

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Importance of Names** Final Advent Days Tuesday, December 23, 2014 8:15 AM  
Mal 3:1-4, 23-24; **Lk 1:57-66** (St. John Kanty) (At the Christening, the name is handed over to Christ to mean whatever Christ wants it to mean, to be whatever God calls it to be, thereby giving power over the child to God.)

Today's gospel is about a very somewhat esoteric aspect of Hebrew, Jewish culture. It has to do with **the power of a name and the significance of a name**. The idea of naming John Zachary or Zechariah was that, well, we are products of our families, and that of course is true in one sense. You can see physically children resemble their ancestors, could be their parents or even their grandparents. They look like them. They act like them. They have certain mannerisms. This is all in **the genetic pattern called the DNA**.

But what this gospel is trying to emphasize is **that's only part of the story**. There is another part of the story. In a way, we are totally different from our parents and grandparents. We are created with a something that is completely original. We call it, for lack of another word, **a soul, a point of originality, a point of freedom, a point of something holy and directly connected to God**. It doesn't mean we don't have an inheritance. It doesn't mean our families are not important. It just means there is something else at work. **In this case that something else is named. "John is his name."** John means literally "God is gracious" or "God acts graciously." By the way, Jesus' name, *Yeshua*, means "God saves." So **these names are significant, especially because they come from the angel. So they indicate what God intends this person to be.**

Now we have to realize that really **God intends something for every person**, not just John the Baptist and Jesus. **Everyone has a name. Now we symbolize this in the Baptism rite when the parents give the name to Christ**. In other words parents don't hear an angel say, well, name your child such and such. They go in a book and they look up something or they have always liked a name or they want to honor grandma or grandpa or whatever. However people choose names, they choose them. But in the Baptism ceremony when the parents give the name to the minister, in a way **they are saying I give up my name to Christ. This is the Christening. The name is handed over to Christ to mean whatever Christ wants it to mean**, to be whatever God calls it to be, **thereby giving power over the child to God**. This is a very important thing; people don't realize how important it is.

I hate to bring this up, but there are actually people who hand their children over to the devil; they do that too, and it has some terrible effect and children suffer their whole life long because of it.

**Parents** have tremendous authority over their children. And **when they come to name their child and give that name to Christ, that's very significant. Hopefully the rest of the dynamics of the family are going to be harmonious with that gift.** Sometimes there is an interruption in this harmony, and this causes a lot of problems. But that's the idea.

Even in the rite of exorcism, an exorcist is forbidden to talk to a demon, except to ask the demon's name, because that's important. In fact, **the exorcist has to know the demon's name in order to command him** or her or it, however you want to talk about a demon, **to leave**, to depart, to free someone from this terrible oppression, this terrible obsession, or this terrible bondage.

So names are important. We have to keep in mind that **our names have been given to Christ, and we are to find our vocation from him, doing whatever it is God has called us to do.** Now the neighbors may not speak of us the way they spoke of John. **“What then will this child be?”** but that's too bad. **We should really ask that about every child.**