

# *In the beginning was the Word...*

*An Advent & Christmas Course from the Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney*



## **Name**

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### **Scripture Numbers 6.22-27, Psalm 8, Galatians 4.4-7, Luke 2.15-21**

What's in a name? We all have names, the words by which we are known to others. There is a difference in the way we interact with others when we have shared names. An interaction with Mr and Mrs Smith may be rather different than an interaction with Tom and Betty. When we meet someone for the first time, it's one of the first things we want to know about them. What is your name? What should I call you? A name is an identifier. It is one way that we can distinguish one person from another. Without knowing someone's name, it can be difficult to build a relationship. It is also harder to mistreat someone if you know their name. It is easy to be prejudiced against a nameless horde – it is less easy when faced with a named individual. To acknowledge someone by name makes them real, somehow. It implies a certain degree of knowledge of the other person. It is where we start in getting to know someone. Some of us may love our names, others may not be so keen. Names have memories, connections, associations. What seems a good name to some people may not be for others, for historical, emotional, or personal reasons. And what you choose to call yourself may not be what others choose to call you. The Welsh, for example, call themselves the Cymru, which means fellow-countrymen, or compatriots, originally. The word Welsh, on the other hand, means foreigners or outsiders. And the Welsh name for the English? Saeson, which means Saxons. English, of course, just means from England.

Our name is our primary means of identification. It is one thing which separates us from another person. Most of us have at least two names – our surname or family name, and our first name or Christian name. Some of us will also have a baptismal or confirmation name, after one of the saints, upon whose example we are meant to model our life. Our surname can often give clues about our heritage and genetic makeup. Names beginning with Mc or Mac indicate some form of Scottish heritage, for example. If we are adopted, we may choose to take on the family name of those we choose to belong to. If we marry, we may choose to change our name to that of our partner. In both cases, the name we choose signifies belonging to a family. In the book of Numbers, we find the Aaronic blessing. 'The Lord bless you and keep you....'. At the very end of the blessing comes this phrase 'So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them!'. This is actually a key part of the blessing; God will shine upon us, he will keep us safe, he will bless us, he will give us peace, and he will give us his name. God is choosing to make us part of his family; to adopt us as his children. And as a sign of that, he is giving us his name. From that point on, we are no longer strangers or acquaintances of God, but family. We have the right to call him Father, and he acknowledges us as his children. The Israelites – and us, through Jesus – are identified as children of God. We are his people and represent him in the world. It is as if the people now wear God's name, and that it should be worn so that all will see and believe. We carry the image of God within us, in our actions, our words, our thoughts. We bear the name of God, and this is a name which we are called to live up to. This is an enormous task – to be the name of God, to carry the name of God into this world. Thankfully, we are not alone in this task. We have with us Jesus.

Every Advent I have a 'Names of Jesus' Advent candle which is lit each day. Twenty-four different names or titles for Jesus, each one reflecting an aspect of who and what he is to us. Emmanuel, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Wonderful Counsellor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. But his primary name, the name which, in the words of our reading from Philippians, is above all other names, is Jesus, or Yeshua. It means God who rescues, God who delivers, God who saves. Before Jesus was born, he was named by God. He was to be the one who saves. This is the miracle of faith. From the very beginning of time, God was. He, although equal with God, choose to come to this earth in the form of a small child, a servant to all. He humbled himself, and was obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. This is the one who saves, Jesus, the name above all names. And to this name every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

*To reflect:* What does your own name mean? What does it reflect about your own family and heritage? Below are some of the names of Jesus found in scripture. What do those names tell you about the nature and character of Jesus?

The Word - John 1:1; The Light of the World - John 8:12 ; Rabbi/Teacher – John1:38; Lamb - Revelation 12:11; Deliverer - Romans 11:26; Prince of Peace - Isaiah 9:6; Immanuel – Matthew 1:23 ; Son of God – John1:34 ; Righteous Judge - 2 Timothy 4:8; Author of Salvation - Hebrews 5:9 ; Man of Sorrows - Isaiah 53:3; Founder and Perfecter of our faith – Hebrews 12:2; Creator of all – Colossians 1:16; Good Shepherd – John 10:11; Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords – Revelation 19:16; Cornerstone – Isaiah 28:16; Messiah – John 4:25; Alpha and Omega – Revelation 1:8; Sacrifice – Ephesians 5:2; High Priest – Hebrews 4:14-16; The Vine – John 15:5; The Christ – Mark 8:29; Saviour – 1 John 4:14; Wonderful Counsellor – Isaiah 9:6; Jesus – Matthew 1:21

*To pray:* At the start of this New Year, pray that through the names of Jesus, he may be revealed to you in a new and refreshing way. Try naming those in your community of faith, one by one, praying that this time may be a time of growth, of love, of joy, of hope.

*To listen:* Listen to the hymn 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' This is based on the ancient Advent antiphons, reflecting on the names of Jesus. What does Emmanuel, God with us, mean to you? How does the fact that Jesus is with you from day to day change the way you choose to live your life?

*To eat:* If you come from the Midlands, you may have heard of Coventry Godcakes. These are small triangular pastries which are filled with a dried fruit mixture. It was customary to give these out on New Years Day to your god-children and other members of your church community as a visible sign of prayers for blessings in the New Year to come. You could combine making and distributing these to members of your community of faith as an outward sign of your inward prayer for them in the coming year. Recipes can be found online.

*...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*