

Sermon for the Holy Name of Jesus, 1.1.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Bregue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist with Installation of Congregation Council Members
Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:15-21

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

*“After eight days 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.”* – Luke 2:21

Today will be the first day since New Year’s Day 1995 that I will not telephone my friend and brother in the sacred ministry, the Reverend Michael Laffon, since he was called this past November to be with His Savior beyond time and the passage of years. As he extended to me a number of times the hospitality of his pulpit at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jersey City, I would like to return that courtesy this morning as we begin our reflection on God’s Word by hearing Pastor Laffon’s devotion for this New Year’s Day 2006, the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, as you

may also find it printed in the daily devotional booklet, *The Word in Season*.

“The Child . . . was called ‘Jesus’ (v. 21)”

“It is sweet serendipity—or perhaps it is something much more—that we begin the New Year with the observance of the festival of the Name of Jesus. Of course, the festival of the Holy Name is always the date of New Year’s Day. However, because it is one of the ‘lesser’ festivals, we do not usually observe it unless it falls on a Sunday.

“The Name of Jesus is the beginning—and the middle and the end—of everything that is Christian. ‘Everything’ includes those beings who call upon that Name. The Name must be at the start of every year and every day to those who have been given the gift of being called Christian.

“Holy men and women have noted the mystical power contained in the simple repetition of the Name of Jesus, as in the Jesus prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner!’ We would do well to keep this prayer close—in everything we do, say, and think.

“We have been blessed to see the beginning of this New Year. Now we have a unique opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to Jesus’ Name, to reconnect with the source of our salvation.”

Pastor Laffon then concludes his devotion with this prayer:
“Jesus, let Your Name mean everything to me. Amen.”

Not all have been blessed to see the beginning of this New Year, not even the author of those words. But we, *here, are* blessed ‘with the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to Jesus’ Name, to reconnect with the source of our salvation.’ What does that mean for us?

What does it mean for us to ‘reaffirm our commitment to Jesus’ Name.’ What does that name itself mean? *Yeshua, Yoshua, Josua,* ‘Jesus’ = ‘savior,’ ‘rescuer,’ that ‘One Who shall save, Who shall rescue His people.’ To be committed to the Holy Name of Jesus means both to accept and to cherish that salvation, that rescue of ourselves from ourselves, God’s rescue of us sinners in One who is like us in all things *but sin, and it means being part of God’s saving cause in this world.*

It means seeking out the forgotten, the cast-off and presumed lost causes of humanity—the presumed irreligious, those

presumed to live in despair or in invincible ignorance or moral corruption. Being committed to the Holy Name of Jesus means recognizing no barrier, no qualitative difference between myself and the worst sinner imaginable, recognizing and trusting in no barrier between me and a life in rebellion against God except God's very own Word, that Word-made-flesh Who seeks me out, Who rescues me. In this New Year in this Congregation, reaffirming our commitment to Jesus' Holy Name will be seen to occur in our outreach to those without a community of faith and our *in*-reach to one another through the reconciling love of God. Our service this coming Epiphany night is intended to be a clear and decisive step in that direction, a time for us as a Congregation to offer the light of Christ to one another and to remove every obstruction to that light shining through us to the surrounding community and world.

What will it mean for us 'to reconnect with the source of our salvation.' This seems simple enough, i.e., to do what we just

said, to turn to ‘Him-Who-will-save-His-people.’ But this is difficult, this is *hard*, precisely because it is so very simple. If we find our salvation, our healing, our rescue in Christ Jesus, then we must give up all of our own pretensions to same. That is, in the very instant we really, radically trust God to save us, we must give Him all of our misplaced trust in ourselves to effect the Kingdom of God among us. But how hard it is to give up worrying about what *we* are going to do ‘to keep the doors of this church open.’

Only by faith in Him Who saves us and makes us whole through His blood can we breathe the free air of the Gospel. Only by faith in that this Child is our Savior, presented by Mary and Joseph for circumcision on the eighth day of His tiny life, *only* through trust in Him can we live in the belief that the Holy Spirit indeed *has* a purpose for us as God’s people in this place. Otherwise, we will worry ourselves and our Congregation to death, most literally.

Today we install some of our members as elected Congregation Council members and as close coworkers with the Office of the Ministry for the work of the Kingdom of God in this place. I ask you, not simply as those who have called me and elected them, but as the Congregation of Our Savior, Jesus Christ: Do not to *drag them down* with your worries and complaints, but rather *support them* with your prayers and with your *faith*, confident that the Holy Spirit will help us to see our mission through God's Word, glad and ready to do *your* part in accomplishing that mission of love. Because you *are* God's people, because you *are* the Congregation of Christ, and by the grace of God grace *my* Congregation, I am confident that you *will*. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has feed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and

Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !

