

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
New Year's Day, 2012**

Luke 2:21

A Return to Normalcy?

- 1. *Striving for normalcy***
- 2. *Let's Focus on the Name***

**Hymns: 551 – 358
Distribution: 36 – 42 – 38
Closing: 34**

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"I can't wait for things to get back to normal." Can you relate to that statement? I would think that it is a rather common feeling on this first day of the New Year as the holidays wind down. Certainly, most of us love the Christmas season. It is a special time of year. There are numerous, unique times to come together for worship. There are family celebrations and opportunities to gather with friends. There is time to fill our mouths with our favorite Christmas goodies and our ears with our favorite Christmas carols. But it certainly can have an effect on us. The hectic pace of the holidays might leave us thankful that this only happens for a short time each year. After all, our teeth and our stomachs could not handle this much food and sweets the whole year through. Maybe you slept too little or spent a little more than you thought you might. The constant stream of visiting family and friends is very nice, but it can be a little chaotic. And perhaps, now that the New Year's celebration is in the bank, you are joining with many others in saying, "I can't wait for things to get back to normal."

Do you think Mary and Joseph might have been saying that exact thing to one

another in the days directly after the birth of their son, Jesus? The busyness of Christmas was on them like we can't even imagine. As we've heard, there was the long, uncomfortable trip to Bethlehem. That was followed up by the crazy birth that took place among the animals in a crude stable. The unlikely situation continued with a visit from random shepherds, who received guidance from an angelic chorus that filled the skies. You think Mary and Joseph might have been longing for a return to normalcy? I'm sure they just wanted to find a place to stay, where they could take a breath, get a decent night sleep, and concentrate on raising their newborn son.

Today, in just one short verse from Luke 2, we see Mary and Joseph getting back to the ordinary. Luke gives us this in his account of Jesus' life, "***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.***" As millions of devout Jewish parents had done before them, Jesus' parents followed the covenant that God had set up with father Abraham 2000 years prior. It was a covenant that promised that God would eventually send the Savior through Abraham's lineage; that promised that God would forgive and give life to all who believed this promise. Circumcision was the physical, visible sign of the covenant. God clearly commanded circumcision. It showed trust in God's promises and obedience to his commands. It marked a child as belonging to God; much like baptism does for New Testament Christians. And so, as was normal, Mary and Joseph also circumcised their young boy on the day it was supposed to be done. It was also custom eight days after birth to give the child his name. And so again, in the very ordinary way, Joseph announced to family and friends that this baby boy's name would be Jesus. And I'm sure as this took place, Mary and Joseph were sitting back and

thinking, “Ahhh, back to normal.” There was nothing about this ceremony that stood out; there were no choirs from heaven; there were no special visitors; just a simple ceremony performed like it had been countless times before.

However, the inclusion of this routine act in the Holy Bible provides us with a rather large hint that there was nothing normal about this “normal” ceremony performed for Jesus. As I studied this story, it made me wonder if Mary and Joseph went back and forth about whether they needed to circumcise Jesus, much like John questioned whether Jesus should be baptized. As much as they may have tried to view him as a normal child, they had to always be thinking about the other side, that he was true God. “Did the God who made the covenant need to take part in this painful part of it? Did the Son of God who came as the fulfillment of the covenant need to follow what was normal? Certainly not! But there was nothing normal about this situation.

This routine act carried out by Jesus at such a young age is really the first instance we have of him actively living under the Law of God. As an eight-day-old child, we see Jesus doing the work of the Savior of the world in a way that can fill us with awe. Just as Jesus would have not endured the pain of the cross unless he had to do so for our salvation, so he would not have endured the pain of this procedure unless it was necessary for our salvation. And it was! As we said on Christmas Eve, I reiterate now. Jesus came to this earth to live under the law and to do so perfectly. This “ordinary” procedure was extraordinary because it showed Christ’s willing submission and perfect obedience. It shows Christ living as our substitute. Jesus came out of the womb living as the Savior of the world.

What a far cry that is from all of us! We are people who are, as the Psalmist says, ***“sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us.”*** Our natural inclinations are to rebel, to live as enemies of God, to do whatever we can to please ourselves. It does not take much to realize how far we fall short and so as we look at this account from Jesus’ young life, we can only give thanks that this event was not just “normal.” This circumcision on the eighth day according to the law was essential to our being saved!

And as we know and realize and remember that, we also understand that there was also nothing normal about the naming of this child. Once again, Mary and Joseph went about naming Jesus in the common way. And though this name was given to the child by the angel before Jesus’ birth, people wouldn’t have blinked an eye when the name was announced as, “Jesus.” It was a common name in those days, the Greek version of the familiar Hebrew name Joshua, which means “Yahweh saves.” It certainly wouldn’t have made people’s ears perk up and say, “What an interesting name!”

But thanks to the angel, we know what a name it truly was. Often when people reflect on the name of a child, they might say something like, “Oh, that name fits him,” or “He is definitely a Max.” When it comes to the name of Jesus, we know how truly fitting and extraordinary his name is. “God saves” indeed and he does so through this child that was aptly named.

And as we think about the young Savior and the name he was given, let us take time today to remember all that we have in Jesus’ name. Throughout Scripture we have examples of the blessings that come to us through Jesus’ name, the help that is assured when we call upon the name of Jesus.

First, we hear Jesus’ promise that when his name is used in confidence, there

is help in bodily needs. He made this promise in Mark 16 when he said that his disciples would do amazing things in his name. We see that come true in Acts when the Apostles healed the sick and gave strength to the lame in the Name of Jesus.

The name of Jesus also gives us consolation as we go through spiritual trials, reminding the sinner of God's love and forgiveness given through Jesus; and encouraging the just to endure humbly just as Jesus did.

As we battle against Satan and the sinful world, it is only the name of Jesus that we can call upon for protection. The devil truly fears the name of Jesus. Often in the Gospels, we see the demons that possessed people shudder at the mere mention of Jesus. They know that they are no match for the One who came to utterly destroy them. As we encounter the devil and his temptations, we can call on the name of Jesus who conquered Satan on the cross.

But it is not just in times of sickness, guilt or temptation that Jesus' name serves as a great blessing to us. Remember Jesus' promise in John 16, ***"If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you."*** Jesus' name has given us access to ask our loving heavenly Father for anything; we have a promise of spiritual and physical blessings, all because of what Jesus has done.

As we think about the name of Jesus and all that it brings before us, we certainly can understand what Paul meant when he said the powerful words of our second lesson from Philippians, ***"God gave him the name that is above every name."*** As we reflect on the blessings that come, we can certainly agree with Paul as he says, ***"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."***

What a wonderful blessing we have as we begin the New Year! We know the name of Jesus! We know the blessings that

come through this child that was named Jesus. Though it was given in the normal way, there is absolutely nothing normal about it. May we always give it the honor and glory that it deserves. May we use it often, as Jesus himself urges us to do, and may we use it with confidence. As we begin the New Year, let us do so in the name of Jesus, leaning on the one who saves to bless and protect us, both physically and spiritually, in all that we do. That is our prayer, and asking in Jesus' name, we know that it will be answered. Amen.