also believe that **This Year's Greatest Name** is...

### ✠ **Jesus – for the deepest love**

Jesus was alive long before He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We see Him all over the Old Testament in words like “salvation” and “deliverance” which come from the Hebrew root שׁע. Do you remember the name of the hero who led God's people across the Jordan River on dry ground, attacked Jericho and whipped up on all the Canaanites worshipping their false gods who were no gods at all? If you remember “Joshua,” good. If you remember יהושׁע, even better. יהושׁע (Joshua) led God's people into the Promised Land, just as our Lord ישׁועה Christ leads us across the river to the Promised Land of heaven. ישׁועה fights and overcomes all our enemies of devil, world and flesh who try to take from us our eternal inheritance just as יהושׁע led the LORD's armies to victory.

With all that power, why would ישׁועה want to be born into this world as a tiny baby? King Herod's sword tried to kill Him, but the heavenly Father sent His holy angels to protect Jesus. Yet ישׁועה had to undergo circumcision. Why shed His blood on the way to the bloody cross?

**This Year's Greatest Name** truly is **Jesus – for the deepest love**, *agape* love of unconditional, self-sacrifice for a world of unloving, selfish sinners like us. Knowing us better than we know ourselves, seeing every time we would fall into sins of thought, word and deed – He still loved and still loves us with an everlasting love that will not let us go. And what does He want from us in return for this priceless debt we can never repay? His Apostle Peter answered already in our Second Lesson. Remember, this is spoken to people who have received the New Testament equivalent of circumcision in our Holy Baptism. To us the Lord says through Peter: ***“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”*** (1 Peter 1:22 NIV)

That deep and grateful heartfelt love will show in our lives that **This Year's Greatest Name** is...

### ✠ **Jesus – for lasting fruitfulness**

That was Jesus in our Gospel Lesson as the vine dresser who pleads with the owner for the unfruitful fig tree. Wherever we have failed in the past year to be the father, mother, son, daughter – Christian that we ought to be, Jesus says to His heavenly Father, ***“Sir, leave it alone,”*** i.e., *remit*, as in *remission of sins* in the Sacrament of the Altar, ***“leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”*** (Luke 13:8f NIV)

What a great way for parents to deal with their children, teenagers, young adults. There's a time to call them up short and apply God's Law to rebellious sin. But often it's better to say, “You know, something's bothering you. You're not yourself. Tell me what's troubling you.” – then don't give up until they do. You're talking to a baptized child of God who has a new man who wants to be good. Likewise with your Christian spouse and fellow church members. Even with unbelievers we will be so much stronger, more patient and firm when **Jesus is This Year's Greatest Name** to kindly lead them to repentant faith **for lasting fruitfulness**. “Take the world, but give me Jesus! All its joys are but a name. But his love abides forever, Through eternal years the same.” (CW 355) Amen.

For the study behind this sermon or for copies email [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net).  
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