

**“What’s in a Name?”**  
**Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-29**

What’s in a name? It’s no small privilege to give someone a name. The Hebrew word “adam” means both “man” and “ground,” so that Adam’s name testifies to who God created and how God created him (Ge 2:7). Adam named his wife “Eve,” which is derived from the Hebrew word for “life,” so that her name testifies to God’s promise that her offspring would crush the serpent and that their fatal sin wouldn’t be the end of humanity. That’s a lot of meaning to find in the names of the first two humans, and those meanings stay with us even to this day. Martin Luther was named after the fourth-century bishop St. Martin of Tours because he was baptized on the feast of St. Martin. Naming your children after Catholic saints was popular in Luther’s day because the parents hoped their child would continue in the same faith. I can relate a bit to that because when Amanda and I named our children we started with Biblical names, quickly eliminating names that carried a decidedly negative connotation, like Judas and Jezebel. Then we eliminated names with which we had bad associations from our own past, ultimately choosing Gideon James and Claudia Eden, because those names of Biblical saints carry meaning for us as parents as they will for our children.

So if this is the kind of meaning carried in a human name, what kind of meaning is carried in the divine name? What kind of meaning is carried by the name not given by someone else but inherent in the divine? Because there was no one existing before God who named the divine... which is why when Moses asked God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”, God simply answered Moses, “I am who I am” (Ex 3:13-14). “I am who I am.” This is what makes the name of God so much more than a mere human name: human names may carry *meaning*, but God’s name carries *being*. And that’s to say that *God’s name is God Himself*. This wasn’t lost on ancient civilizations. Messengers that came in the name of their king had the full power of the king, and what they said was as if the king himself was present and speaking. Of course, it’s impossible for a human king to be in more than one place at the same time... but it’s entirely possible for the divine to be in more than one place at the same time. And if that’s possible, then it’s also possible for the divine to be where His name is invoked, which is exactly what Jesus confirms when He says, “Whoever receives one such child *in my name receives me*,” and, “where two or three are gathered *in my name, there am I among them*” (Mt 18:5, 20). Are these just poetic words to simply give *the impression* of divine presence, or are these words *realities* that locate Jesus where God’s name is spoken according to His command? They’re indeed the latter, because the Lord says, “put *my name* upon the people of Israel and *I will bless them*”; they’re indeed the latter because the Lord says, “In every place where I cause my name to be remembered *I will come to you and bless you*” (Ex 20:24).

And this is why God placed so much responsibility in the second commandment: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Ex 20:7). The Israelites took this command so seriously that they wouldn’t even utter the name of God outside the temple for the sake of reverence. And the New Testament writers held the name of God in a similar reverence, because there’s only one place in all Scripture where the final revelation of God’s name is recorded: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them

into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). If we’ve lost reverence for the name of God... if we’ve become so cavalier as to text “OMG,” or to use “Jesus Christ” as a curse word, or to let the name of Jesus sound forth as a curse without rebuke, let us rediscover reverence by returning to baptism where not just the name of God but God *Himself* has chosen to be present and revealed. Let us return to baptism where, as Luther writes, “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself” (LC IV.10), for God “appears to you in Baptism. He baptizes you himself and addresses you Himself” (AE 5:21). This is your heavenly reality as one baptized in the Triune name! Jesus—as both God and man—came to you with all the benefits of His death in “washing of water with the word” (Eph 5:26). And there’s no reason to doubt this, because as Paul writes, “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” To put on Christ is nothing less than to receive, in the words of Isaiah, “the garments of salvation... [and] the robe of righteousness” (Is 61:10); to put on Christ is nothing less than to receive “robes made white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14)—the Lamb whose death won the benefits you received in your baptism—the benefits of forgiveness (Acts 2:38) and entrance into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5).

And because Jesus is God made man, His human name carries meaning. The name “Jesus” is derived from the Hebrew verb “to save,” and as the angel said to Joseph, “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). The human name “Jesus” carries the greatest meaning for all humanity, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And He’s the One who opens the way to God, for “Whoever has seen [Jesus] has seen the Father” (Jn 14:6). Jesus earned His Father’s grace on the cross, and He opened the way to His Father in your baptism, coming to you and putting upon you the very name He revealed after His resurrection: “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Brothers and sisters, if we’ve lost reverence for God’s name, let us return to the waters made holy by His Word and know His love for us in His sacrifice delivered through those holy waters! If we haven’t lost reverence for God’s name, let us continue to rejoice in the baptism with which God baptized us!

So what’s in a name? When it comes to God, God is His name. His name carries *meaning* and it carries *being* as revealed by Jesus who died for your sins. The Scriptures are clear, your baptism is certain, and His name is upon you! May the meaning of “Jesus” and the being “of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” remain with you into eternity. Amen.

—Pastor Greg Bauch