

So, as it has come to pass...the time has come...when I will be joining many of you...in a new time of my life.

I am going to become a grandfather, for the first time! Wow. My son Ian and his wife Catherine told Jennifer and me that they are expecting to deliver a child in July. So, a lot of the conversation with them this past week has been about all that! It has been great.

Since they don't yet know if the child will be a boy or a girl, thinking about the name has had to be pretty expansive to cover the possibilities. It brought to mind the naming of my son back 28 years ago and how his mother and I navigated between family names and names that just felt right. It is of course a big decision to name a child.

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So, as it would happen, today, January 1, is a special feast day that remembers and celebrates *the naming of Mary and Joseph's child*. According to the Nativity stories of both Matthew and Luke, Mary and Joseph had it easy. *They didn't have to decide on a name for their child*. The name of "Jesus" *was given to them by angels*. So, in other words, *God* named the child. And on this day, eight days after the child's birth, as was the custom, the name of Jesus was publicly announced.

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Names are important to everybody, but especially in the biblical worldview, names *mean* something. And crucial names in the Bible *really* mean something. And so it is the case for the name of Jesus—the angel in the Gospel of Matthew says that he shall be so named because it means: "God will save his people from their sins", or more simply: "God saves" or "God is our help".

So, according to our story, to speak the name of "Jesus" is to speak *a name that comes from God* and describes *God's intent in bringing this person into the world*. *The very existence of Jesus is a gift, a grace, from God, intended to help*.

It is fair then to ask ourselves this morning: *Has Jesus, in your experience, helped you?*

But before we even get to that question, maybe we could begin by asking the question: "Has having a child yourself, or having grandchildren, or beloved nephews and nieces, or other persons in your life—helped you?" Maybe that is a question that we can only best answer later in our lives.

Then, has *Jesus*, in your experience, helped you?

And yes, I know, that the way that Christians sometimes talk about Jesus isn't always helpful, in fact, it has also been harmful at times throughout history, maybe even your own personal history. But having said that, has something about Jesus also *helped* you?

There are so many ways I could talk about this myself. One thing I could say this morning is that *Jesus has helped me believe in God*. When I was a teenager/young adult, the difficulty I had was not believing in God but trying to make sense of all the fuss about Jesus. But as I became older, there have been times when believing in God has been hard because the world can be so hard. And to my great surprise, it has been Jesus who has helped me believe anew. There has always been Jesus to stand in the breach, to help me begin again.

I would anticipate that your experience of Jesus would have its own distinct shape and story. It might be hard to put it into words. But I think that trying to say it...matters.