

SERMON: 2019/01/01 (The Feast of the Holy Name, Yr. C) - Numbers 13:1-16; Galatians 4:4-7; and, Luke 2:20-24_BTR

One of the things to *appreciate* about this feast day is how, in the (very) midst of a focus on Jesus and the beginnings of His earthly life, we're reminded that the story didn't actually begin there - in Bethlehem, in "0 B. C." - *nor* did God's rescue mission for the world begin there either - *but*, rather, to properly understand the events and significance of the first Christmas we need *context*; the context of the Old Testament; the context of the Lord's pre-existing - and tumultuous - relationship with His chosen people, "Israel."

And the fact that we would do well to be mindful of this background is signalled to us by the small detail of Jesus' name:

Why is it, do you think, that, during his visit to the Virgin Mary, Gabriel specifies the name that was to be given to the (little) Messiah?

He hadn't really asked for her consent as to the pregnancy, and not only does she not get to choose the father of her child, Augustus Caesar's decree prevents her from choosing where she would give birth too.

The *least* thing that the archangel could have done was allowed her to pick out the baby's name, no?

If he had, maybe today we would be worshipping "Chad Christ" or "Brian the Savior."

But Gabriel decrees what the boy would be called: "You *will*..." he says: [Lk. 1:31]. And since he takes *care* to do this, we should ask: "Why?"

What is so special about that particular name as opposed to any another?

Unless, of course, the choice was arbitrary - plucked from a hat, but that seems highly unlikely; *contrary* to the meticulous, methodical manner in which the Creator interacts with His universe - a manner that we come to appreciate only really by reflecting on the Hebrew Bible, (though some thinkers might argue that we could ascertain this also from observing the created order, with its intricate patterns, and the predictable laws of physics).

And what we find when we look back is that Jesus wasn't an original or even uncommon name. Indeed, there were many Jesus-es in 1st century Palestine - we even encounter a few others in the New Testament itself; and they were all named this in honor of the hero, "Joshua."

There are, in fact, the *same* name.

(Only translated differently to avoid confusion.)

And Joshua, of course, was the famous protege of Moses.

And not famous just for the fact - vicariously.

But in his own right; for Joshua was the famous hero who believed steadfastly in God's promise to give the Jewish people Canaan, and fought to make it a reality. At every stage he was instrumental: as a spy - which we heard about just now. And then as a general.

All of his peers, remember, doubted and hesitated.

And for their skepticism were cursed to wander in the wilderness for forty years and to die and never see the land "flowing with milk and honey." [See: e.g. Ex. 3:8,17, 13:5, 33:3, etc.]

But Joshua prevailed.

And he led the armies of God across the Jordan, around Jericho, and to victory. It was his zeal - his conviction - that carried the whole enterprise.

And it is this example that God desired to evoke when mankind contemplated His son: of a warrior - a leader - a conqueror; one who brings a people a second-chance in a new, more beautiful country, by an *un*-flagging commitment to the King of Heaven.