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1/1/2013, The Name of Jesus
Numbers 6:22-27, Psalm 8, Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 2:15-21

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

²¹And 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 2:21, RSV)

Happy New Year, everyone!

It seems to me that the Christian faith is not a sad or dour faith. Christians who go around with frowns on their faces, as if everything in life somehow simply annoys them, are not doing as well as they could in witnessing to Jesus. They have a right to *be* happier and to *look* happier, to cheer like mad for the Knicks, to dig into the chocolate cake with peanut butter frosting, to enjoy romance and parties and music, to look as if they are glad to be alive even in a tough world. They have a right to joy, I say, for they are marching heavenward, and meanwhile a Champion fights at their side as they lend their hands to doing some good in this world.

So, here we are at the start of a new year of our Lord—the year 2013. What does the *name* of Jesus mean for us as we now stride forth into this new year?

THE MEANING OF THE NAME

In the Bible, not only is the *name* “Jesus” specified, but also the *meaning* of that name. The angel of the Lord told us so. He is the one who gives the authorized meaning for the name Jesus:

²⁰But while he [Joseph] thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. ²¹And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall *save his people from their sins*. (Matthew 1:20-21, KJV)

He shall be called JESUS, for he shall save!

One Christmas afternoon back in 1530, Martin Luther preached about the birth of Jesus the Savior. Let me lift up a passage from this sermon. You’ve

probably heard me quote this particular passage before—I am so very fond of it. It goes this way:

...if I receive even the costliest and best in the world, it still does not have the name of *Savior*...In my sin, my death, I must take leave of all created things. No, sun, moon, stars, all creatures, physicians, emperors, kings, wise men and potentates cannot help me. When I die I shall see nothing but black darkness, and yet that light, “To you is born this day the Savior” [Luke 2:11], remains in my eyes and fills all heaven and earth. The Savior will help me when all have forsaken me. And when the heavens and the stars and all creatures stare at me with horrible mien, I see nothing in heaven and earth but this child. (Martin Luther, *Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day*, Luke 2:1–14, December 25, 1530, LW 51:209)

Come what may, Luther is glad to see this child, Jesus, the Savior!

WHERE HAVE THE YEARS GONE?

I have heard elderly folk sigh about the passing of the years. “Where have all the years gone? They seem to have flown by.” Perhaps you have heard this lament too. Indeed, perhaps you are starting to join the elderly in their wonder at how fast time flies.

One day seems like another. We let them slip on by. They drift along, they pass, and one day we look up and wonder where have they gone?

But this year, 2013, could very well be a special year for us. It could well be the best year for us in a very long time.

For our congregation, it is an anniversary year. We have reached the noble old age of 150 this year. Not even dear Ann Siemer is that old! It is my sincere hope and prayer that this anniversary year will be a year of spiritual renewal for our congregation. Our many celebrations and guest preachers for this year are all carried along by this prayer: that this year will be the start of a great season of spiritual growth for our congregation.

And for each of us individually, this year now before us has every right to be our best year. For we head into this year in the company of Jesus, and he is our Saviour, as his name indicates.

INSCRIBING THE CANDLE

In your imagination now, move ahead a few months to the Easter Vigil. Holy Saturday this year is early: March 30th. If you have attended that great liturgy here at Immanuel, you will recall that the service starts off on the church steps with the blessing of the fire, the inscribing of the new Paschal candle, and the lighting of that candle and other candles for the procession into our darkened church. It is a very dramatic liturgy.

The inscribing of the candle means that I take a nail and trace on it the sign of the Cross, the letters Alpha and Omega, and the numerals of the year. As I trace the numbers 2-0-1-3, I repeat the ancient words:

- ☐ Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. *All time belongs to him*, and all the ages. To him be glory and dominion, forever and ever.
- ☑ Amen.

As we head into this new year and all the years that remain to us, let us do so taking encouragement from that glorious phrase: All time belongs to him! To whom? To Jesus the Savior.

In the daily meditation from the immense writings of Charles Spurgeon, the editors chose a passage for today, New Year's Day, that seems to be a meditation on the opening words of Hebrews 4:3. They go this way:

For we which have believed do enter into rest...(Hebrews 4, KJV)

Spurgeon seems to feel that whether we live or whether we die this coming year, still we enter into God's good rest. His meditation include these striking lines:

Unbelief shudders at the Jordan which still rolls between us and the goodly land [he means heaven], but let us rest assured that *we have already experienced more ills* than death at its worst can cause us. Let us banish every fearful thought, and rejoice with exceeding great joy, in the prospect that this year we shall begin [for all we know] to be "for ever with the Lord." ...[On the other hand] A part of the host will this year tarry on earth, to do service for their Lord. If this should fall to our lot, there is no reason why the New Year's text should not still be true. "We who have believed do enter into rest." The Holy Spirit is the

earnest of our inheritance; He gives us “glory begun below.”
In heaven they are secure, and so are we preserved in Christ
Jesus...

The old preacher is right: if we should tarry this year too on earth in service to the Lord, we are preserved in Christ Jesus. All time belongs to him, and all the ages. Aye, and this good year now before us belongs to Jesus too, whose very name means Savior, and who gives us reason for joy as we serve him here below.

So, Happy New Year, in the blessed name of our Savior, two whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.