

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
Newark, DE
First Sunday after Christmas & Feast of the Holy Name – January 1, 2017/Year A
Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 2:15-21
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God.

AMEN

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Here is a quiz to begin the New Year – who is **Hiram U. Grant**? If you guessed **Ulysses S. Grant** you win the fabulous prize that will be determined in the near future. While Hiram was Grant's given name, the nomination form for his acceptance into the U. S Military Academy was placed as **Ulysses S. Grant**. The academy would only accept the name on the application, so Hiram adapted and adopted his middle name **Ulysses** as his first name. The rest we know as **U. S. Grant** is his history and ours.

Everything is in a name! In her book **Four in America**, Gertrude Stein conjectured that while Grant may have ultimately been successful as Commander of the Northern Armies, his success may not have been recorded in history the same if his name had remained Hiram. **Everything is in a name** and our Christian name bears more gravitas than just a "surname." Surnames are often important to families while the first name denotes character, career, and shapes us in the ways we to go in life.

Everything is in a name! When Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, the Feast Day of the Holy Name of Jesus coincides with the First Sunday after Christmas Day. When this happens, the special feast day of observance replaces the regular Sunday lectionary. In early days of the Christian church, the day was first known as the **Feast of the Circumcision** as the Gospel records this being the event that happens to Jesus along with the naming ceremony. As the thought of circumcision gives many that "icky feeling," this is one of those times when I appreciate this **political correctness** change of the focus for this day.

From the Catechism of the Roman Church – **"God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it."** We remember the Holy Name of Jesus this day. We remember **everything is in a name!**

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William Shakespeare wrote, **"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."** We tend to hold less respect for names in our day. After all, a rose would smell as sweet no matter what we call it, right? Things, and often people, are what we call them and make them, **so why do names matter at all?**

Our names **matter to God** which then becomes OUR MATTER as people of faith. From Genesis to Revelation, names hold significance before God. The name of a person indicates **who that person is, and what the person is called to be and/or do in their life.** When Moses encounters God on the holy mountain, “*The Lord descended in the cloud, and proclaimed the name, THE LORD.*” The Psalmist sings, “*O Lord our Governor, how exalted is YOUR NAME in all the world.*” In the Gospel, Luke records the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day in keeping with the Jewish tradition, and in that same tradition “... *he was called Jesus, THE NAME GIVEN by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*”

In the love of God, our names are **supremely important:**

- **Names are symbolic.** Our name indicates **who we are and what we are called to be and do in this life.** *Adam* was named for it means **human**, and *Eve* means **the mother of all living things.** *Abram*’s name was changed to *Abraham* to image God’s promise that he would be **the father of a great multitude.** *Jacob* is later called *Israel* because he becomes **a prince with God**, although his name first meant **heel catcher** and also **liar.**
- **Names reveal the character of God and of a person.** Here are just a few names for God – *El Shaddai, the Strong One ... El Olam, the Everlasting ... Jehovah Jirah, God who provides ... Jehovah Rophe, God who heals ... Jehovah Shalom, God of peace.* The prophet Isaiah reveals the coming Messiah, who is Jesus our Lord, when he writes, “*His name will be wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, eternal one, Prince of peace.*” [9:6] Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, *Therefore god also highly exalted him and gave him the NAME that is above every name, so that at the NAME OF JESUS, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God ...*” [2:9-11] In John’s Gospel and later Revelation, he reveals the deeper character of the name of Jesus as *living water ... the way, the truth, the life ... the resurrection to eternal life ... the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world ... the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*”
- **Names are significant.** We hold those family names that identify who and whose we are in this life. When we are baptized, we are named before God and all gathered, and then we are “**sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and MARKED [NAMED] as Christ’s own forever.**” We call ourselves **Christian** to reflect this name and sealing of Christ and to live our life in the ways God and Christ Jesus have shown us. As our Collect for this day prays, with my slight addition, “**Plant in every heart, we pray, the [NAME and] love of him who is savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; ...**”

By claiming and calling ourselves **Christian**, we carry **the love, the light, and the life of Christ into our world** beginning this New Year’s 2017. We are invited to grow and go forward in our journey of faith, to be transformed in the love of God give to us in the Christmas Presence of Jesus Christ.

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I found a **meaning of names** website to see what might emerge in the names of some of our parish family. Interestingly, a few names revealed the following:

- **Frank – Analytical mind; happy as long as things are going as you expect to be done; always on time.**
- **Beryl – Success is a foregone conclusion; confident, caring, compassionate, enthusiastic.**
- **Roscoe – Natural leader and organizer; friendly and well-liked for sense of humor; a good appetite!**
- **Susan – Pleasant and easy going; relationships are important; sometimes lacks confidence.**
- **Thomas – Quiet and systematic by nature; take life seriously and self not so much; you finish what you start; friendships are few but deeply important.**
- **Paul – Small; intrigued by challenges physical and mental; dynamo of energy and faith.**

Everything is in a name! Our name becomes the icon of **who we are and whose we are** in the world. We hold the common name of faith as **Christian**. This communal name is melded into our hearts, our souls, and all our lives at our baptism.

May LIVING t our common name **Christian** in the visible ways of mercy, grace, love, justice, and peace our Lord Jesus lived and proclaimed, be our principal New Year resolution for 2017, and ever onward. **THIS** is how we can change the world when remember **everything is in OUR name!**

AMEN