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1/1/2009, The Name of Jesus
Luke 2:15-21

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called *Jesus*, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (Luke 2:15-21, RSV)

This is the name we love: Jesus. He is this world's Saviour. He is *our* Saviour. This is the Name into which we were baptized, or are invited to be baptized, and this is the name we bear with us as we march forth into this new year of our Lord 2009. He is our light. He is the truth of a human life. He is our canon, our rule, our most real measure of all that is good, and true, and lovely in a human life. We are, and should evermore try to be, with increasing devotion, men and woman, boys and girls of this man, Jesus.

Dear Bishop Michael McDaniel, of blessed memory, used to tell a story about an Irish saint who went up north and brought the faith to Scotland. I have told this story to some of you before, either in a sermon or in the quiet of my pastor's study. Though I do not have all the details clear in my mind, I am quite certain of the great culminating line of the story. And now, as we face a new year stretching on before us, I deeply desire to linger with that story and that culminating line. It is a story about the One whose holy name we celebrate today. It is a story about the One whose holy name we bear in our souls as we head out in this new year of our Lord, 2009.

As far as I can tell, the heroes of this story are St. Columba (c. 521-97) and Áedán mac Gabráin, a Scottish chieftain. Butler's *Lives of the Saints* (1956) reports that St. Columba is the most famous of Scottish saints, but that he was actually an Irishman.

Christianity, it seems, came to Ireland earlier than to Scotland, thanks to the missionary work of St. Patrick. As for the Scottish folk, naturally they had their own ancient religions. They painted their faces blue and worshiped around trees, as I understand it.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (2000) reports that in 574 St. Columba anointed Aedán mac Gabráin¹ King of the Scots of Dalriada. Also, St. Columba is said to have baptized Bridei son of Maelchon, who was king of the Picts until his death around 584–586.²

Well, that's enough of the historical possibilities to set the stage for the great culminating line of the story. In broad outline, the story goes this way: The Irish saint brings his witness to the Scottish chieftain. But the chieftain hesitates. Though he likes the saint and is moved by his witness, still he hesitates. Like King Agrippa of old, who declared himself to be "almost persuaded" by the preaching of St. Paul,³ the Scottish

¹ Áedán mac Gabráin (pronounced [aiða mak gavra] in Old Irish) was king of Dál Riata from circa 574 until his death circa 608.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81ed%C3%A1n_mac_Gabr%C3%A1in)

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridei_I_of_the_Picts

³ Acts 26:28: Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

chieftain is almost persuaded to become a Christian. But before he can do so, he has an important question for the saint. Here is his question, “But if I become Christ’s man, what will become of me?”

I admire this question very much. It is practical, sensible, and I bet it was borne along by a sense of responsibility — aye, a sense of responsibility that the chieftain had not only for his own soul, but for the welfare of his clan. “But if I become Christ’s man, what will become of me?”

And here is the culminating line — the answer of the saint: “Ahh, Aedán mac Gabráin, if you become Christ’s man, then you will go out on adventure upon adventure,

What is an adventure? Well, my dear old *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1968) says this: An adventure is “an undertaking involving risk, unforeseeable danger, or unexpected excitement.” To my mind, the fascinating thing about the saint’s answer is not that he spoke of “adventure,” but that he spoke of the “truth” of the adventure.

Take you and me, for example: Here we sit facing the year of our Lord 2009. If the heart of adventure is uncertainty and risk, then each of us is setting out on an adventure simply to be venturing forth into this new year. Some of us might be anticipating a sedate year. Being cautious by nature and accustomed to our routines, we might want nothing to do with “adventure,” yet who knows what lies ahead of us in 2009? Sometimes excitement and risk and confusion come upon us unexpectedly, but they come nonetheless, and then there is nothing to do but pray to the Lord that we will make it through safely to the other side.

And some of us might be conscious that we are setting out on an adventure. Our Assisting Minister, Maggie Luthar, for example, is setting out on an adventure for she is moving to the Canadian Rockies for three months in the dead of winter. There is all kind of excitement and uncertainty connected with that. Likewise, in our parish we have soldiers and law enforcement officers and nurses whose daily jobs carry with them the chance for adventure, and they deserve our prayers, every one of them.

So, the saint was right that if Aedán mac Gabráin becomes Christ’s man, he will be set out on adventure upon adventure, for that is the nature of life anyway, especially when you are a clan chieftain or a Scottish king.

No, the interesting thing is not that the man faces adventure, but that if he should become Christ’s man, he will face adventure upon adventure and every one of them “true.” This implies that some adventures are untrue, and therefore unworthy of a human being. A pirate, for example, might use his wits and his courage and mount an attack upon a merchant ship, and he might even succeed, only it was not worth his effort, for that adventure was not true. It did not chime with the destiny for which his Maker put him on this earth. It did not harmonize with the dignity of a human life.

It is the same with any task, pleasure, or cause before us this coming year: If it does not accord with Jesus, it might be an adventure for us, but it is not yet a true adventure till we surrender ourselves to him whose name we bear.

By way of encouragement, let me tell you of someone whose adventures were true. I mean Abraham, the “father of faith,” as he is sometimes called. When the New Testament recalls this great patriarch, the chief thing it says is that his faith took the form of an adventure that was true:

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, *not knowing* where he was

to go.

The man went out, “not knowing where he was to go,” but only that wherever he went, he meant to walk with God, and that is what made his adventure true.

One of my favorite prayers comes from the liturgy for Vespers. It has the feel of a prayer modeled on the life of Abraham. The prayer goes this way:

Let us pray. Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Better still even than Abraham is our Lord Jesus. If ever there was a man who lived “adventure upon adventure and every one of them true,” it was Jesus himself. He once said that it was his very sustenance was to live for his heavenly Father and therefore to live for you, that you might have a chance in this world:

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.”(John 4:34, RSV)

It was as if for Jesus, you could take all the rest, so long as you left him his life of love for his heavenly Father and for humanity. He was content, then, that the birds of the air should have their nests and the foxes should have their holes, but that he should have nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20), for as long as he had his life of love, he was content. Indeed, in the end, he could be stripped of everything, even his life, but he was willing, for his adventure above everything else was true! And his life was the life worth resurrecting. *His* life is the life worthy imitating. His life is the one for us and with us as we face the adventures of 2009.

Do not be discouraged and imagine that you are not cut out for adventure. You might be ninety years old, yet this week before you might hold one of the most important adventures of you life, for you might have dealings and your might save the soul of someone facing the very crisis of his or her life.

Oh, adventures will come our way. They will surely come. The needful thing is that we resolve that our adventures shall be *true*, and for that, we need to rededicate ourselves to Jesus, becoming Christ’s man, Christ’s woman in the year of our Lord 2009, and always.

Dear ones, on this New Year’s Day, be of good courage. The Lord shall strengthen your heart if you will let him. And take it to heart that what this old world really needs is some *true* adventurers, and that we mean to be the ones, to the glory of Jesus Christ, whose Blessed Name we bear, and to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.