

Monday November 30, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Jesus

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21*

Solomon tells us in Proverbs 22:1 that **“a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.”** For Solomon, a name is a connection to your character. It doesn't just identify someone, it tells us a story. We should desire a good name, a good character, because that is of incredible worth – apparently more valuable than great riches.

If this is true of anyone, so much more this true of the Son of God. His many names and titles given to Him through the Scriptures tells us of His character, and therefore, the character of God. After all, Jesus said, **“if you have seen me, you've seen the Father”** (John 14:9). To know Jesus, is to know the essence and character of God.

Therefore, it makes sense to begin our Advent of considering His names to begin with the name God desires the incarnate Son of God to carry: Jesus. The words of Matthew 1:21 are from the angel Gabriel to Joseph, and if the names of Jesus are to tell us of His character and of the nature of God, we are overjoyed that this is the name that is chosen.

He is Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins.” The essence of Jesus' character is to be savior. To rescue you from sin is central the character of God and His Son. It is better for US than riches that God's Son is given this highest of all names. Other names and titles accurately describe Him – Holy One, Lion of Judah, King of Kings – and we will consider them in the days ahead. But we will hear them all with the name Jesus ringing in our ears. He is holy, but since He is Jesus, He comes to share His holiness with us sinners. He is a Lion, but as savior, He doesn't devour us, but uses His power and strength to defeat sin, death and the devil. He is the King of Kings, but still Jesus, the Savior, so He will take up a crown of thorns to reign in forgiveness and mercy. He is always Jesus, our Savior.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, prepare my heart for the celebration of Your coming through the forgiveness of my sins. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday December 1, 2020
The Names of Jesus

The Resurrection and the Life

*“Jesus said to (Martha), “I am the resurrection and the life.
Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” John 11:25-26*

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.” Jesus give us the reassurance we need in dark days. Yes, God has permitted the Devil to other us and the world. Yes, death in this life still exists. And yes, sin still swarms our lives corrupts our actions and taints even our good intentions. BUT the truth remains. Our Savior; our Lord, Jesus the Christ is life! He is God Himself, who put off His divine power to live among us. He accepted even the punishment we deserve for sin, dying on the cross that Good Friday. And then He showed that He is life! He rose from the dead! He conquered even death.

Thus He is our life as well, since we too went with Him in baptism through His death to life. He is life itself, and so He is also our Resurrection. He gives us repentance (sorrow and repulsion at our sinfulness) and takes our guilt, our consequences on Himself. He makes us His own, sharing with us the life He is!

Even in the midst of sin, I have life! I find that I can share with others what I have and they don't. What others call good deeds, I find happening in my life - Because I live in Jesus and that life keeps spilling out into my lifestyle. Surrounded by dark appearing events, surrounded by intimations of doom, even death to others, my family/friends, even to myself, still that promise of Jesus brightens life. **“I am the Resurrection and the life.”** I live in Him - let appearances say what they will. I LIVE! Amen Lord Jesus.

Prayer: I thank you, Jesus, for that assurance of my life. Let me that truth blot out the world and remain in my life. Let me always trust in You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday December 2, 2020
The Names of Jesus

King of Kings

“Where is the one who is born, King of the Jews?” Matthew 2:2

Could you imagine this question? King Herod is in his home. With his family, which, was not a pleasant scene, but then these wise men come from the east. The first thing they ask this King, **“Where is the one who is born King of the Jews?”** Herod was probably flabbergasted at this question. Taken aback. Wondering what are these people talking about??

Yet, Herod is not the only King. There are many kings you could probably think of. King Henry, King George, add a couple roman numerals at it, and you could come up with many kings. Many with very successful reigns. Many with reigns that were forgettable by history. Many with reigns that were not so great.

Yet if you notice, all the kings in history, the greatest, to the least, all their reigns come to an end. No king reigns forever. **Except one.** The Christ, this Jesus, born, in a lowly manger. **THIS!** This is the one born King of the Jews! Earthly kings will come and go in history, they will fade into the back of the minds of children learning history in school. They will be remembered for a while, but eventually no one will remember them.

But there is another common factor of these kings. At the last day, they will bow to the King of Kings. They will bend the knee to the Almighty King, the **ONLY** King, who will reign forever. Our King of Kings, Jesus, our Savior, will reign eternally. Earthly kings, reign for a time, but none compare to **OUR** King of Kings. And yet even this King of Kings, humbled himself to be born of a virgin, be born as a human, and live as a man. And ultimately, take the place no King should ever be at, a cross. And his crown? Not a crown of gold and silver, but of thorns.

But not forever. Christ will reign eternally on **HIS** Throne, with His Crown, with love, for us his people. As we begin Advent, know that the King who has already come, will come again, and claim His Throne. Eternally.

Prayer—Gracious God, Almighty Lord, King of Kings, grant us your peace this Advent season. As we await your coming, give us hope, give us peace, give us comfort, that You will come to be our Eternal King. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday December 3, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Light of the World

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1:9

As a child and often today, the darkness of night bothers my frail heart. Night lights and lit TV screens only bring temporal comfort in the frightening pitch-darkness of the night. In the dark world, our hearts and flesh are corrupted in sin, and sin is frightening, but we are not left in the dark. Jesus is the true light and life come into the world for us. His true light eternally saves and comforts our hearts with faith in His life, death, and resurrection given for us. Jesus assures us and says, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”** (John 8:12).

Jesus Christ, the true light and life of men has come in the world for everyone by the will of God: **“to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** (John 1:12-13)

Just as the world needs sunlight, we need the light of Christ. After all, “in regard to spiritual and divine matters Scripture labels people by nature ‘darkness’ (Eph. 5:[8]; Acts 26:[18]; John 1:[5]: ‘The light shines in the darkness (that is, in the dark, blind world, which does not know or grasp God), and the darkness did not comprehend it.’ . . . people who are spiritually dead in sins cannot on the basis of their own strength dispose themselves or turn themselves toward appropriate spiritual, heavenly righteousness and life, if the Son of God has not made them alive and freed them from the death of sin” (*Formula of Concord, SD, Article II:10, 11*).

Jesus’ light shines in the darkness to us through the Gospel bringing redemption and forgiveness of sins through faith. Jesus’ blood frees us from the power of sin, death, and Satan. God’s Word declares to us: **“This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all . . . if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (I John 1:5, 7).

Prayer – Light of the world, Your blood cleanses us from all sin, grant us peace in the midst of darkness and bring us Your light and life which comforts us in our weakness. In Your name. Amen

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday December 4, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Christ/Messiah

*“and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people,
he (Herod) inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.” Matthew 2:4*

The history of the Jewish people in the centuries leading up to the birth of our Lord was dominated by the hope of the coming of the new king, God's anointed one, the Messiah or Christ (both words refer to the anointing that marked the installation of a king). This hope was amplified because the Exile was fresh in the minds of Israel. The people had lost their king and were, for all intents and purposes, no longer a nation. The hope of the Christ was not initially that he would forgive sins but that he would restore the kingdom of Israel.

This is why Herod was so interested in getting rid of the newborn Christ: he was a threat to the Roman authority in the region which backed up Herod's power. Of course, we as Christians have the luxury of knowing that the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the Messiah are much greater than simply a great temporal ruler. The Christ came to bring a Kingdom, to be sure, but His Kingdom is not of this world. Our Christ certainly came to overthrow tyranny and bring freedom, not from the power of Rome or any worldly rule but from the tyranny of sin and death that burdened Israel and the whole world since the Fall. He came to depose Satan and overthrow all evil.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You sent Your Son to be our Anointed One, our Christ. We thank You that You have overthrown the tyranny of death and brought life to Your people. Rule in our hearts so that we might live according to Your rule and begin today our eternal life in Your Kingdom. Teach us to worship You as King and look to Your second coming when Your Kingdom will become undeniably clear to all. We pray this in the name of our Your Son, our Christ. Come quickly, Lord. Amen!

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday December 5, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Mediator

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” [1 Timothy 2:5-6](#)

Even the comic book writers, who in their infinite wisdom thought that “Ant Man” would be a compelling super hero, never chose to make a comic book character called, “Mediator Man”. If there was such a comic book hero, what would his super power be? Well, he’d probably arrange meetings between parties that were at conflict with each other to help them reconcile with one another, right? Some super power!?!

This name for our Savior would be almost laughable if it wasn’t so critically necessary. That silly super power of being able to reconcile people with one another – you wouldn’t think that’s so mundane if you were Moses. As Moses cringed before the burning bush, I’ll bet he wished for a mediator. As he climbed Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments from God Himself, he prayed for a mediator. When he stood before Pharaoh and spoke God’s Words to the mightiest man on earth, he probably dreamed of having a mediator take his place.

How about you? Do you look forward to the Last Day, when you will stand before El Shaddai – God Almighty – and plead your case as to why our Holy and Perfect God should bring you into Paradise? Or would that be a good time to call on “Mediator Man” – the man, Christ Jesus? You see, without our Mediator, we would stand condemned to eternal death – end of story. You and I have no mediating skills that could convince God to forgive us. We excel at sinning, but we fail at justifying ourselves before our Holy Judge.

But, “at the proper time” “Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all!” Not only is our Mediator uniquely skilled at bringing us together in peace with God, He is God Himself as well as Man Himself! He rules the universe as God and He lived and died as one of us to give us His Peace. And, just when He knew we were unable to reconcile ourselves to His Father, He laid down His life on the cross to purchase our eternal Life.

Best Name Yet!

Prayer - Lord Jesus, our Brother and our Mediator, praise be to You for reconciling us with Your Father. Continue to intercede for us on our behalf. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday December 7, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1, 14

“In the beginning was the Word.” John began his Gospel with these words. He purposely began the same way the Old Testament begins, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1)

John says to us that Jesus already existed at that time. He is eternal like His Father. Through him, everything has come into existence. When He came into the world on Christmas Eve, he came to His own, to the world He Himself created. I, too, belong to this world. Even I have been made by the Savior’s hand. Nothing has come into being without Him. He has a purpose for my life.

But why does John call Him the Word? An entire book could be written about this. There is a similarity between Christ and the Word. God’s Word isn’t just “empty words,” it is not the mere names for things. It’s a creative Word, full of God’s power, of His Spirit and life. When it emanates from God, God is a part of it. Therefore, the Word can give everything God can give. It’s the same way with Christ. All that God is and has, will and does, lives in Christ. The creed says He is “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

We need to keep this in mind to get an idea of what is implied by “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Here flesh means whatever is created, whatever consists of molecules and atoms, the same kind of molecules and atoms that are found in the air and the water, stone, and clay. The Creator became a part of His creation. The Lord of the whole world made His dwelling in a man’s body. God’s Son became a human child – so we could become God’s children. Through this great miracle an even greater miracle has become possible: God can dwell in our hearts with His eternal life.

Prayer - Lord Jesus, I pray to You now for a great miracle: that You be born in my heart also and make Yourself at home with everything You’ve brought with You from Your Father. Lord, it is the greatest and most incomprehensible of all miracles that You, with Your glory and Your love, with Your purity and Your zeal, would be able to live in me, a sinner. Lord I am not worthy. You know this better than I do myself. But You became a man just so this very thing would happen. Do this miracle for me, for Your name’s sake, because You are the Savior that You are. Amen.

This devotion shared by Pastor Jason is adapted from [To Live with Christ](#) by Bo Giertz

(I could not do better than to share these words from my favorite devotional book)

Wednesday December 9, 2020

The Names of Jesus

Truth

*“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6*

Everyone searches for the truth - they seek to have a surety in their decisions to have a guide to life, a direction to follow for actions. The Truth is important, not just as a beacon or a motto, but as a rescue from our failures before God, for our errors in this life. This life is a cesspool of deception, a pit bringing only despair; But Jesus is the Truth!

Jesus flames brightly in a world of darkness. He sharpens the contrasts, exposes the shadows attempting to conceal. The Truth sets us free! Jesus shows the danger/consequences of sin, or living/being against God and His ways. Jesus pays the penalty, death! Certainly, if God lets death come to His Son when He accepts our sin, there is no escape if we try to face God on our own. The penalty we face is deadly!

Jesus is our escape. He died to set us free, to carry us with Him in His victory over death. Jesus is our escape. Jesus defeats death; having experienced death, He rose to life. But Jesus is our resurrection as well. In Him we have life - that is Truth.

Truth inspires trust. Truth molds our behavior but more our approach, our dedication. Truth gives power and substance to our faith, to that longing for stability and support which directs our lives. Jesus is that center of our life trust, of our faith! Faith lies in Jesus, Jesus who is Himself the TRUTH. Hold onto that Faith!

Prayer: Jesus, you who are the truth, thank you! Thank you for being that surety and center of my Life. Thank you, Lord. Amen!

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Thursday December 10, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Holy One of God

“And we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” John 6:69

The sinful world can hardly understand holy. Indefinitely and apart from Christ Jesus, not one can see or believe in the true holiness of God, and His love given for the world in Christ. The word Holy belongs to God and not the fallen world. Yet, the world is not left without hope. The *Holy One of God*, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has been sent into the world to redeem the world.

Peter confesses Jesus is the *Holy One of God* who has the words of eternal life. *Holy One* identifies Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the living God: This confession of faith in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of and *Holy One of God* can be seen throughout the New Testament. Even demons recognize Jesus as the *Holy One of God*.

Jesus speaks of eternal life He gives to those who hear His voice and follow Him: At the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem at the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon, Jesus was asked if he was the Christ. He says He and the Father are one, “of Him whom the Father consecrated [hallowed] and sent into the world” (John 10:36). Many wanted to stone Him to death, arrest Him, and “many believed in Him there” (John 10:42)

We confess our belief in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is True and Holy God, one with the Father:

“I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah], the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very [true] God of very [true] God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.”

The *Holy One of God* come into the world has redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil on a cross.

Prayer – Holy One of God, Lord Jesus Christ. You have come for us in the flesh; suffered, died, and rose again, freeing us from the bondage of sin and death, bringing eternal Life in Your name. Grant us grace and strength to trust in You always as You live in us. For, You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday December 11, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Lord of Lords

“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:15-16

Paul charges Timothy **"to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ"** and presents the following litany of Christ's titles as both praise and warning. It is impossible to overstate the sovereignty of our God and we should both rejoice and tremble at His coming. Advent is a season where we both remember the Incarnation of our Lord and look forward to His Second Coming when His Lordship over every lord is made apparent.

In our times, it can seem like God is powerless against the lords of our world. Human tyrants wage horrific wars and oppress the weak in unspeakable poverty. Natural disasters leave thousands homeless or worse, and the present pandemic is only the latest among countless diseases that disrupt or even end lives. In the eyes of the world, God seems impotent or, worse, uncaring. But we who are believers worship a God who delights in flouting expectations. He appears to be useless in the face of tragedy but we know that He is at work in all things as Lord of all things.

Our Lord of lords appeared as the helpless infant child of a newlywed couple born in a manger surrounded by lowly animals. Our God walked and lived among us for decades as a humble day laborer. The Everlasting One was condemned and killed with petty thieves. Yet in all of these things, He was the Lord above every lord. In his resurrection, God demonstrated that Jesus Christ's words were faithful: He was the Son of God, King over all things. Knowing that He is risen from the dead, we can be confident that there is no lord or king who has any power in comparison to our Lord of lords.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You rule all things through Your great might. Reign as Lord in us that we might do Your will in all our endeavors. Lord of lords, teach us to remember Your power that we might not question Your rule but boldly proclaim it. Train our eyes to look for the Second Coming that we may prepare ourselves for the coming consummation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in Whose name we pray, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday December 12, 2020

The Names of Jesus

Author and Perfecter of Our Faith

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12: 1-2

What rich, deep titles for our Lord and Savior: “Author and Perfecter of our Faith!” Both these words have multiple nuances and, in the case of Jesus, can be viewed from more than one angle. Jesus’ Spirit puts the seed of faith into our hearts and makes it grow and flourish and bear fruit. He creates, or “founds” our faith. As an author creates a story – a whole world, complete with people and places – out of nothing, Jesus created life in us where there was only death.

But He’s also the Author of the reason for our new life – He authored our salvation by being born as a human infant, living a holy life, and suffering and dying for our sins. Just as He authored the world itself, He authored you and me in our mother’s womb. He went on to author faith in us at our baptism, thereby authoring our adoption by His heavenly Father. And even now, He is authoring places for us to live with Him in heaven.

“Perfecter” may be an odd title, but is perfectly fitting for Jesus! Not only does he create faith in us, He makes that faith perfect. As He said, **“whoever sees me sees him who sent me.”** If we didn’t know Jesus, we wouldn’t know the Father and our faith would be futile. Our faith would be ludicrous, absurd if God didn’t know us through Jesus. Our faith could only be partial, blurred, and pointless if we didn’t know the Father by knowing His Son. And, our now-perfect faith bears fruit rather than filthy rags, as we love our neighbors as Jesus loves us.

Prayer - Heavenly Father, continue to point us to Your Son as the subject of our faith, as the Author of our faith, and as the One who makes our faith complete. In His holy Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday December 14, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Great High Priest

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16

The role of priest seems very distant to us. The notion of a high priest seems even further removed from us. But there is incredible comfort in Jesus being our great high priest.

He has passed through the heavens. Once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest would pass through the curtain into the Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God among His people. There, he would make a sacrifice for the payment of the people’s sins for that year. We have a high priest who has passed through heaven itself in order to come and be THE great sacrifice for our sins.

Yet He is not aloof from us and our concerns. He is able **“to sympathize with our weaknesses”** because He **“in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”** He knows our struggles. He has experienced the desire to sin and rebel against God from the inside, not merely as an observer. Yet He withstood every temptation, for us and for our salvation.

From these truths about our great high priest, we are encouraged to do two things. (1) **“Hold fast to our confession.”** Cling to Jesus, THE great high priest who alone can save us. (2) **“With confidence draw near to the throne of grace.”** Our Savior is able and ready to help us in trial, forgive us when we fall, strengthen us for the difficult road of faithfulness, that He knows Himself. So cling to the truth of Jesus, Son of God and Savior AND always know that you can come before Him confessing your sins and weaknesses knowing you will **“receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

Prayer – Dear Jesus, the great High priest, take my sin, give to me Your life and forgiveness, and strengthen me to endure trials through Your grace. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday December 15, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Alpha and Omega

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
"who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8*

Jesus is the Alpha (Greek first letter of the alphabet) and Omega (last letter of the alphabet)! When did the universe start? When Jesus made it! The beginning, like a spring of water, determines the nature and direction of what follows. Jesus, the loving one, who gave Himself, who experienced death who needn't have, Jesus determines what reality is!

But He is more. He finishes what has been started. Again, the Omega completes the alphabet. Far more than a period, the completer takes what has preceded and turns it into the final product. The world, starting from Adam and Eve's betrayal of their position in Eden, has been the scene of a war between God and evil. It is war which God has won, a war in which the end is determined. Jesus finished and completed the war! He pulls His people, we who trust Him, out of the hands of evil, into salvation. There is no doubt, He is the Omega, who has finished the power of evil with His sacrifice in our place.

Our Lord, the one who lives in us and, indeed, gives us the life we live. He started it all, He has finished it all. He celebrates that giving us and all believers faith and life eternal in Him. These are words for those times when, like the disciples in the storm in the lake, those times when all appears lost - then, Remember. He is the start and the finish. He is the Alpha source and Omega finish!

Prayer: I thank you, Lord, for Your victory and taking me with You. Let me always remember that whatever affairs look like, You are the finish, the one completing it. You have won! Thank you. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday December 16, 2020

The Names of Jesus

True Vine

“I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser...I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1, 5

I have never been much of a gardener. However, I do know a little about plants. And I know that one of the most important parts of plants that have vines, is the vine itself. It is a very important part. The vine for plants, is the life source for the branches. The vine is where the branches get anything and everything that they need.

Huh, sounds an awful lot like how Jesus is important to you and me. During the Advent season we wait for the return of Christ. But while we are here on earth, and while we wait and wait, we cling to the vine. The life-giving, life-altering, life-sustaining vine.

Now earthly vines give branches life through water and nutrients. Those plants then live until something happens to the life source, and the plants wither and fade.

But the vine that you and I have our life from, the vine that sustains you and me, will never die. That true vine, Jesus, gives us new life, through the waters of baptism. That vine gives us life eternal, through His death and resurrection. That vine, is vital not just to daily life, but to life eternal!

When everything around you seems to be fading, withering, lifeless, remember the Vine that came down from heaven, **to give you life!** Jesus, the true vine, and we the branches. Christ our Lord, gives us all that we need. It may not always be easy in this world, but The Vine gives us eternal water, where we will be fully cared for and tended to.

Prayer—Gracious Lord, Jesus, MY Redeemer, thank you for coming into this world not to condemn but to save. Grant me that life giving, life sustaining water, and help me to stay connected to you. My true source of joy, happiness, love, and care. Thank you Lord. Continue to sustain me. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday December 17, 2020

The Names of Jesus

Prince of Peace

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7a)

Peace in our lives today may seem very distant or very near. Living peaceably with others may be difficult when sinful thoughts and actions toward others are anything but quiet and peaceful. A hopeful end to disastrous and hostile events may bring a sense of peace. We might find peace in completed tasks, kind words, or a relationship restored, but worldly peace often fades and does not last. We need everlasting peace from God.

Everlasting Peace comes only from Jesus Christ, The *Prince of Peace*, The Messiah foretold and fulfilled in Jesus. He is the Word of God born from above who dwelt in the flesh and died for our sins on a cross, reconciling us to God forever through His blood.

God’s Word says: **“You were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility”** (Ephesians 4:12-16).

Martin Luther writes, “In the kingdom of Christ there is grace, comfort, forgiveness of sins, joy, peace. He does not deal with the transgressor in sternness, but as a father. The forgiveness of sins is justification, and peace follows justification” (Luther’s Works, vol. 16:10).

The *Prince of Peace*, Jesus Christ, reconciled us to God through His precious blood shed for us on a cross. Only through Jesus, we have peace without end, the forgiveness of sins, and hope in His name, now and forever.

Prayer - Lord Jesus, *Prince of Peace*, You are Mighty God and True Peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding guarding our hearts and minds. Because of Your blood shed for us, we are justified by faith and set at one again with God in Your everlasting Kingdom. Help us to be still in Your name. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday December 18, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Bread of Life

“Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” John 6:35

Imagine yourself in the situation of the Israelites wandering the wilderness after escaping slavery in Egypt. On the one hand, you're on your way to the Promised Land. On the other hand, the road is so hard that you think it would be better just to go back to Egypt. As cruel as slavery was, you never starved. Miraculously, God hears your suffering and sends exactly what you need exactly when you need it. Now there is plenty of heavenly bread everywhere you look. God's great mercy is so abundant that it's like the dew on the ground.

The story of manna in the wilderness has a great deal to teach us about what Jesus means when he says, "I am the Bread of Life." He comes to us in our sin, He frees us from our slavery, and throughout our pilgrimage on earth when we think that it would be easier to return to sin and eat its poisoned food, God sends Bread from heaven, Jesus Christ our Lord. He comes abundantly like the dew on the ground. There is nowhere we can go that the grace of God in Jesus Christ will be far from us. If we have Jesus, we lack nothing. He fills our souls so that we have no hunger after any other spiritual food.

As the season of Advent is in full swing, we celebrate that God has heard our cries for deliverance and sent Jesus, the Bread of Life, to fulfill our every need and look forward to the day when Christ returns and we feast with Him forever.

Prayer: Lord God, we thank You that in Your great mercy You have heard our groaning and provided for our needs both of body and soul. We thank You that You sent Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, to give to us life. Teach us to eat fully and drink deeply of Christ so that we might live forever with You. Help us also to share this great gift with those all those who hunger for You. Bless us with Your presence so that we might recognize Your mercy as abundant as morning dew on the ground. We ask all this through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday December 19, 2020
The Names of Jesus

The Image of God

“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2
Corinthians 4:4

“He’s got his mother’s eyes”; “she’s got dad’s nose (poor thing!)” If you saw pictures of my Mom’s brothers, you’d know I came from that family (it’s the “Degner chin”). It’s kind of nice to know we “fit” with our family. So what does it mean that Jesus is “the image of God”?

In the Bible, the Hebrew and Greek words translated as “image” go beyond what immediately comes to our English-speaking mind. Greek uses the word – “icon”. With modern electronics, you have a screen full of icons, each looking unique and representing an app or file. That’s what “image” means in the Bible – something that resembles something else and is its/his at-the-ready representative.

Images of pagan gods were condemned in the Bible as representations of false gods – not that the idol itself was made poorly or of bad materials, but that it was dangerous – something that pointed people to a false god. Adam and Eve were created “in the image of God”, meaning that they were created “above the angels” and have dominion over the earth on God’s behalf.

There’s a difference between being made in the image of God and *being* the image of God. Jesus is the patten – the mold – from which every person is made. That means that all people have at least a trace of God’s image by having His Law written on their hearts, along with hints of His many qualities (goodness, mercy, justice, etc.). This diminished image is because sin ruined our “view” of God when it entered the world.

Fortunately, as the Image of God, Jesus has all the same qualities as the Father – perfectly. He is the “icon” of goodness, mercy, righteousness, grace, and love. And He’s God’s representative to us – not just as a passive “point of contact” with a distant God, but as God’s mighty right arm who fights the devil, wins salvation, and brings us His Spirit. We have faith because He’s God’s Image, and that faith (at least partially in this life) restores the image in which we were created.

God is not some “faceless god”. He wraps Himself into His Creation through His Son so we can see and know Him. God’s face is Jesus, through whom we know God’s goodness, join His family, and enter His kingdom. And, living in that kingdom even now, you and I are God’s face to the world around us.

Lord God, thank You for sending us Your “Poster Child”, Jesus. Help us to see Your Image through Him and to be Your Image to our neighbors. In Jesus’ holy Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday December 21, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John
10:11

Shepherds did not always have the best reputation in the ancient world. They could be less than honest, not always hard working (especially if they were only hired hands), and they smelled like sheep. Yet Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd. In contrast to all others, he was not just good at being a shepherd, but He defined good. And as a shepherd He was completely devoted.

The good shepherd cares for His sheep: He finds pastures that are lush and green, He protects them from dangers (both attackers and the kind sheep would wander into), He binds up their wounds.

The good shepherd knows His sheep. He calls them by name and they recognize His voice. He knows which sheep are prone to stray and how to go after them.

The good shepherd leads His sheep. They are followers. Sheep are notoriously getting into trouble. The good shepherd goes ahead to make a way for the sheep.

Lots of other shepherds may do some of these things, but THE good shepherd also lays down His life for the sheep. He will do anything in order to protect and rescue His sheep.

This is our Good Shepherd. He cares for you and provides all you have for this life and life eternal. He knows you and has called you by name to be His own in baptism. Your Good Shepherd leads you. He asks only for you to listen to His voice in His Word. But most of all, He is the one who was born in order to lay down His life for you. He will do anything in order to rescue you from the predators of sin, death and Satan – and He has.

This is your Good Shepherd who leads you today and always.

Prayer – Dear Good Shepherd, help me to listen to Your voice and find comfort that You know me, care for me and have laid down Your life for me. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday December 22, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Emmanuel

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us).” Matthew 1:23

God with us! Or “Emmanuel”! Can there be any more exciting name for anyone. Can anyone hope to supersede His abilities/achievements? Who else can deal with my problems, my real problems, the evil I find in myself, try though I do to hide it. Truly only such a friend fills my needs.

My sin, my evil, hides God from me, drives me into even more troubles, my wrong doing. Only God can deal with the strength of my sin. Only God can remove that indelible stain on my character. But God is so much more than I; and my wrong stands between us. I need God to come to me, as I am trapped in evil.

But “Emmanuel”, but “God IS with us”, that name tells me that God has come to me! Here lies the secret of my rescue. Here lies the source of my joy and my life away from evil, the way one can find good things in my life. God is with me! Emmanuel.

Jesus is his proper name. Emmanuel is the description of His character. Jesus, God, took on our nature - and won. He won by dying and rising. The death we deserve, the rules our life of sin, has been conquered. We have life now, because God is with us; Jesus not only conquered death, He destroyed the power of sin over us. When we trust Him, trust what He has done, we live in Him, He lives in and with us. I am happy and live - God is with me, Jesus my Emmanuel!

Prayer: I thank you Jesus so much for coming to be with me. Your life, your death, your resurrection have changed me and given life. I thank you for being with me, in me. Please let your life be shown in mine. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday December 23, 2020

The Names of Jesus

Son of Man

(Jesus said), "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

Have you ever really taken the time to sit down and think, "What does it mean for Jesus to be fully man and fully God?" It's a question that you could find book after book on. A question that we as humans try to rationalize, but may never get to the bottom of. Why? Because God never made it known to us, just exactly what it means, but we do have some insights from the scriptures, and Mark 10:45, our reading for today, shows us Jesus tells us about the Son of Man.

The Son of man came NOT TO BE served, but TO serve.

Read that sentence again.

And to give his life as a ransom for many.

Read that sentence again.

Christ comes into this world for many, for you and for me? And NOT as earthly kings and as mankind would want.

If we are being truly honest, if we had to pick between serving and being served, we would probably want to be served. That is simply how our sinful nature works. BUT! Jesus, being fully man, knows our struggles. He knows the trials and temptations we face. Our God, knows what it is like to be man. But we also know that He is perfect, so doesn't give into any of those temptations.

Because that is the sacrifice that is necessary. The ransom that needs to be paid. A perfect human. Jesus. The Son of Man.

Remember as you reread Mark 10:45, that Jesus didn't come into this world to be put on a throne and served, but was down in the dirt, in the mud, with sinners, serving them. The Son of Man, the ransom for many, including you and me.

Prayer—Gracious God, Lord Jesus, Son of Man, thank you for coming into the flesh and living as a Man in this world. We know that you have walked as one of us and know our trials, temptations, and hurts. Walk with us this Advent season, and bless us as we await your birth on Christmas, and your ultimate second coming. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Chris Deneen

Thursday December 24, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Son of God

“This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’ . . . When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 2:15; 27:54)

Joseph - warned by an angel of the Lord in a dream, flees to Egypt with the Christ child and His mother - Mary. They flee from King Herod, searching to kill the child who was **“born king of the Jews”** (Matt 2:2). Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Matthew records the fulfillment of God’s Son Jesus called out of Egypt. Israel was referred to as God’s son, to whom He was a loving Father, as the prophet writes: **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son”** (Hosea 11:1; see Exod 4:22-23). The Israelites (most often wayward) calling and exodus out of Egypt foreshadows Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son.

We see much later in Matthew’s account, the Christ child was grown and sentenced to death for blasphemy: **“the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?” They answered, ‘He deserves death’”** (Matt 26:62-66).

At Jesus’ crucifixion, witnesses including a centurion watched over Jesus dying on a cross. They watched Jesus with the charge written above and against Him; **“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews”** (Matt 27:37). Watching Jesus crying out in a loud voice giving up His spirit, the earth shaking and rocks splitting, they confess, **“Truly this was the Son of God”** (v. 54).

The eternal *Son of God* (perfect, holy, and righteous) born and called out of Egypt; fulfilled what was written and spoken of by the prophets; was crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins by His body and blood given and shed for you!

Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad new year to all the earth.
(“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come,” TLH 85, verse 15)

Prayer – Son of God, Savior of the nations, thank You for the forgiveness of sins won and purchased for me on the cross. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pre-seminary Student Nathan Tritch

Friday December 25, 2020

The Names of Jesus

Lamb of God

“The next day (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29

On this Christmas day, we ponder the words of John the Baptist when Jesus appeared at the beginning of His ministry: **"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** Today, we celebrate the coming of the Lamb of God into the world. He came into a sinful world to redeem the whole world from our sin. Although we are familiar with the phrase in the Scriptures and the liturgy, what do we mean when we say Lamb of God? What did John mean?

The first Old Testament passage that comes to mind in the sacrifice of Isaac when Isaac asks his father, Abraham, where the animal for sacrifice was. Abraham said that God Himself would provide the lamb for an offering. He was shown to be right not only in that particular instance but in a much greater way. God not only provided a Lamb for the sins of the world, God took on flesh to become Himself the Lamb of God. This is truly an amazing gift for this Christmas day, but in His extravagant grace God has given even another vision of how we can look at the Lamb of God. In Revelation, the Apostle John sees another aspect of the Lamb of God. In Revelation 5, John writes of his vision of the glorious and victorious Lamb who has been slain. The Lamb came not only to be a humble sacrifice, but to rise victorious and rule forever. How blessed are we that the Lamb has come for us!

Prayer: Everlasting Father, we thank you today for the great gift You gave millennia ago and the gift that You continue to give to us. Teach us to behold the Lamb of God as He continually takes away our sins. Give us hearts to celebrate His coming and to behold His victorious reign. In Your Son's holy and precious name we pray, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday December 26, 2020
The Names of Jesus

Amen

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.’ Revelation 3:14

This devotion concludes our brief look at just *some* of the many Names of Jesus. And this Name – “Amen” – in many ways is the “last word” in the list. “Amen” comes to English, Arabic, and many other modern languages from a Hebrew word that meant “to be steady, faithful, true”. In Deuteronomy, it’s used by the people of Israel as a response to God’s words of Law and Gospel to them: “**And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**” They were saying that God’s promises to them, as just spoken, are good and true statements with which they agree. They were “signing the contract” with God by agreeing with His covenant with them.

“Amen” is closely tied to worship in both testaments of the Bible, as both blessings and praise conclude with that word: “**Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.**” Paul concludes many of his greetings with an “Amen” to testify to the truthfulness of God’s message for them. “Amen” is literally the final word of the Bible. In the 12th century it was first used as an English word, and a few hundred years later, Martin Luther translated it as, “this is most certainly true”.

But in our reading (above) we’re told that “Amen” is a Name for Jesus. When you think about it, what could be more fitting? That a simple, short, Hebrew word would be used to describe the Word of God? That a word that means “steady, faithful, true” would be applied the One Who came to “**bear witness to the truth**”? Who was, “**the Way, the Truth, and the Life**”?

There’s a reason that “Jesus” is the answer to almost every question in a children’s sermon. There’s a reason that in many Christian churches the word “Amen!” is shouted out after a particularly truthful statement. Jesus is God’s signature, His “Amen”, on the covenant He’s made with you and me – that “**I will by your God, and you shall be My people**”. Jesus is the “Amen” through whom our prayers rise to be a fragrant offering before His heavenly Father. And Jesus is the “Amen” through whom God’s steady, faithful, and true promises come to us. Amen!

Lord Jesus, with Your “Amen” You have saved us from our sins and brought us into Your Kingdom! Keep us forever strong in You. In Your holy Name, Amen and Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

