

CHRISTMAS HOMILY – VIGIL READINGS – 2018

His name is Jesus. We rejoice this Christmas as we do each Christmas because we are celebrating Jesus' birthday. Like all babies, He received a name. His name is Jesus.

What is your name? Who picked your name? Did the name you received come from your family's past? Family history is important. Even if your name did not come from family history, who you are, in appearance, in temperament, talent, your entire DNA makeup, comes from family history. Even some of the other things you may be called in addition to your actual name come from family history, things like son, Momma, Sissy, Junior, Papa, or Pumpkin, or any other terms of endearment.

His name is Jesus. What else do we call Him. We call Him the Son of God. We call Him the Savior. We call Him the newborn King. We call Him Lord. His name is Jesus.

Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah is a beautiful poem about a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, building a highway for the Lord to enter in. Those who prepare the way are not silent, they will not be quiet any more than a baby will be quiet. Thank God babies are not quiet. How else would we know they need something? How else would we know they are happy? How else would we know they are around?

His name is Jesus and He was not a quiet baby. And He does not expect other babies to be quiet when they come to visit Him in church. Just like other babies, Jesus cried when He was hungry or needed His diaper changed. Just like other babies, Jesus laughed when He was happy and shouted when He saw another baby that made Him joyful. His name is Jesus.

Giving a name to someone demonstrates God's all-powerful creativity. The one who receives the name becomes a radically new creature. When we were born, we were first, "the baby" and then we became special when we got our own identity with a name. In Isaiah's prophecy, the "forsaken" and "desolate" are renamed "my delight" and "the espoused". In Genesis we heard that out of "the dust" of the earth God created "man". In Ezekiel we hear God changing "stony hearts" into "natural hearts". Today, "the Word", the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, becomes a human being, becomes "flesh".

His name is Jesus. He is God made man. He has a new name and we are blessed. He can be seen in the manger with His virgin mother Mary and the once confused Joseph guarding them as the Lord has asked. And it is Joseph who we hear in today's Gospel who had family history to share with Jesus, and Joseph who was told by the angel to say, "His name is Jesus."

The image that closes this Isaiah reading is that of matrimony, that of God being wedded to earth, that His Son, Jesus, may be the Son that saves the earth from destruction. In a greater sense, it also is the beginning of the foundation of the Church,

the bride of Jesus, who will carry on the mission of bringing the Gospel to the world after Jesus leaves the earth. Today, we the Church celebrate the birth of our bridegroom.

His name is Jesus. And while He is eternal, He was born about two thousand years ago on this earth, and continues to be the best spouse we could ever have. His name is Jesus.

In the many stories leading to Christmas and stories of Christmas itself we hear of visitors. The angel came to Mary to announce to her God's choice of her to become the mother of Jesus. Mary visited Elizabeth while they were both pregnant. What a beautiful sharing of new life between mothers that had to be. In the Gospel we just heard the angel visited Joseph to comfort him in his taking Mary as his wife. Mary and Joseph visit Bethlehem where Jesus is born. The angels visited the shepherds and the shepherds visited the cave where the Holy Family rested with the newborn named Jesus.

And all this visiting happens because of Christmas. Many of you have come here to visit this church of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus because it is Christmas. Many of you will entertain visitors and many of you will be visitors in other's homes because it is Christmas.

Do you do these things because it is snowing? Do you do these things because you have extra days off work or school? Or do you do these things because His name is Jesus?

Do you receive the visitors or visit others because you feel you must, or because you see in these others images of Jesus? Do you remember that each person is created in God's image and likeness? We all have some of Jesus in us. And as the Church, we are all the bride of Jesus. And as His bride, we all have His name. We are all Christians. We, then, are also by name, association, and by grace, Jesus for today's world.

His name is Jesus. And when Jesus was on this earth He was born in a very humble place; He lived in small-town Israel; He worked as a carpenter; He ate with prostitutes and tax collectors; He preached to foreigners and welcomed immigrants; He touched people who were supposed to be contaminated with illnesses that were taboo. He even helped Peter get along with his mother-in-law. These are everyday things that real people do, that good people do and that real sinners do, for that is why Jesus came, to save sinners. Everyday people have real lives that have good times and not so good times. That's why we come to church. We celebrate and thank God for the good times and we ask for forgiveness and grace for the not so good times.

It is up to us to make this Christmas a time of change. We need to tell the world His name is Jesus. Jesus is the relative we have not welcomed or visited or the one we have gone into the other room to avoid when we are at the same place they are visiting. Jesus is the one who left home when we needed them most, the one who got married

outside of the Church, the one who did not finish school, the one who went down the path of trying drugs. We all have Jesus in us.

Jesus is the one who is sitting in "our pew" today. Isn't it good they came today and that we found another place to sit or stand so they could be here? How wonderful we found a place for Jesus to sit.

His name is Jesus and we are so blessed to be celebrating His birthday here today. We are so blessed to have a family tree that can be traced from the time of Abraham to Joseph. And now as we hear in the Acts of the Apostles, that family tree can be traced from the time of Jesus through the apostles and their successors the bishops of history and all Christians to today when we are now the members of the Body of Christ.

It is now up to us to go tell it to the world. His name is Jesus. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! Go spread His joy to the world. His name is Jesus!