

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

January 1, 2023



## NAME

*More than what we call him*

by Drew Downs

When we started planning for children, I got *really* funny about the names. Rose had some names she liked, but I had one serious stipulation: they had to *mean something*.

There is meaning that we ascribe to names and our experiences with people. This is a huge part of the decision. You can't use a name already being used by someone you don't like. Or one a sibling chose for *their* child, for instance.

Similarly, for those going through a gender transition, choosing a name for themselves involves a similar process.

The reason we all get so worked up about names is precisely because we know they are significant. They *ascribe* meaning as much as they *describe* the person. We ought to apply this same vision to Jesus's name. It isn't simply that the holy name, has meaning, but that it gives out meaning into our lives.

# CHRISTMAS

2023

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### Sharing

This time of year, I really appreciate Saint Stephen. He's a top shelf saint.

Even though he doesn't get a *ton* of space in Scripture, only a few chapters in the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen plays big, getting a chapter-length sermon while others have to write their own letters to the church to get that kind of real estate!

There's a lot to the veneration of Stephen, making him a significant "First". He is regarded as the first deacon and the first martyr. So when we celebrate him on December 26, we can go in either direction.

Throughout history, however, Stephen's feast day has most often been marked by profound acts of sharing, particularly to the poor. While it is culturally regarded as the day *after* Christmas rather than the second day *of* Christmas, I am moved by how most of us just *know* that it is a day for generosity. Even sacrifice.

Given this history of service associated with Stephen's day, I'd like us to consider the profound place Stephen's preaching has in the story. He isn't all talk *or* action. The Spirit elevates Stephen because he is *both*.

One of our favorite sayings, attributed to Saint Francis, is "Proclaim the gospel always. If necessary, use words." Many of us love it as a corrective to a vision of preaching that is "all talk/no action." Stephen reminds us we are all to be talking and acting our faith.

With love,  
Drew

# CHRISTMAS

2023

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## FOR SUNDAY

*The Holy Name*

January 1, 2023

### **Collect**

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From Luke 2:15-21

"...and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

### **Reflection**

This week we celebrate the official naming of Jesus, which happens at his circumcision.

Two weeks ago, we had Matthew's gospel, with the angel coming to *Joseph* and telling him that *Mary* would bear a son, named *Immanuel*. Then he proceeds to name him Jesus. Which is a bit confusing.

In the eye's of Matthew, this isn't a question of consistency so much as prophecy.

# CHRISTMAS

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Matthew draws our attention to Isaiah, and a savior who would be called Immanuel, or *God with us*.

The name, Jesus, means *God saves*.

Matthew is *showing us something* with this linguistic twist. That this baby is part of God's salvation. And that he would be known as God's presence with us.

That said, we're reading Luke this week. And Luke tells the story differently.

In chapter one, the angel appears to Mary and says to her "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." So there is no name confusion in Luke—the angel says to name him Jesus and that's what they name him.

As much as modern readers might find this all confusing or a little problematic, it is clear that early Christians weren't fixated on it. That this Hebrew baby was born and raised conventionally speaks volumes for how Jesus *is* Immanuel. And how we have come to see in Jesus the *way* God is with us.

And the way that we can come to see it working here and now.

When I lived in Lansing, Michigan, there was a homeless mission downtown. It had the now familiar neon sign in the shape of a cross that simply reads "Jesus saves". I drove past it day after day without realizing it was a shelter. I was focused on this particular evangelistic form. This isn't the most useful kind of familiarity.

And yet, I was thinking from the warmth of a car, driving to work, from the safety of a home. I didn't have the eyes to see.

But for those that do, this name does mean saving.

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