

The Name of Jesus
Luke 2:21–40
Sunday, February 2, 2025

Let us pray: God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, speak your Word, and lead us to new life, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

There is *power* in *names*.

When I was in seminary, there was a woman on the faculty who called me *Matt* for two years. The first time it happened, I thought, “I have a good friend named Matt. Maybe she’s just confusing us.” But every time she saw me, she would say, “Matt! Hi! How are you doing?” And it got to the point where it was too awkward to correct her. I had *friends* who *did* correct her. She would refer to me as Matt, and a friend would say, “Oh, you mean Patrick?” But she would keep right on calling me Matt! So for my first two years of seminary, I was Matt.

After my second year, I took a year off to work in a church, and when I came back for my final year, I was walking down the main hallway one day, and I saw her coming the other way. And I thought, “Oh boy. Here we go.” And she gets a big smile on her face and says, “Patrick! Good to see you! How are you?” And I can’t tell you how *good* that made me feel. “*She knows my name.*”

Because there is *power* in *names*. When someone unexpectedly *knows* your name, it has the power to make you feel *good*. When someone *forgets* your name or calls you by the *wrong* name, it has the power to make you feel *bad*. When your mother called you by your full name, it had the power to make you feel *scared*. There is *power* in *names*.

When Jen and I were waiting for Emily to be born, we had the *hardest time* settling on a name. We had this *long list* of potential names, but we just couldn't *pick* one, and I'll be the first to admit that *I* was the holdup in the whole process. Because there was this part of me that kept saying, "We are setting this girl up for the rest of her life. She's going to have to deal with this name forever. *We better get it right.*"

So Jen would say, "What about *this* name?" And I'll say, "No, I had an ex-girlfriend with that name. Bad association."

"Well, what about *this* name?" "No, every girl I've ever known with that name has been just a little bit crazy."

"What about *this* name?" "That name sounds like you made it up." (To which she would say that *every* name was made up at one point, and I would say, yeah, but some names sound more made up than others.)

The reason it was so hard, one of the reasons that names have *power*, is because names have *meaning*. The name Sophia means *wisdom*. The name Zoe means *life*. The name Hannah means *grace*. There are names that mean *hard working*, names that mean *strength*, names that mean *joy*, names that mean *happiness*. And it felt like by choosing a name, we were conveying something about *her*; like we are choosing the kind of *person* that our child would *be*.

And we see that all throughout scripture, where a person's *name* tells you something *about* that person. The name *Adam* means *man*, but it's also a play on the Hebrew word *adamah*, which means *ground*, since God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. The name *Eve* in Hebrew

is *chavah*, which means *life*, because as the first woman it says that she will be the mother of all life. Their son *Cain*, the first person to commit murder, his name comes from a Hebrew word that means *spear* or also *lament*. Their other son Abel, who Cain killed, his name comes from a Hebrew word that means *vapor*, something that is *temporary*, *fleeting*, vapor disappears. The name *Jacob* comes from a Hebrew word that means *supplanter*, because he was always trying to supplant and take the place of his older brother Esau. But then God gives Jacob a *new* name, *Israel*, which means *to strive*, because God says, “You have striven with God and with man, and you have prevailed.” Their names don’t just tell us who that person *is*, they tell us what they are *like*.

The Greek word for *name*, *onoma*, it means *proper* name, like Patrick or Jacob. But it *also* refers to everything that the name covers, every thought or feeling that is brought to mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name. For Greek and Hebrew speaking people, the *name* encapsulated everything about that person. It represents the very *essence*, *nature*, and *being* of a person.

There is *power* in *names*, and we especially see that in *Jesus*. The name *Jesus* is the English version of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, which is a variation of the name *Joshua*. The Hebrew name *Yeshua* literally means, “Yahweh saves.” Yahweh is the Hebrew name of God, so the name *Jesus* means, “God saves.” Before he is born, the angel says to Mary and Joseph, “You are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” And we always refer to Jesus *Christ*, but we know that *Christ* was not his last name, right? *Christ* comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which means, “anointed one.” The Hebrew version of that word is *mashiach*, which is where we get the word *messiah*. So *Jesus Christ* simply means, “Jesus the Messiah.” Jesus is the anointed one of God, who saves.

Jesus' name tells us *who he is* and *what he is about*. *Who he is* is salvation. *What he is about* is salvation. We see that in his life, death, and resurrection, and we *also* see it in this encounter with Simeon and Anna.

When Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple to make an offering and dedicate him to God, a man name Simeon comes over, takes Jesus in his arms, and begins praising God. Simeon was, we assume, an old man. It sounds like he has been waiting a *long time* for this moment. Simeon's name literally means, "God has heard" in Hebrew. If we look back to the Old Testament book of Genesis, Jacob had a son named Simeon. His wife Leah *named* him Simeon because she said, "God has heard of my suffering," since Jacob loved his *other* wife Rachel more than her. So Simeon's name points to the fact that God *hears* the suffering of God's people, and not just that God *hears* it, but that God *does something about it*.

So there is a sense in which Simeon represents the suffering of God's people and their *longing* for a Savior. Luke says that it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. And now that he *has*, Simeon says to God, "Now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." What Simeon is saying there is actually *monumental*. He is saying that God's salvation is not just for the people of Israel, as had always been thought. It is for *everyone*, for *all* people. God hears the suffering of the world and brings about salvation from that suffering in the person of Jesus.

No sooner does Simeon hand Jesus back to his parents than Anna appears. Anna was 84 years old and lived in the temple. She has completely devoted herself to God after the death of her husband. It says that when she sees Jesus, she begins to praise God and talk about him to everyone who had been looking for “the redemption of Jerusalem.” That’s a phrase that comes from the prophet Isaiah at a time when Israel had been invaded and conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians. During Anna’s time, as well, Jerusalem had been invaded and conquered by the Romans. That word *redemption* means, “to be liberated or set free.” Anna’s name comes from the Hebrew word that means, “grace, favor.” So what Anna points to is that God’s grace and favor are with those who have been waiting to be set free from that which oppresses them and holds them captive.

In these two people, Simeon and Anna, what we see is that God hears the suffering of God’s people, the longing for freedom from all that which holds us captive, and God responds with grace and favor and salvation in the person of Jesus.

But also what these two people show us is that salvation is not a *thing* or an *idea*, it is a *person*. Simeon says, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” And to everyone who has been looking for the redemption of Jerusalem, Anna tells them *about this child*. Jesus *is* the salvation of God, the consolation of God for those who are suffering, the grace and favor of God for everyone who longs to be set free from that which holds them captive. The very name of Jesus bears witness to the fact that God hears our suffering and our longing, whatever that may be, and God works to save us from it. God comes near to us to deliver us from it.

What do *you* need to be saved from? Delivered from? Set free from? What, in your life, needs to change? Whatever it is, God does not just say, “Here’s a prayer to pray or an idea to believe

in.” God says, “Here is a *person* who can save you.” And not just *you* or *me* but the *world*. God is at work to redeem this broken world in which sin and evil and suffering and death *appear* to hold power. If we are looking to political leaders or parties to fix what is broken in this world, then we are looking to the wrong people. Because *Jesus* is the salvation of God, the name above *every* name to which every other power in this world and in your life is subservient. And the name of Jesus means *God saves*.

Whatever you are struggling with, God saves.

Whatever life brings your way, God saves.

Cancer? God saves.

Dementia? God saves.

The loss of someone you love? God saves.

The loss of a job or of ability? God saves.

A broken relationship? God saves.

Addiction? God saves.

Anxiety? God saves.

Fear? God saves.

Loneliness? God saves.

Sin? God saves.

When we have no idea how this thing in our life is possibly going to work out, God saves.

That salvation may not always look like we *want* or *expect*. No one *expected* God's salvation to look like a little baby. That just shows us that sometimes God's salvation takes time to develop and grow. But whatever challenge life brings your way, in Jesus Christ we are invited to trust in God's power to save us from it. To *redeem* us. To *console* us. To make us *whole*. To give us *peace*. Just call on the name of Jesus. Say, "Jesus, save me. Help me. Heal me. Forgive me." However you need the saving presence of God, call on the name of Jesus.

In the name of Jesus, there is the power to save. And in this meal that we are about to share, we can *experience* that. We can *touch* and *taste* the salvation of God – Jesus' body broken for us, Jesus' blood shed for us, Jesus' life given for the salvation of the world...and for us. Amen.