

Sermon for Feast of the Holy Name 2023
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico
January 1, 2023

Numbers 6:22-27
Galatians 4:4-7
Psalm 8
Luke 2:15-21

Happy New Year!

You know, actually, January 1st has only been called New Year's Day since 1752.

That may sound like a long time ago, but for more than a thousand years before, the new year started on March 25 with the Feast of the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel told Mary she would bear God's son.

From that date, when Mary conceived, if we count forward nine months, we come to the birth of Jesus on December 25 – Christmas Day.

So if you hear that Jesus was actually born in the Spring, that's when he was conceived.

Today, this day, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name.

Of course, it's only been the Feast of the Holy Name since the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Earlier versions of the prayer book, including the 1928, marked January 1st as the Feast of the Circumcision, as we read in the Gospel of Luke today.

Since the time of Abraham, on the eighth day, a male child is circumcised and named.

In the Anglican tradition, we have a variation of the tradition with the christening of children and naming them so they can take their place in the Parish register as baptized.

The remarkable reality is that Jesus was named well before he was circumcised and not by his grandparents or even his parents, but by an Angel.

As for me, my mother told me I was named Arthur Raymond Raney III because the head nurse came into her room the day after I was born and told her, "What's his name? Either you name him or I will."

My parents hadn't thought of any boy's names.

They had expected me to be a girl.

Who knows why?

So they'd only picked a girl's name, Janice Arlene –

which would have made my initials – JAR.

I don't know what would have been my name
if it had been up to the nurse,
but my mother relented to my father's mother's preference
and named me as the third in line after my father and his father.

My grandfather was Arthur, and he went by Pop.
My father was Arthur, and he went by Art to his friends,
and Sonny to the family.
I was Raymond and I went by Raymond,
except when my mother was angry
and it was Arthur Raymond Raney the third.

But back to Jesus.
His name was foretold to Mary by Gabriel,
whose name means "God's Strong Man."

"Jesus" is the transliteration from the Hebrew "Yeshua,"
which means "He saves."
Traditionally, this has been expanded to
"He saves his people from their sins."
This is the "Holy Name" of Jesus,
about which we sang in the sequence hymn.
God tells us something very important in the naming of this child, Jesus. His name helps us to know
God more fully.
His name helps us to know how much God loves us.
God is telling us in the name of Jesus that he saves us from our sins.

Jesus was born to come to each of us
so that we may have life to the full
and to give us Joy in our love together,
as our sins are forgiven.

This Christmas message — and it is a Christmas message,
because it is still Christmas season —
in the naming of Jesus God reveals to us
that our relationship to God is joyful – for God and for us.

Jesus will come to know God as his Father.
The same relationship we have in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven..."

But Father is too formal a title for the God
in whom we live and move and have our being.
As it says in the reading from the Letter to the Church in Galatia:
"God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!"

This is what we cry in the night
when our lack of self control leave us frightened - "Abba!"
This Hebrew word doesn't translate as Father.
It translates as "Daddy."

It is the cry for a child wanting protection, of wanting to be saved.

I remember one Thanksgiving when I was in my mid 20s.
I was driving home in a blizzard.
The roads were so icy. Snow blew across the highway.
I could barely see where I was going in the near whiteout.

The other drivers did not seem to have any idea of how to drive,
and they kept sliding off the road.
I was afraid, near tears, and my nerves on edge.
And all I could think was:
"Daddy, help me."

This is the Christmas message –
and it is a Christmas message because still it is Christmastide.
The naming of Jesus reveals our relationship with God
as not just our father, but as our Daddy,
who brings joy to us as the Angels did to the Shepherds:
"To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior...
and he was called Jesus."

As we begin this New Year,
may we go into the world with a sense of wonder and joy
that every day may begin with the anticipation that,
eventually, in God's good time, all will be right with the world.

So I leave you with this:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Amen.