

Eve of Holy Name
December 31, 2017
St. John's Cathedral

I don't know about your family, but in my family it is really difficult – sometimes almost an ordeal to name a child. One daughter and her family have a particularly hard time-- researching, pondering, changing their mind and finally coming up with the right name. Twice this decision came at the hospital while someone from administration waited patiently to fill out the birth certificate.

Names are important. They often say something about our heritage – like my brother and me, both of whom have middle names from a parent or great-grandparent. Sometimes the name is from a saint or a hero. Sometimes it is a virtue—like charity or grace. Or from the ancient world like Hercules or Apollo.

And we also answer to more than one name in our lifetimes. I am Kristi to most, but I am also Mom, Nana, and for those who insist on formality, Canon Philip. Each of those names has to do with a relationship. I am Mom to my daughters, Jennifer and Andrea. I am Nana to six grandchildren. I have been Kristi my whole life except the summers I worked at a Camp Fire camp and my name was changed to Wa-he to keep my real identity from curious campers. I have been Canon Philip for about 30 years, a way of describing my job and my relationship to both this cathedral and the Diocese of Spokane.

Of course there was no difficulty in deciding on a name for Jesus, since this was done by the Angel Gabriel, described in words we heard last Sunday in our last gospel reading of the Advent season. Gabriel announces to Mary that “you will be with child and give birth to a son,

and you are to give him the name Jesus.” The gospel reading we heard tonight, continuing that story, confirms that eight days after his birth it was time to circumcise the child (according to Jewish custom) and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived.

It probably comes as no surprise to us that the name, Jesus (a derivative of Joshua) means ‘salvation’. You could say he is one who accomplishes the glory of God. In being born and living among us, he makes salvation available to all of humankind.

And this really gets us thinking and reflecting on what that actually means as we encounter Jesus as we go about our lives that are filled with both blessings and challenges. And I think about Mary, looking at that tiny child with a life of great promise ahead of him (not unlike any mother or father who looks at a newborn child) wondering what will lie ahead.

The song, “Mary Did You Know,” echoes some of that:

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?

That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

Needless to say, a lot of other names were given to Jesus through his lifetime—names we read in the gospels. We used to have a poster in the Sunday School here that listed many of them: Lord, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Rabbi, Redeemer, Bread of Life – just to list a few. All of those names describe how Jesus related to the world his time and the world of our time. He is teacher, Lord, giver of hope, the one who nourishes us with the bread of life.

A point to ponder tonight as we stand on the brink of a new year, is how does this savior, whose name is Jesus, enter into our lives? How does Jesus enter into our struggles and

the struggles of the word? How does Jesus enter into our hopes and the hopes of the whole world? How does Jesus call us to a fuller, more generous, more compassionate way of being?

As James Montgomery's hymn, 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed' reminds us:

His name shall stand forever, his changeless name of Love.