

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
Circumcision and Holy Name of Jesus – Year B

RCL Readings – Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4:4-7 (or Philippians 2:5-11); Luke 2:15-21

ACNA Readings – Exodus 34:1-9; Psalm 8; Romans 1:1-7; Luke 2:15-21

Seasonal Introduction. Christmas is not a day, it is a season. The Christmas season lasts 12 days beginning on 25th December and ends with the Epiphany Eve on January 5th. The Christmas season includes celebrating or remembering: the first coming of the Messiah and the life He chose to live among men; the evil of mankind in the death of the innocents of Bethlehem; and the circumcision of Jesus as God is a keeper of covenants and will never abandon His promises.

Common Theme.

Hebraic Context. In the first century, the Jewish people had a certain nostalgia and hope for redemption. And so, male children were named¹ after the Hasmonean family: Matthew (the father), Simon, Judah, Eleasar (or Lazarus), Jonathan and John. But the first commander of the Jewish army, Joshua (or Jesus), was also incredibly popular.² [Rachel Halili]³ states that as many as one out of every seven males were given the name Jesus according to the literary and archaeological evidence. But the first commander of the Jewish army, Joshua (or Jesus) was also incredibly popular.

And, of course, Jesus' name had significance, as seen in Matthew 1:21, "He will save his people from their sins." But remember, we aren't simply saved from something—our sins. Rather, Jesus is Immanuel, God with us—we are saved for something, communion with God.

Numbers 6:22-27.⁴ Every week at the end of the service, the priest declares a blessing over the church. But let's try an experiment. Write down or state the definition of blessing. How does God bless His people? We so often speak of giving a blessing (or grace) before a meal, although what we often mean is that we are recognizing the blessing, or grace, of God before a meal.⁵

¹ The Jewish custom of naming children at the circumcision is actually first mentioned in today's readings. The Mishnah and Talmud may pick up on the concept but they are written well after Luke's writing.

² The princesses of the Hasmonean family were also quite popular names for female children, as in Miriamne/Miriam.

³ Rachel Halili, book, page

⁴ Part of the Aaronic Blessing was discovered in a first temple period tomb just outside Jerusalem (Ketef Hinnom) on a silver Scroll in 1979. At the time of its discovery, it was the earliest known written passage of a Biblical text.

⁵ In Hebraic thought, we aren't simply to thank God for His blessing nor are we to bless the food—it has already been blessed by God's provision of rain, soil, and workers. We are to bless God because He has already blessed us. This blessing comes after the meal (Deuteronomy 8:10) when we have fully tasted and seen that the Lord is good. It is clear from the context that the way we bless God is to keep His commandments (מצות).

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But let's take our earlier definition of blessing and see if we can apply it with that same definition when we are called to bless God?⁶ Psalm 103 states that the angels of hosts of heaven should bless God, all of God's creation should bless God, and, indeed, we too should bless God.

I will put my name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them...?

Blessing for all Israel, not just Nazirites?

Psalm 8. Deities of the ancient world were never omnipotent. Those that didn't know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob assumed that He was a god of a specific region.⁷ But this Psalm of David recognizes that God is above all the earth—He made the heavens, moon and stars. Nonetheless, everyone in the ancient world understood the frailty of men—particularly babies and infants that could be discarded or sacrificed on a whim. Jesus' coming surely tricked people and made fools of those in power. The powers and principalities didn't understand God's plan, "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2:8). Jesus didn't come with a spotlight or celebrations. His coming was a great mystery, but one that established his strength over His enemies.

Galatians 4:4-7. It's easy to think of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the pinnacle, the central pillar of our salvation. But this verse reminds us of the centrality of the incarnation. Without the incarnation, there is no life, no death and resurrection of Jesus, and there is no salvation. The incarnation isn't about a single act, no matter how important, but God coming to dwell in human history.⁸

It is common to understand that the Roman empire was the perfect time for Jesus to come into this world—a common peace, a roadway and Mediterranean sailing that allowed for travel. But peace was never a prerequisite for the time of the Messiah. Jesus started His ministry shortly after John the Baptist—a prophet that saw many in Israel repent. Additionally, the Jewish

⁶ Mirriam Webster states that 'to bless' is: to hallow or consecrate by religious rite or word; to invoke divine care; to praise or glorify. Can we make God holy by our words? Can we invoke divine care towards God when we bless Him? And if the definition is to praise or glorify, is that what God is doing for us. In the Hebrew language, words have a large breadth of meaning. Certainly, God makes his people holy and shows his divine care for his people and we, His creation, are called to glorify God but there is also always an element of action in a blessing and not simply words. We can bless God by how we act, even as God blesses us by how God acts.

⁷ Ben Hadad, of Syria, chose to fight in the plains as he thought the God of Israel was a hill-country deity, I Kings 20:23-25, 28. Rabshakah, of Assyria, compared the God of Israel to the other regional gods of the lands, II Kings 18:22, 28-35.

⁸ Immanuel, God with us. God's plan was always to dwell among His people. From spending time in the garden with Adam and Eve to the Exodus to the prophets. When Jesus went to prepare a place that we can dwell with him—God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell among us even as He works.

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community was spread throughout the world (both Roman and Parthians)⁹ and was fulfilling God's calling to be a light to the gentiles as we can see many gentiles became God-fearers.¹⁰

also when the Jewish people had prepared the way for the Messiah—see John the Baptist and, in fact, the vast number of scholars throughout the 2nd Temple period. The roots of Judgment, morality, salvation, messiah, sin, all of it came out of the Jewish theologians studying Scripture. This happened in Jewish communities, although Gentiles were also able to join into the conversation. Also, up to 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish—double check Gregory Bar Hebraeus. 13th century Syrian Orthodox Primate. Check total population of Rome against citizens of Rome, one estimate is that Gregory misread [citizens, see census](#) with Jews. However, the low estimates of only a half million doesn't equate with the three major revolts, one of which was claimed, along, to have killed a half-million... Alexandria was well known for having a large Jewish population (as high as 30-40%, source), while also being one of, if not the largest, city in the empire...] with humans. In this time, God sent forth his son, born unto a woman, born under law to redeem those under the law.

[FN - Benjamin Sumner, "*Bodies of God*"

- Orthodox Jew
- God could take spiritual form.
 - Opposed to Maimonides
 - Understands the Christian argument
 - Difference is that a crucified man was the Son of Man.
 - Not that the Messiah could be God.]

Not Hebraic roots, but Roman Law and customs.

⁹ One source, the Syrian Orthodox Primate Gregory Bar Hebraeus, from the 13th century, thought that upwards of 10% of the Roman Empire was Jewish. This was likely a misreading of the percentage of people who lived under the Roman Empire and the number of actual Roman citizens, just under 10% (roughly 6 million Roman citizens in Claudius' census from 48 CE). Nonetheless, there was a large number of Judeans in the Roman Empire (and, according to Josephus, Israelites in Parthia). Alexandria, one of the larger cities in the Roman Empire, was a major Jewish centre with upwards of 35% of its population being Jewish. From 66-136, between the three great Jewish revolts, an estimated 1.6 million Jews were killed.

¹⁰ In the 1st century, many of the synagogues throughout the world included Gentiles (Acts 13:43, 17:1-4). One synagogue, excavated in Aphrodisias, Turkey, had an inscription including 69 Jewish donors but also 54 among those who were 'God-fearers', or Gentilic followers of God. Gentilic inclusion in the worship of the Jewish God was part of the difficulty of the early church as they sorted out how to apply God's statutes and commandments given to the Jewish people and Israel (see Isaiah 56 and Acts 15).

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- Adam is God's son
- Israel is God's son
- Jesus is God's son

Slaves were often the adopted one, the slave was given the keys to the family.

Philippians 2:5-11.

Luke 2:15-21.

Hebraic Perspective.

Optional Context 1

ACNA Readings

Exodus 34:1-9.

Romans 1:1-7. Jesus doesn't like to use the term Son of David about himself, although the gospels often point out that Jesus is the son of David and that he rules as an ideal king (or, in the minds of some people, David was the ideal king...)

Jesus mentions that the prophets, the Old Testament, speaks about him...

Declared to be the son of God – this is a hard verse. It sounds like Arianism...

Optional Context 2

Further reading.

Sources and Bibliography.