

Dear Name !

In the name of Jesus, that **Dear Name!** my dear Christian friends:

Such a simple verse – so rich in meaning: *“After eight days passed, when the child was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”*¹

First, the time and place needs to be clarified. English translations tend to list verse 21 with 22ff under the same heading. But according to Moses’ Law, a baby boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day, then presented in the temple thirty-three days later on his fortieth day. (Leviticus 12:2-6) What we’re seeing here is God’s Son perfectly obeying God’s Law in our place, then shedding His first blood for our sins. That’s Good News for everyone who is honestly looking into the glaring, unforgiving light of God’s Law that shows us our sins. Only then can we be honest about our failings in the year past. Now as we also see Jesus forgiving all our sins, we drink deeply of God’s grace for the New Year ahead.

For some older folks these are just Sunday School stories. Children who go to Sunday School simply believe God’s Word. But some, like John Newton, never went and did all he could to destroy any faith in Jesus by his own dissolute, immoral life. His father was a captain of slave trader ship. Yet he found his son so disgustingly gross in wild living that he and other sailors were embarrassed. It was hoped that discipline in the British Navy would cure young John, but he deserted. Somehow he ended up as the slave of a woman who misused and abused him until he ran away. It was on a ship bound for home that John picked up a Bible and started reading out of sheer boredom. He started wondering, “What if Christianity is true?” That night a violent storm nearly sank the ship. In terror at that tiny display of God’s infinite power and wrath John Newton repented.

Maybe you’ve heard how he finally wrote favorite hymns like “Amazing Grace.” He also asked for a confession of faith to be engraved on his gravestone: “John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy.”

Can you see why as a grateful sinner he also wrote our Hymn of the Day? Forgiven, mercied sinners like John Newton don’t have to be told to praise the Lord. They never want to stop simply because, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer’s ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, And drives away all fear.” (CW 358:1)

Obvious sins like slave trading are hidden under “human trafficking” today. We’re more in danger from what you might call “trailer sins” – the kind that trail behind us. Most of the time you can’t even tell they’re there. If a trailer could sneak up on you, that’s what bitterness, envy, grudges and resentment will do. You think you’re fine, but have a hard time dealing with certain people. Usually that happens when they’re too much like us. Honestly, most people are looking in the mirror and may not even know it. Teenagers with their parents / parents with their teenagers – all too familiar! Somehow someone hurt your feelings, questioned your judgment, or unintentionally failed to make you feel good, and resentment starts growing like weeds under the snow. Then comes springtime when everything should be all right, and instead that resentment is yielding a bumper crop of bitterness. Where did all those dandy lions come from? Left untreated, *“Each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.”* (James 1:14f EHV) That’s why I’m so glad “Jesus” means Savior, and Jesus was born for me!

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

We heard in our Christmas morning Gospel text (John 1:1-14) how Jesus is the eternal Word of God who took on our human flesh to suffer and die as our Savior – God’s “**only begotten Son, full of grace and truth.**” Every time you open your Bible to read God’s Word, every time you remember a Word of God passage you memorized, each time you listen to a sermon accurately proclaiming God’s Word, Jesus is right there. He is the flesh-and-blood Word of God, born to be your Savior. He was raised from the dead to lead you steadfastly into the New Year with God’s rich, abundant, overflowing promises.

“We also have the completely reliable prophetic word. You do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts....” (2 Peter 1:19) What a great New Year’s Resolution that would be – to pay closer attention to God’s Word this year!

Christians in a nursing home or elder care facility have lots of time to listen if they’re willing and able. A favorite devotional book of ours was written by a Lutheran Pastor “to my shut-ins.” *The Burden Made Light*² includes this devotion, “A Handful of Everlastings.” Let me share and update as we go.

Our faith is built upon the sure foundation of the Word of God. This Word is not a gathering of cunning fables and pet theories of men. The Scriptures have been given to us by inspiration. They are God’s message to man, If there is a God – and who doubts it? – then He must have revealed Himself to mankind from the beginning. Here is a Book that was begun in the childhood of the world and from beginning to end claims that it comes from God. Its wonderful message of forgiveness and its promises of eternal life are so divine and convincing that we cannot doubt its claim.

These Scriptures give us the most glorious promises and fill us with hope and cheer as we journey along life’s road.

Do you have trouble? This Word tells you: “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” (Isaiah 55:6)

Are you worried? The Scriptures say: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37:5)

Is sin vexing you? Then hear the wonderful promise of God: “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25)

Are you looking for peace? Jesus comes to you, saying: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Are you looking for cheer? The Bible offers it to you on many pages. “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)

Are you weary? Jesus stretches out His nail-pierced hands to you and invites you to come to Him: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Thus we can go again and again to this Word and through it strengthen our faith. Amid all our perplexing problems and trying sufferings we can seek refuge in these Scriptures, which are sure and certain, the eternal Word of God. If we take heed to them, it will be well for our souls, and we can hopefully, courageously look into the future, knowing that there is safety and salvation in our Lord.

And it all began so simply under God’s Law to bring the Good News Gospel to you: ***“After eight days passed, when the child was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”*** Jesus – that **Dear Name!** Amen.

² *The Burden Made Light.* Alfred Doerffler. Concordia Publishing House, © 1958...1964. “To my shut-ins.” Pages 88f. For *The Preacher’s Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126