

Imagine your parents had gone with a different name. What would your life be like if you lived as a Geoff instead, or as a Miranda? There's no reason you couldn't work your same job, have your same friendships or even marriage. It's not as though you'd be driven out of Grande Prairie because there's only so much room for Bartholomews and we've reached our quota. Nothing would need to change. But I bet your life would be different. Not better or worse, necessarily—just different. Your parents would have treated you differently. You'd see yourself in a different light. And for whatever reason, you, as a Sigmund, would be more likely to marry this lady, while you as a Patrick would marry that one. Some names just sound better together maybe? It's not like the olden days where your name, your last name at least, signified your role rather than simply identifying you as an individual—the Smiths, the Taylors, the Schumachers—but your name does change your life. It helps form who you are.

Jesus, leading up to His birth, had had a fair bit of importance placed upon His name. Isaiah prophesied a long list of names—wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and two chapters earlier He is to be called Immanuel.

With all the different names that Jesus was prophesied to have and with the input of the angels, it's funny to think of Mary and Joseph spending the week up to the circumcision trying them all on for size. Does the little one respond better to Immanuel or to Prince of Peace? Does He smile when we use the name Jesus? Does Wonderful Counselor calm Him down? His naming situation is confusing, as the angel in Matthew alone can't quite decide how people are to refer to Him. In the span of one breath, he announces that He should be called both Jesus and Immanuel. Maybe one should be His middle name.

But when all was fulfilled, when the boy was 8 days old, Mary and Joseph were faithful to take their son to be circumcised, as was commanded, and they called this crying, bleeding boy Jesus. Joshua. He saves.

His name wasn't simply to identify Him apart from the neighbourhood boys. Just as the angel said, He is to be called Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.

And He doesn't waste any time. In a strange account, taking up no more than one verse, we hear of Jesus already fulfilling the law, apart from His own action and intent. At 8 days old, Mary and Joseph are faithful to have this little one walk perfectly in the Law before He can walk or even soothe Himself. God has sent Christ in order to fulfill what no Jew could, and He will do it for Jew and Gentile alike. The circumcision shows us that the ball is already rolling for Christ to be perfectly righteous, fulfilling God's Law, not ignoring one command, not succumbing to a singular temptation. Though He is God in the flesh, He will live with perfect faith in God just as His parents and siblings and neighbours, and you and I ought to. And He will do it not in order to prove that it can be done, walking around showing off His perfect report card, but instead to fulfill His name. To save us.

For the One shedding blood on day 8 as the scalpel scars His tiny body will one day be pierced by nails and by spear to die, that His righteousness, from conception until death, would be yours.

And His righteousness is made ours as He places His name upon us.

In our reading from Numbers we hear God giving the blessing that Aaron and his sons are supposed to announce over the people of God. They are to remind them, to tell them that this is reality—the Lord bless them and keep them, the Lord cause His face to shine upon them and be gracious to them, the Lord lift up His countenance (which means His face) upon them, and give them peace. It's a beautiful promise of God's faithfulness to care for them and sustain them and demonstrate grace for them, but then God goes and says that by saying such a blessing, He is putting His name upon them.

Through this promise, through God's will and action, He claims them as His own, He identifies them as His, and thus He changes them to be like Him. He is with them from the moment they rise until they lay down at night; they bear His name throughout their work and their play, their rest and their worship. And Aaron is to remind them of this perpetually.

Which sounds an awful lot like baptism, where a trifold name and blessing is placed upon us. You have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Certainly that means that it was done at the command and by the authority of such a name, but more than that it means that you have been placed into, or under this name. It surrounds you, it identifies you and defines you; it is now inseparable from you. The name of God, alongside His holiness and righteousness that Christ lived out in His days here, are yours. Paul even goes so far as to make the connection in Colossians 2: "In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. "In your baptism, Christ severed you from your sin and united you with Christ's righteousness and life, with Jesus, the one who saves, Himself.

So you are called Christian, bearing His name, sustained by His name, made right by His name, invited to call upon His name. Jesus, the One who saves.

And all this means you don't need to make a name for yourself. Paul, in Galatians, reminds the church not to return to the Law as a means of justifying yourself and your existence. It was never given so mankind could fulfill and prove to God that we are worthy of entering heaven. But that's what it had turned into. The Pharisees wanted everyone to walk just as they did in order for God to finally send the kingdom. The Judaizers wanted all men circumcised even in the church, and every food law and each commandment followed exactly. But the Law was sent as a guardian, watching over us from self-destructing by curbing the most excessive of sins from running rampant, and a guardian to point us away from our own helpless actions and point us to the righteous One who gave us His name, who has now walked among us, and died for us, and placed His resurrected, eternal life over us.

This means that the laws we make for ourselves are no longer good and necessary either. You don't need to have this toned of a body or this clean of a house; you don't need to

be found associating with only people of a certain status, nor do your children have to act 80% perfect or better in public. You don't need to make so much per year in order to justify your existence; you don't need to do anything to prove that you deserve to be here, on earth, in Grande Prairie, in your family, or here at Faith. You don't need to make a name for yourself, because a better name has already been given to you, a name that is yours waking and sleeping, when you're ecstatic or depressed, when you're hired or fired, whether you've read your bible and said a prayer today or not. He gives you a name that makes you more perfect than you could ever attain to, a name that makes you ready for heaven and ready to serve your neighbours now.

This name was given to you from baptism, this name was on the cross thinking of you, this name is placed upon your tongue and given to you inside and out. This name was made flesh, sent from heaven to dwell among man, to do as His name says. He saves. He saves you. And this name is given to you to wear over you, the name is given to you to call upon in every trouble and trial.

Christians, baptized children of God, believe that the Christ has given you His name, and rejoice that He is yours today and through eternity.