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St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church
The Feast of The Holy Name
January, 1, 2017

Sermon Notes

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Feast of the Holy Name—Jesus gets a name.

Hebrew tradition that on the 8th day after being born, male child is circumcised—receives the mark of being of the people of God...and apparently only the Jews did this.

Brit-milah: the first commandment given to the Jews—from God to Abraham. See Genesis 17:10-14:

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'

Why is it important that Jesus gets his name?

Important because: Joseph does what he is supposed to do. That's really all that we know about Joseph:

Carpenter

From Nazareth

Of the House of David

Has a dream with angel that tells him two things: 1) chill out about Mary, 2) name the kid Jesus.

The other part of the plan—that happens because humans are well, humans, is that the shepherds—the guys working 3rd shift—are blabber-mouths.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

I think a bit of the amazement of that original revelation from the shepherds to all the townsfolk they ran into has worn off for us today.

We are onto bigger and better things, right? I mean it is New Year's Day, the new Star Wars movie is out—Christmas is SO last week.

But we are invited by Luke, for a while anyway, to linger a bit longer at the manger. We are invited this day to pause and, if only for a moment, pull a Mary:

"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart"

The all these words were what the shepherds had revealed to both Mary and Joseph:

That what the angel had told Mary when she first learned of God's plan for her—and what Joseph had dreamed when an angel of the Lord came to him and told him what was going to happen and what he needed to do:

Has a dream with angel that tells him two things: 1) chill out about Mary, 2) name the kid Jesus.

Jesus means: in Hebrew, "God Saves."

Joseph does both of those things. Without either one of those things, the story doesn't go like how God planned it.

"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart"

We need to treasure all of these words—all of the awesome wonderment that has happened for us in the birth of Jesus. We need to stay a bit longer and linger over the incredible gift of love that has been born for us—to save us.

And, even if for a few minutes, we need to ponder them in our hearts. We need to ask questions, we need to sit with...let marinate...that God loves us so much that God gave to us a savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Here's the real ponder for us as we get back into the swing of life after Christmas—going back to work, taking ornaments off the probably pretty dried out pine tree in our house: What difference does it make to us that Jesus is born? And, does that gift of Jesus [insert line from hymn chosen for the day] inspire us to be any different than we were last Saturday night?

Amen.