

4 Advent A – Fr. Val Handwerker

December 18, 2016

Cathedral

5:00 and Noon

Theme: *What's in a name?*

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What's in a name?

A family in the parish awaits this week the birth of their second son. About three months ago I asked the older son—now in our second grade here—if he's weighed in on the naming of his brother. He nodded affirmatively and informed me that he told his parents that they should name his brother either "Bandit" or "Hobbes."

I told him that I think neither name will make his parents' short list of possible names.

In a dream an angel told the sleeping Joseph: Mary **"will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

Father Jose` Cruz has three brothers. And one of his brothers is named "Jesus`." I told Father that when I was a boy I avidly collected baseball cards. I was thrilled when I got the cards of all three of the Alou brothers who played in the major leagues at that time: Felipe, Manny...and Jesus`. Up until then, I had never heard of anyone with that name—only Mary's Son. That's why I wanted all three of the baseball cards of the Alou brothers. I thought it was so neat that the youngest of the Alou brothers had that name. And I called him "Jesus Alou" until one day I heard on the radio during a baseball game the proper Hispanic pronunciation.

Mary **"will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

What's in a name? A lot.

"Jesus" is the Greek form for "Jeshua," the Hebrew name. And it's "Joshua" in English. It's usually interpreted as meaning, "Yahweh (or God) saves." Oh, if parents gave *this* name to their son, it ordinarily would mean they were naming their child after the great leader of the chosen people Israel in their conquest of Canaan.

The angel gave the sleeping Joseph—*and us!*—a clarification about the name. The angel wanted Joseph to know that this special son about to be born wouldn't save his people in the usual military kind of saving from enemies, like Joshua did. No, this son whose birth we celebrate a week hence will save in a much more radical way: Mary **“will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”**

That, sisters and brothers, should stop us in our Advent tracks! (1) What if that angel had told Joseph to name Mary's child “Harsh Judge” or “Strict Rule-Giver”?

What's in a name? A lot.

*This* Jesus will save us all from our sins! And, in case we don't really hear it tonight, on Christmas morning Mass St. Paul will remind us again of this Jesus: **“When...God our savior appeared, he saved us—not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy.”**

Almost all of us have some baggage we carry around—remorse, guilt. At times, to calm that burden within, some turn to liquor, or other drugs, or overwork...any sundry variety of ways. Friends: These days, gifts mean a lot, especially if much thought and preparation go into them. And, *this* Christmas, we celebrate in the birth of our Savior the gift which the angel wanted Joseph—*and us!*—to be sure to hear: God gives us the gift of freedom within—forgiven fully and being loved unconditionally.

This Christmas, may we accept *that* gift humbly, cherishing it—*and* our Savior!

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(1) See Dennis Hamm, S.J., “Let the Scriptures Speak” (Fourth Sunday of Advent A—December 18, 2016) @deacon.sil.com.