

THE NAMING OF SALVATION

A sermon on Luke 2 : 21 and Colossians 2:1-13

*Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in Thy sight O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.*

Just a quick sanity check - How many days are there in a week? Not a trick question.
So it's not just me that's been going through life thinking there are 7 days in a week?



A couple summers ago I had to take some French reading classes,
and there was a certain phrase (*huit jour*) we were told to translate as a week,
though it literally means 8 days.

Do they have some sort of extra day in their week,
and wouldn't that really screw up the calendar?

Or is this some huge Beatles influence, Eight Days a Week?

It's probably just a different way of counting.



Anyway, I the translators of our Pew Bibles did just as I was taught in French,
because we have another instance this morning of "that's not what the Greek says!"

Where the Good News Translation has "a week later" the Greek says eight days.

In efforts to simplify the language, some cool details often are forfeit.

You might think I'm making too much of this - what's an extra day?

Why have seven days in a week? Time is all arbitrary anyway.

Seven is not "merely" symbolic - whatever that means

Symbolism is not "mere," but is a way of expressing patterns that are very real.

The most obvious pattern of seven is probably in music.



In music, something curious happens with the eighth note in a scale.

The first and second note don't sound too good together
the first and third are better...the fourth...the fifth - that one's important
the sixth, the seventh is a bit discordant again.

And then the eighth sounds in some respect the same as the first note.

Clearly one is higher than the other,

The higher one has a frequency of double the hertz as the lower
but they resonate in a way that they sound together as the same note.

And they are called that way.

Whether you like the Solfège scale from do to do

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or the alphabetic scale that runs from A to G and then starts over again with A.
For a while I actually forgot how the alphabet proceeds after G
because A comes after G, obviously.

With 7 - you have a set of exactly one of each, perfect in the sense of complete
With the 8th - things repeat and it is essentially the first.



There is a similar cyclical nature to time
as well as one that relentlessly keeps moving forward.
It is why every January we thinking of having a fresh start
just because the number of the year has changed.

In Christian theology, there is eighth day that breaks into the cycle.
Sunday is the first day of the week, but now it is also the eighth day.

The eighth day is a new day,
a day that exists outside of the normal cycle of seven days.
It breaks out of the cycle even as it renews it.

It is so perfect that the eighth day of Christmas
always falls on January 1st - the first day of the New Year.

(but that's rarely a Sunday
so we typically pass over this particular celebration.

It happened a few years ago in 2017,
but isn't due to happen again until 2034)



In the New Year, it is not enough to just turn the page in the calendar,
you need a new calendar.

[That's not why Christmas is celebrated on Dec 25, but it sure works out perfectly]
Keep this in mind as we think about the significance of the events of Jesus' 8th day.



Two things happen:

Jesus is circumcised as proper for a Jewish boy,
and he is Named.

The eighth day circumcision goes back to Genesis 17:12
and is repeated in Leviticus.

The 8th day is a fitting time to enter into the covenantal
relationship with God, for this too brings in a new dimension to
life, even as it renews it. A New Creation happens as the

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relationship is formed.

[Medically speaking the 8th day is the day to do it,
since that is when blood clotting elements are at their peak
- any sooner and the boy would bleed to death]

But circumcision has never been solely about the physical aspect,
which don't worry - I'm going to move on from.

Even in the Old Testament we hear about circumcision of the heart being the true aim,
of which physical circumcision was supposed to be a symbol.

And this of course is picked up in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul.

This morning we read from Colossians such a passage that tries to explain the
significance of Christ's circumcision for us.

Paul ties the idea to what happens in our baptism
- being cut off, not from a tiny bit of flesh, but rather cut off from sins.

It is Christ's circumcision that adds this important dimension

The other thing that happens on the eighth day that comparably was not stressed in the
Bible nor was it the focus of much of the early commemorations of the day.



Luke tells us that "His name was called Jesus,
the name *given by the angel*
before He was conceived in the womb."

The detail Luke emphasizes is that this name, Jesus,
was given to Him by the angel.

This emphasis highlights Joseph's obedience,
since it was his duty to officially name the child.

It also highlights that this name wasn't picked haphazardly.

Mary and Joseph didn't just say to one another
"how about Jesus - that has a nice ring to it"
This Name was given by a heavenly messenger.

Names have meaning,
many are related to words that mean something in some language.

Mine is related to the Greek word for crown, στεφανος.

Jesus doesn't mean anything in Greek,

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but the Hebrew/Aramaic version of that name is related to the word for salvation.

Yehoshua means Yahweh or the LORD saves,
the shortened version Yeshua is something like “he saves” or just “salvation”

In the Gospel according to Matthew,
when the angel appears to Joseph he is instructed:

“you are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”

In Luke much the same information is imparted to Mary,
who is also told that she is to name the child Jesus.

And when the angels go talk with the shepherds,
the significance of the child is also put in these terms:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Savior*, who is Christ the Lord.

This Name means something,
and it was given to Him in anticipation of his purpose.

and at the same time, it wasn't exactly a Name like no other.

Yeshua or Jesus was a perfectly common name in the second temple period,
even as it suited his purpose.

It was so common perhaps due to another naming convention:

To be named not because of a word's meaning,
but because someone else had that name,
someone the parents want their child to aspire to be like perhaps,
or in some other way honor and carry on the name and memory.

This isn't mentioned here by Luke,
but Christians caught on to this aspect immediately.
It is really easy to catch if you read the Old Testament
in Greek translation as was common at the time.

There is a Jesus in the Old Testament,
in fact there is a whole book bearing that same name.

We call it Joshua.

Believe it or not that is the very same name.

Remember the Hebrew or Aramaic name of Jesus
would have been something like Yeshua or Yehoshua.

There's plenty of scholarly debates as to exactly how that would have been pronounced,
or if it would have been more like Yashua.

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I can't make all the Hebrew sounds properly, so we'll just go with Yeshua. You might be able to hear in there already a similarity in sound to the name Joshua.

But rendering that name into Greek changed it since Greek doesn't make all the Hebrew sounds either, plus it demands more standardized endings so it can fall into a pattern such that people will be able to distinguish grammatically if Jesus is a subject or object or something else.

When, a few hundred years before Jesus was born, what we now call the Old Testament was translated into Greek, Yeshua, or Joshua, became Ἰησοῦς or Jesus.

In fact, if you have an old King James Version, there's a place in the book of Hebrews (4:8) that refers to Joshua, but the KJV renders it as Jesus.

Easy mistake when almost everywhere else in the NT Ἰησοῦς means Jesus.



If you think back on Sunday school lessons, you probably remember big names like Abraham and Moses more than Joshua. In fact, all I really remember about Joshua involved walls that came tumbling down and a song about the battle of Jericho. If you don't immediately see the similarities to Jesus, you can be forgiven. If you did, stop showing off.

He did lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, not just to the doorstep like Moses, but into it. There are other aspects of the Joshua story that are relevant here, if a little less “Sunday School friendly.” Much as Moses had, Joshua also parted waters for the Israelites to pass through. (well, God actually did that, but Joshua was commanding the Israelites at the time) This time it wasn't the Red Sea but the River Jordan, which was where Jesus would be baptized.

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Cyril of Alexandria comments that:

that Jesus of old [Joshua], who was captain after Moses, was a type [of Christ].

For he first of all led the children of Israel across the Jordan:

and then having halted them, immediately circumcised them with knives of stone.

So when we have crossed the Jordan [i.e. receive Baptism],

Christ circumcises us with the power of the Holy Ghost,

not purifying the flesh, but rather cutting off the defilement that is in our souls.

Joshua did not use a blade forged by human methods of metallurgy,
but one of rock.

The Venerable Bede makes the point that the True Rock is Christ,
as he performs our spiritual surgery in conjunction with our baptism.

But ultimately, the Name Jesus is not significant because of its intrinsic sound qualities, or its being unique - it wasn't, nor is it important solely because of its meaning or namesake, fitting as they are. Jesus is the Name at which every knee shall bow and tongue confess, because of Whom it signifies. This person Who is the Son of God made incarnate is given a name, and that name is thereby made powerful.

*The grass withers, the flower falls,
But the Word of our God endures forever.
(Isaiah 40:8 / 1Peter 1:25)*

Amen.