

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Galveston, Texas  
Sermon for Christmas Eve 2008  
Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14,  
Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)  
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue, Rector

Here we are, gathered in our historic church, which, like most of us, is damaged but not destroyed, dented but not defeated, disabled but not dying. And we are here three months after our lives were changed by a hurricane named “Ike” to celebrate the birth of a baby named “Jesus.”

An angel of the Lord told his parents to give him that name and told the shepherds that he would be God’s promised Messiah. Jesus, our Anglicized pronunciation of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, meaning “God saves.” Such a big name for a little baby. But it’s a good name for a Messiah because that’s what the prophets promised God would do, save us. When we say the name Jesus, we identify this One particular Messiah who lived into the name, for he did accomplish what was foretold. In him, the world was given the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, life over death.

What a contrast to Hurricane Ike, which brought darkness, destruction, and death. All hurricanes are given names. Why is that? It helps us identify storms and track them as they move across the ocean, sometimes for weeks. Because there can be more than one storm at a time, naming them helps us avoid confusion.

I guess that’s why we name anything when there is more than one of them and we need to be able to avoid confusion. We give children names to identify them as individuals. There was a time when Christians did not give their children names until Baptism. The naming of the child in Baptism is the part of the liturgy we call “Christening” because it is the putting on of the Christian name. We still call a person’s name in Baptism not because they didn’t already have one, but in order to signify that person’s identity in the eyes of God and the Church wherein he or she will be assisted in growing into that particular identity God has in mind. I’m not supposed to become John or Mary or Carl. I’m supposed to become Ron, a child of God. I don’t need to be confused about who I am nor does it help me to have you confused about who I am. Names are important. They help us avoid confusion.

It seems to me that we have had our share of confusion here in Galveston for the past three months or so. The worst kind of confusion comes from uncertainty about who is in charge, who is going to help, who will get us through this. We know it’s not over. The confusion is going to continue for some time to come. That’s where this name thing comes in.

For everything bad associated with a storm named Ike, there are ten thousand good things associated with a savior named Jesus. If we can hold that truth in our hearts and minds, and if we will call upon that Name, it will help us overcome confusion. This child, who grew into his name, God Saves, continues to calm all sorts of storms in our lives with all their names. He will calm the storms in your soul and get you through this slow and difficult process of recovery.

Jesus; such a big name to give a little baby. But he lived into that name during his earthly ministry and he lives into it through all eternity as his saving work continues in our lives and in the life of all creation. It is who he is and what he does.

Someone once said that the best way to send a message is to wrap it in a person. And that's what God did in sending Jesus to us. In Jesus, the Messiah, we receive the message of God's love for us. In Jesus, God's redemptive work continues to transform lives – not just change them, but transform them. To change means to do something different. But to transform means to become something different, a new creature. In Jesus, God Incarnate, “things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made.” That's the message for us this Christmas and every Christmas. My prayer for you and those whom you love is that after the name of Ike has become a distant memory of a bad dream, the Name of Jesus will remain on your mind, on your lips, and in your heart as the One who has seen you through all the storms of life and made you strong.

I'll close with these lines from the English hymn writer, Brian Wren:

How can we name a Love that wakens heart and mind,  
    indwelling all we know or think or do or seek or find?  
Within our daily world, in every human face,  
    Love's echoes sound and God is found, hid in the commonplace.

So in a hundred names, each day we all can meet  
    a presence, sensed and shown at work, at home, or in the street.  
Yet every name we see, shines in a brighter sun:  
    In Christ alone is Love full grown and life and hope begun.