

# Something About that Name

[Luke 2:22-40]

Rev. K Karpen

Sunday, January 1, 2006

New Year's Day

Sacrament of Holy Communion

[Luke 2:22-40, "Something About that Name," K Karpen, Sunday, January 1, 2006]

"After a week had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

Today I'd like to have a little chat with you—a two-way chat, if you're willing—about something we all have: a name. I say something we all have and not something we have in common. Once in a while, though, you might find someone with the same name as you, which can give a strange and eerie feeling. Why? Because names are very personal things. We think of our names as being all about us, most of us.

But with more than 6 billion people sharing the planet with us, it's only natural that some of our names are not as unique to us as we could wish. I remember a couple of years ago wanting to invite my brother Rich to share Thanksgiving with us at our home. My brother doesn't get out much, so I figured I'd need to entice him over from Pennsylvania with a warm invitation with a few details about the things we were planning to eat.

So I wrote him a long e-mail, and almost right away got a sweet reply from [RichardKarpen@yahoo.com](mailto:RichardKarpen@yahoo.com), which, it turns out, is not my brother's e-mail address. The message said, "I don't think I'm who you think I am, but your invitation was lovely, and the meal sounds tempting..." I wrote back and told that Richard Karpen that if he lived in the New York area, he'd be very welcome to join us. I never got a reply to that. Guess he had plans.

Today we read from Luke's gospel about the naming of Jesus. We hear about when he got his name: a week after his birth, on the day he was circumcised, 8 days following his birth, as were all Jewish babies. We hear what his name is: Jesus, a common form of the Hebrew name Joshua. We think of that name as unique, but it was probably one of the more common male names at the time. There were a lot of Jesuses running around. More like the name "Jesus" in Hispanic cultures. If he'd had an e-mail address, it would have been something like [jesus324@palestine.net](mailto:jesus324@palestine.net).

We also hear who gave him his name: the angel, the angel Gabriel, to be exact. And if you turn back to Matthew, you find that the name Jesus means "he saves." God saves us.

So let me ask you a few questions, and share the answers if you feel like it; if not, you don't have to.

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Who gave you your name? Where does it come from? What does it mean? How does it fit?

When I was born, my parents thought my name was James, which is a great name I never liked. Fortunately my brother Rich didn't like it either and re-named me K after a TV character.

So, what about you?

\* \* \*

Not everyone fits their names; not everyone feels comfortable in his or her name. Take Allen Konigsberg, for example. He didn't feel like that was a good fit, so he became? Woody Allen.

And nobody's heard of the recent antics of Thomas Mapother IV, have you? Tom Cruise. Or Leonard Rosenberg—Tony Randall. Or Jennifer Anastassakis, though I bet you can figure that one out. Archibald Leader? And there are no degrees of separation between Kevin John Fowler and who? Kevin Spacey. People's names become such a crucial part of their identity!

And so it is with Jesus. It may have been a common name at the time, but today, 2000+ years after Mary & Joseph took him to Jerusalem for his bris & named him Jesus, there's something about that name. There's peace in that name for many of us. There is power in that name. There's something about that name.

I can remember working at Camp Quinipet one time and running into a group of kids from a fundamentalist church out for a week of camp, and they were lined up on the dock speaking to the jellyfish floating in on the tide. "Be gone in the name of Jesus!" The jellyfish were unmoved.

But I have to tell you, in all honesty, I have seen some other things happen in the name of Jesus. I have witnessed some amazing healing, as recently as this past fall, done in the name of Jesus. I have seen that name bring hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless in real and maybe disconcerting ways.

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I have been a privileged witness to the power of that name in the lives of people at all stages of recovery. I don't understand it. I don't always get it. But I've seen it. I have seen people summon enormous courage to stick with a difficult relationship or to get out of one, clinging to the power of that name.

I have witnessed ordinary people doing some extraordinary work for justice & peace well beyond yourselves all in the power of that holy name. I don't understand it. I don't get it. But I want to tell you this: There's something about that name.

What are you struggling with? Call on the name of Jesus. There's something about that name.