

Holy Name of Jesus, Year A  
The Very Reverend D.S. Mote, PhD  
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL  
January 1, 2023  
Isaiah 42:1-9  
Psalm 29  
Acts 10:34-43  
Matthew 3:13-17

## The Holy Name of Jesus

There are many names for God. Throughout Hebrew scripture we find the God of Abraham and Sarah is addressed in many different ways. El Shaddai (God Almighty), Adonai (Great Lord), El Elyon (God of Heaven and Earth, God Most High), El Roi (the God who sees).

Elsewhere in Hebrew scripture we understand that God is the ancient of days, the daystar, our rock and our redeemer, our provider, and so on.

These are names *for* God but not the name *of* God. That name is really unpronounceable, meaning we do well not to utter it. But we translate it with four Hebrew letters and understand that it means "I am."

Today we commemorate the Holy Name of Jesus on this the eighth day after celebrating his birth. The eighth day was the day for boys to be circumcised. It was also the day the child was officially named.

The Holy Name of Jesus has been commemorated by different Christian traditions and communities on different days, most often in January. Since 1979, in the Episcopal Church, we have marked the Holy Name on January 1.

Picking up where we left off on Christmas Eve in Luke's gospel, as we've just heard, the baby born eight days before in Bethlehem was named Jesus. This is the name the angel Gabriel gave to Mary in Luke's gospel. And it is the name an unnamed angel gave to Joseph in a dream in Matthew's gospel.

Jesus. Yeshua in Hebrew. Joshua in English. Through translations of Hebrew into Latin and Greek, we have wound up with *Jesus* as his name in English. We see the first three letters of his name in Greek pretty often, maybe more often than we realize. Those are the letters carved beautifully into the front of the altar. They sorta look like I H S. They are actually *iota eta sigma*.

Jesus. In Hebrew, the sense of this name is God delivers, saves, rescues.

It's the same name as that of Joshua, successor of Moses, who ultimately with God's help delivered the children of Israel to the land of Canaan after forty years in the wilderness.

Of course, Jesus the Christ, our savior, has many names, many of them quite descriptive: root of Jesse, lion of Judah, wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace. You may know these by heart from Handel's *Messiah*.

And also, lily of the valley, bright and morning star, fairest of ten thousand,<sup>1</sup> and quite a few others that populate the hymns of various Christian traditions.

At this point in Christmastide, Jesus is still a baby. He will still be a very small child when the magi arrive, an event we commemorate on January 6, the Day of the Epiphany.

And, by the way, we will celebrate the Epiphany this Friday evening at 7 PM with a jazz-flavored mass.

As this baby Jesus grows up, Luke tells us a bit later, he grows "in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and people" (Luke 2:52). Jesus also grows into his name: "God delivers." We see this growth revealed over the season of Epiphany, first to the magi, then at his baptism, then at the wedding in Cana. And his growth and God's deliverance through him increase. Day by day, encounter by encounter, he lives that truth: God brings deliverance through him. He lives that truth, and he invites us to do the same.

So, as we begin this new year, and on this very first day of a new calendar year, it's a good time, a fitting time for us to think about the dimensions of our life together and our lives as individuals in which we are called to grow in this season.

And it's a good time, a fitting time to ponder from what we need to be delivered.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Lily of the Valley" ("I've Found a Friend in Jesus") is a Christian hymn written by **William Charles Fry** (1837–1882) in London for the Salvation Army. Ira D. Sankey arranged the words to the music of "The Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane" composed by Will Hays.

As the congregation of St Paul's, we are called to mobilize resources to do urgently needed repairs on this historic building.

As individuals and as the congregation of St Paul's, we are called to continue meeting the community of Key West and the Lower Keys where they are, to continue inviting people here, yes, but also to go out from here to meet people where they are.

We are called to start from where we are and grow over time in the holy name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, his own first gift to us who believe, into the full measure of Christ. In the holy name of Jesus, may we grow and grow up more in every good way in this new year.