



## Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

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Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

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### ***“What's In a Name?” – St. Luke 1:31***

*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent – December 3, 2017*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Gospel appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Luke, the first chapter.

My dear family in Christ, I cannot imagine that any of us were named without a certain amount of thought on the part of our parents. They wanted to give us a name that meant something to them: a family name with a respectable heritage, the name of a popular or heroic figure of the time or a name they simply liked saying or hearing.

There are some names such that, when they are spoken, they bring to mind someone in our past whom we will continue to associate with that name. When I hear the name “**Mae**” it brings to mind a devout, loving mother whose family welcomed us into their home as our family was moving from North Carolina to West Point, Nebraska, when I was in the second grade – the parsonage wasn't yet available due to some needed repairs. She and Gerhardt raised 4 wonderful people, sisters and a brother in the body of Christ.

My own given name of Frank has a heritage I'm happy to bear. But it was a source of amusement for some when I attended the seminary. This was at a time when the television program M\*A\*S\*H, though completed, was still fresh in the minds of many – as was its character, Major

Frank Burns. Jack Meehan found great enjoyment in using some of Hawkeye, Trapper John and B. J. Honnicut lines when he saw me, such as “**Frank, you are so above average.**”

It’s a profitable exercise to study the names used in the Old Testament, for they have meanings all their own. The prophet, *Daniel*, who recounts not only his testing which led to the lions’ den but also Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo’s testing before the ordeal in the fiery furnace, has a most fitting name since it means “**God is my judge.**” The archangel *Michael*, mighty in spiritual warfare on our behalf, has a name which challenges all the people, for it asks the question **“Who is like God?”**

And then we come to the prophetic name of *Joshua*. He who “**fit the battle of Jericho**”, who led the children of Israel in taking the Promised Land, who was one of the two men of his generation to be able to enter the Promised Land because he and Caleb were convinced God would give them the victory, he bears the name of comfort and assurance, a name of confidence **“The LORD saves.”**

This was a name made necessary not simply through Moses’ frustration-prompted disobedience in the wilderness. This was a name made necessary by Adam and Eve’s lack of trust in God, which eventually led to outright disobedience to God’s commands. That heritage we can trace throughout the Old Testament in Sodom and Gomorrah’s debauchery, Abraham’s fickleness, Jacob’s favoritism, David’s lust and murder.

That heritage we can trace through the New Testament in Herod’s insecurity, Annanias and Saphirra’s greed, Judas’ spite and Pilate’s weakness. We can trace it through the ages in the Roman persecutions, the Spanish Inquisition, the Gulag, the Third Reich and the Khmer Rouge.

That heritage we can trace among the names we find in this place and all places just like it: from Adam to Zoe, from Anderson to Zwonitzer. It is the heritage of sin, which separates us from

our maker, alienates us from our God, pits us against one another and inevitably leads to destruction and everlasting condemnation.

Thankfully, we had the forerunner whose name proclaimed, “**The LORD Saves.**” For such was God’s intention from that fateful day in the Garden of Eden. A child would come from the line of Adam and Eve, One Who would crush the head of the old evil foe.

That one would be named Jesus – the LORD saves. Through the ages the waiting people wondered “What kind of a king is He going to be?” For He was prophesied to be “a lion from the tribe of Judah” and the lion is the king of beasts.

Then again, Isaiah foretold that like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he would not open his mouth. So what will this one be, a king or a lamb?

From this Jesus of Nazareth, we learn that He is both. Coming among us in his birth in Bethlehem He is a lamb right at home in a stable. Riding astride the donkey on that Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, this King would be crowned at the close of the week – crowned with thorns and hailed, mockingly, by the Roman guard. This was as He was on the way to the cross to atone for the sins of the world. For this King was also the lamb of God, pointed out by John the Baptist. This lamb of God would take away the sins of the world by being that sacrifice for our sins.

And in our baptism His name was applied to each of us. We were marked as the children of God as we were invited to have faith in His substitutionary sacrifice. We were marked as the heirs of the resurrection by this Jesus Who rose victorious on the third day. We bear His name, those belonging to the Christ, as we await His triumphal return on that last great day.

And in the meanwhile, we live as Christians, bearing that name in the days that remain. There is the story, for the veracity of which I cannot vouch, of Alexander the Great. Tutored by Aristotle in his youth, undefeated in battle and considered one of the most successful military

commanders of all time, having conquered the land between Greece and Northwest India, he is recorded as having administered courts martial from time to time.

One day, there was a young man brought before him. The young man was handsome, yet frightened. He was, by all outward appearances and his record, someone you would want in the military forces of your land. The charge against, however, was desertion of his post – a crime punishable by death. Alexander, swayed by the young man’s history, his bearing and his eloquence in asking for lenience, was about to go against his usual practice – for he hated cowardice upon the battlefield – and spare his life. But then he asked the young man his name. Upon the answer, Alexander grew visibly upset. Each moment that passed saw him growing angrier and angrier. Finally, shaking with rage Alexander the Great said to the young man, **“Change your conduct, or change your name!”** For the young man before him was named the same as his commander. His name was Alexander.

Does your life reflect the life of Jesus to those around you? Are you fair? Are you patient? Do you stand steadfast for what is right? Are you forgiving?

If we are honest in this season of Advent – a season of preparation for Christ Jesus’ return, a season of thoughtful reflection and repentance – we have to admit that we often do not display the life of Jesus in our own lives. We do not wear His name well.

But that is why Jesus came. That is the wonderful meaning of His exalted name – **“He will save His people from their sins.”** He came to save us from the penalty of eternal separation from God. Jesus was innocent of all sin. He carried our sins in His own person to the cross. Following His death, God the Father raised Him from the dead, exalting Him and His name above all names.

That is the name we bear. That is the birth we will soon celebrate. That is the return we await with great joy and expectation – the return of Jesus, our Savior, Who will bring into being the kingdom new and glorious purchased by His Holy blood. That is what's in a name! Amen.