

Destiny Fulfilled: the Name we call ourselves Feast of the Holy Name 2006

Happy New Year! A new year means a new start. It is time of planning and budgets. It is a time of new growth. This is a time to look forward to new opportunities for new growth: for achievement, for study and building on the good things we bring from the past.

For the church as it should be for every person, it is a time to examine how healthy we are spiritually. We must look at where we want to be next year this time if we hope to be obedient to our faith. Will we be where God would want us in our personal journey of faith and will we be where God would want us as the body of Christ, this church.

Spiritual goals for our New Year are attainable if we take measured steps. As a church we will receive challenges to accomplishing such goals together on the fourth Sunday of January. A budget will be presented in which to carry out the spiritual and temporal goals of this church. Agreement will have to be made on what our mission truly is and what specific actions must be taken to accomplish that mission.

In his letter's introduction to the Roman Church, Paul writes that by "the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord...we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." Fellow Christians my calling as a shepherd is to bring about the obedience of faith. We are on a journey to discover what "obedience of faith" means and how to measure that obedience. Paul tells us that all God's beloved are called to be saints.

Measurements will need to be made to judge ourselves successful. One of the finest measurements given by God for us is the Ten Commandments. We might wish they were in Hebrew 'til this day and not in English. We might wish they were broken once more and forgotten. Well the truth is all have broken these tablets but they just won't go away.

In the midst of giving these measurements the LORD, Yahweh, proclaims his Holy Name and stands with us as we take the tablets into our hands and carry them each day. And Yahweh's name brings to us mercy and graciousness, steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiveness, and justice for the guilty. All those

attributes of God proclaimed to Moses is simply proclaimed to the shepherds as Jesus.

And on this Feast Day of the Holy Name we are given a name through which we must be saved. That is the name of Jesus. He alone is Lord. He is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. He is King of kings. He is the measure of our success as the people of God, a people who claim to be Christian. He has been given a name above every name and every knee shall bow to him whether in heaven or on earth.

In ancient days names were given to children and adults as a mark of identification and as a sign hopeful of their character. Modern names are apt to be chosen on how they sound with the sur-name or whose name it belonged to such as a grandparent or a famous character in history.

I was named Robert during a time when that name was popular. Looking deeper at its meaning I discovered it was an old Germanic word referring to conquest, a winner of battles. I was also given the middle name Emmanuel because of my day of birth. I suspect, little was thought about how I might live into its meaning until I began to prepare for Confirmation and

later when I made the decision to become a lifelong disciple of Christ.

Do you know that to be called a Christian is more than taking on a specific religion? It was the name given to the first disciples of Jesus. They had made decisions to follow the anointed One who was to save his people from their sins. The name Christian means literally, "little Christ." When we call on the name of Jesus as Lord, at baptism and at confirmation we tell the world we belong to him. When we hear of the angels proclaiming the birth of Jesus the Savior we too rejoice that his Name was given as a sign of what he would do on our behalf and that of the world. He became one of us so we might become One with him.

During the first days of the apostolic Church there was the practice at baptism of giving a new name to the baptized. It was "Christian," along with their earthly name. No longer were they just a Robert, or a Robyn, a Dick or Jane. Now they were to be called Christian, one that is like Jesus.

How well do we honor the name of Jesus, the name above every name in our church and in our lives? Do you know anyone that is like Christ who calls themselves Christian? These are hard questions. Even harder is to consider

how far we fall short of that Name. We are called to obedience of faith, we are called to be saints. May the Lord, the Everlasting Father who is from the beginning, write this calling on the tablets of our hearts. AMEN