

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

January 1, 2023 – THE MOST HOLY NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

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Sermon: “*The Powerful Name of Jesus*”*

Numbers 6:22-27 (God blesses Israel)
Psalm 8 (The Name of the Lord is exalted in all the earth)
Philippians 2:5-11 (At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow)
St. Luke 2:15-21 (The Holy Child is named ‘Jesus’—“God Saves”)

“What’s in a name?” William Shakespeare’s 17th-century tragic drama, *Romeo and Juliet*, made this question famous. The couple fall in love before learning they bear the names of rival clans. Romeo is a Montague and Juliet a Capulet. Willing to reject family ties for the sake of their love, Juliet cries out, “Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name. Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love and I’ll no longer be a Capulet.” A few lines later, Juliet asks, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”¹

In other settings, a family name becomes even more important—we have only to think of some sprinkled throughout American history, such as Roosevelt or Rockefeller. Names in Bible times had particular significance in that they expressed a person’s character: For instance, Jacob, which means “supplanter” (Gen. 25:26), was so named because he stole both the blessing and the birthright from his older brother, Esau.

Or take Naomi, in the book of Ruth. Her name means “delightful one.” But after her husband, her two sons, and a daughter-in-law died, she changed her name to “Mara,” meaning “bitter” (Ruth 1:20). In Acts 4:36 we find a Christian named Joseph who was so caring toward others that he received the name “Barnabas,” meaning “son of encouragement.”

But why was it so important that Mary’s son be named “Jesus”? The name comes from the Greek *Iesous*, which was derived from the Aramaic *Yeshu*. In Hebrew, the name “Yeshua”—with its variants “Joshua” or “Jesus”—means “God saves.” At the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angel Gabriel gave her child the name “Jesus” as His proper name, because it expresses both Our Lord’s *identity* and His *mission*. Inasmuch as God alone can forgive sins, Jesus as the second Person of the Trinity is the only one who “will save his people from their sins.”

However, Jesus’ name is more than just a reference to His purpose as Savior of the World. The Bible tells us His Holy Name is *itself* a means of saving grace. In Acts 4:12, we read: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Romans 10:13 reiterates: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” And John 1:12 promises, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

We have salvation in, through, and by, the Holy Name of Jesus because, as Acts 10:43 tells us: “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Moreover, Christ’s is the name at which, when Jesus comes again, every knee shall bow in worship and in awe. As we heard today in Philippians 2:10-11: “... at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” That is why, whenever we mention the name of Jesus in our liturgy, we are supposed to bow slightly [demonstrate.] You may have noticed that some of your fellow parishioners and I do this. It is right that every believer should bow at the name of Jesus, to reverence our Lord.

From the time of Christ’s birth, which we are celebrating in this season, many have missed or *dismissed* the significance of His name. When Jesus was a child, His neighbors considered Him as merely the son of Joseph the carpenter. In our day, many know “Jesus Christ” only as an expression of anger or profanity. Few are familiar with or understand the many names given to Him in the Bible. For that reason, I’d like us to look at just four out of the 198 names Christ is given in both the Old and New Testaments.²

By discovering what's behind these four, we can be led into a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, and why He deserves our faith, trust, honor and worship.³

No Hebrew prophet had more to say about Israel's promised Messiah than Isaiah. He described the coming Servant-King as One who would bring a mysterious mix of mighty power and humble suffering (Isa. 53, 61:1-3). The Messiah's character is most clearly stated in Isaiah 9:6, where the prophet declares: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Let's have a look at what these four names mean—and what they mean for us today.

First, Jesus has a Guiding Name: "**Wonderful Counselor**" literally translates, "a wonder of a counselor."⁴ The Hebrew word for "wonderful" indicates something outside the realm of human experience, separated from the normal course of events—something miraculous. This describes the person of Christ Himself: He is the wonder, He is the miracle! And in its historical usage, "counselor" implied a king who gave uplifting counsel to his people in a time of trouble. Think of it! Long before the Child was born or the Son was given, God planned to send a Counselor for the lost and brokenhearted of this world, to comfort, console, and advise us. That Counselor would have great wisdom. In Colossians 2:3, St. Paul praises Christ, in whom "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

We find that wisdom in Jesus' words recorded in the New Testament. And, as God Himself, Jesus is able to help us in *every* situation, and to give us direction in life far beyond our own abilities and limitations. We need only call upon His Name!

Second: Jesus has a Powerful Name: "**Mighty God**" is a compound Hebrew title, *El Gibbor* in which the first part "El" denotes the one true God. Jesus alone is the One who walked on water; healed the sick with His word or touch; raised the dead; cast out demons; changed water into wine; multiplied bread and fish enough to feed a stadium crowd; died voluntarily for our sins; and physically rose from the grave. Of Himself, Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:58), and St. John describes Christ as the One "through whom all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:1-3). *Indeed, He is God!*

The second part of this title, *Gibbor*, means "strong, powerful, hero," and connotes the courage, valor, and action of a mighty warrior.⁵ In Jesus' case, this meant far more than physical prowess or personal talent. Christ displayed His life-changing strength and power through His ministry, and He continues to transform lives today, in all who know their need for a Savior. Jesus demonstrated His supremacy over nature, disease, sin, demons, and death, such that St. Paul would refer to Him as "Christ the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:24).⁶ As such, He is the source of *our* power, and the strength of our lives.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises to send the power of the Holy Spirit to equip each and every one of us for all that He requires of us, and in Philippians 4:13, we read, "I can do *all things* through Christ who strengthens me." This verse should be a great comfort to us in times of weakness or self-doubt.

Third, Jesus has a Timeless Name: "**Everlasting Father**," or *'Avi'ad* in Hebrew.⁷ Like "Mighty God," for centuries this name was shrouded in mystery. What mortal could earn such titles? In Hebrew, the word for *father* denoted "possessor of," meaning that Jesus' identity as a child came about through His birth. Yet, He Himself is the possessor of Eternity, for Jesus says of Himself, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 21:6).

The truth of Christ as eternal has come under attack for centuries. But if we reject His eternality, we reject His divinity. The two cannot be separated. For if Jesus is not everlasting, He is not God. But because He is the timeless Father, He is always and constantly a source of fatherly protection and provision for us. All our earthly fathers must leave us, yet Christ will not. Although the world is marked by unfairness, injustice, and suffering, those who believe in Jesus are in the hands of an Eternal Father, who, as the familiar hymn says, is "strong to save." He is the Father who holds us in His "everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27); cares for us with an "everlasting consolation" (2 Thess. 2:16); and graciously offers us life eternal (Jn. 14:19).

The timelessness of God is supremely important. If He were only God for a while, He might still be worthy of our reverence and attention. But as God for eternity, He deserves our *unending* devotion and *total* trust.⁸

Fourth, Jesus has a Comforting Name, “**Prince of Peace**.” In Hebrew, *Shar Shalom* means “the one who removes all peace-disturbing factors and secures the peace.” This instantly sets Jesus apart from human rulers, whose reigns depend on bloody conquest. But Christ’s rule rests on His *own* shed blood, as He was sacrificed for us. His name “Peaceful Prince” helps explain why so many were disappointed in Him. They wanted a monarch who would annihilate their enemies. Yet Jesus didn’t lift a finger against Rome. They did not understand that all who trust in Christ as their Savior are given a peace, a security, an assurance, that flows from Jesus Himself. He assured His followers, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid (Jn. 14:27 ESV).

As we head into this new year, many are expressing anxiety that that the world is coming to an end. Be that as it may, the Bible tells us *God alone* knows when that will happen. Psalm 46:1-3 assures us that even if the mountains were to sink into the sea, or the heavens fall from the sky, we are not to be afraid, for Jesus is our peace. He is the One who stills our fears, and calms our terrors.

It is a fact that we cannot know what this coming year will hold. We only need to know the One who holds us: Jesus Christ, our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *Amen*.

* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, 1 January 2012 “The Strong Name of Jesus,” and 5 January 2014, “Jesus—Name Above all Names,” St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Cobleskill NY. Used with permission.

¹ William Shakespeare, “Romeo and Juliet,” 1600, © Gary Martin, The Phrase Finder < <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a-rose-by-any-other-name-shall-smell-as-sweet.html> > 20 December 2022.

² Alexander Cruden, “A collection of the Names and Titles given to Jesus Christ,” A Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures, 1737.

³ Adapt. Bill Crowder, “The Amazing Names of the Messiah,” Discovery Series (Grand Rapids: RBC Ministries, 2011), pp. 5 ff.

⁴ Adapt. Crowder, *op. cit.*, pp. 11 ff.

⁵ Kurt Selles, “El Gibbor: The Mighty God,” TodayDevotional.com < <https://todaydevotional.com/devotions/el-gibbor-the-mighty-god-2014-05-08> > 20 December 2022. Used with permission.

⁶ Adapt. Crowder, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 ff.

⁷ “Names for God,” n.d. NamesforGod.net < <https://namesforgod.net/everlasting-father/> > 20 December 2022. Used with permission.

⁸ Adapt. Crowder, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 ff.