

Most Holy Name of Jesus

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'What's in a name?' Juliet protests, 'that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet'. The irony here is that if she or her Romeo were not called by the names Capulet or Montague we would have a very different story. There can be quite a lot in a name would perhaps be an appropriate response to her question. Names, for good or for ill, mean something. They carry weight, they carry *history*, with them.

In Scripture naming is often closely associated with blessing. The creation narrative has God naming things as they are created: 'And God called the light day, and the darkness night', and further, 'God created humanity in his own image . . . and he blessed them' (Gen 1.27-8). And the traditional first people in the garden then bless

the earth they are given dominion over by naming the animals.

The name of God tells a different story. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the people understood God's name to be so holy and to wield such power that it was not spoken for fear of speaking it wrongly or in vain. The Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, was replaced with another name, Adonai (Lord). The divine name was a name that, in a sense, carried God's power within it.

When Mary brought her child to be circumcised, eight days after his birth, he was called Jesus—a name not unusual in his day: ordinary, mundane, uneventful. But this was also the name revealed to Mary and Joseph from the angel, the name sent from God, a divine name.

He will be called Son of God, the angel claims. He will reign forever on the throne of David over the house of Jacob: the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings. All this carried in that ordinary name, 'Jesus', a name which means, 'God saves', or 'God is salvation'. Here, in the Most Holy Name of Jesus, we have a summary statement of the entire history of salvation: God Saves is the story this name tells.

God saves in the name Jesus, because this is where that unapproachable, set-apart, unmentionable Name has come near. Jesus is the lived expression of the inexpressible, the pronunciation of what cannot be pronounced. He is the actualisation of the perfect and indescribable power and love of God.

So in that holy name of Jesus, 'God saves', because that name is the name of both the inexplicable and

the ordinary, both the grandiose and the mundane, both the King and the servant, both the divine and the human. This is Emmanuel, God with us. God with us in the pedestrian, stable-born child Jesus.

In Jesus, the divine name becomes also a human name. Jesus, born of Mary, of the household of David; Jesus Christ, Son of the living God. And because Jesus is the performance, the living out, the embodiment of God's power and love in the world, this power and love are not only observed in the life of Jesus Christ, as some sort of demonstration by God. In Jesus, this love becomes possible, humanly possible, in our world. In this most holy name of Jesus, God is not simply explained, God *saves*.

The name of Jesus is our salvation because our salvation is the incarnation of Christ. He is God-

with-us in our humility in the manger, God-with-us in our disgrace and shame and brokenness on the cross, and God-with-us in our glory in resurrection and ascension. Jesus, as the enactment of divine love in our world, makes possible, makes a reality, the salvation his name promises.

And now we, as Christ's body, as the community of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord, are his instruments of reconciliation, making real, making *true*, this great salvation in our world each day.

In our baptism, where we are identified with Christ, we gain a new family name. The name of Jesus, the name 'God saves', becomes our name too. Paul makes this clear in our reading from Galatians: We have received adoption as God's children, sisters and brothers of Christ, sharing

the same Father through the unfathomable grace of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And just before our reading, in Galatians chapter 3, we get a glimpse of what this might look like: 'For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3.27-8).

In a world divided: divided by race, by gender, by creed, by politics, and perhaps most egregiously of all, the enormous disparity between rich and poor. In a world where if you are a woman you are almost as likely to be sexually abused as you are to get an education and where 1/4 of all deaths occur from malaria, a perfectly preventable and treatable disease, that is, if you were fortunate

enough to be born on the right side of the wealth disparity.

In this divided world the Church stands as one united body. The grace and mercy and peace of God have broken into our world in Jesus Christ, and as we are in Christ, they break into our world through us. To be redeemed in the name of Jesus means that you—Anna or James or Lydia—are no longer your own but bear the name of reconciliation, of peace, of salvation. We bear the holy name of Jesus. We now live under the banner of the name, 'God Saves'.

This frees us from the illusion of our individuality that our modern world throws upon us. The name of Jesus frees us from being dominated by our own egos—both in terms of self-absorbed narcissism and self-guarded anxiety.

You do not exist as a static thing, easily defined and circumscribed, but in a continual dynamic relationship of love. You are not defined by gender, or anything in a long list of social constructs; you are not defined as Jew or Greek or slave or free; you are defined as *loved*. And that love is forever pulling us into a new way of life and ultimately toward our future glory in a unity and love that knows no borders and makes no peace with division.

Christ unites us precisely where the world divides us. And our life, united in love, is now on offer to and for the world. In a world of divisiveness and oppression and *horror*, we, sharing in the name of Jesus, are offered as a gift of hope. And in bearing the name of Jesus, in bearing the name 'God saves', we ourselves are freed from our narcissism, freed from our guardedness and anxiety; we are freed to love.

And in a world where love seems so scarce, so rarified, sharing the indiscriminate, round and borderless love we meet in the name of Jesus is the best we could ever hope to give.

Perhaps Romeo's response to Juliet is really quite good theology: 'I take thee at thy word: Call me but love, and I'll be new baptised; Henceforth I never will be Romeo'.

Let it be said of us, who bear the most holy name of Jesus, that the cry of our every step was, 'Call me but love'.