

The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus
January 1, 2017

Text: Numbers 6:22-27

Theme: “Facetime with God”

Let’s face it; it’s time to get back to the routine. The Christmas break was nice. It was good, very good, to be with family. We enjoyed the foods. We enjoyed the gifts. Most of all we enjoyed the company. But the last gift has long since been opened, maybe the decorations put away. Now, I know it’s still Christmas. It’s the 7th Day of Christmas. The tree is up here with the fully lit Advent wreath. But still, it is time to get back to the routine. Does that mean it’s time to get back to the grind?

Maybe it’s time for more Facetime. Facetime is that video call you make on your Apple Devices. I’m not pushing Apple, just what we have. We like to do this with Emma. She gets pretty excited when she sees our cat, Polly. Polly likes this type of interaction with Emma better than the in the flesh encounter. Usually after a few minutes Emma can’t help but push the big red button in the middle that ends the call. Access to such connections can be a real joy and blessing. It’s pretty amazing. You can be connected to people on the other side of the world.

But today we focus on Facetime of a different sorts. God shines His face on us to bless us. Now this is pretty astounding don’t you think. We are using the same words that God gave to Moses so long ago, some 3500 years ago. God longs to spend time with us and bless us—wow!

‘Let’s face it, God has delivered us to bless us.’ So the people of Israel could have said to one another. God is very specific here as to how He will bring that blessing about. He will do so by putting His name on the people. It’s always helpful to set the stage, to know the context of the words. God has brought the people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. By the time we get to Leviticus, they have been to Sinai, received the Ten Commandments, been given instruction for the building of The Tabernacle, the priestly garments, and the consecration of the priests. This has all been completed. They also had time to rebel with that golden calf affair. Moses has interceded for them so they have not been destroyed. They have not yet made it to the promised land. This will happen in chapters 13 and 14.

In chapter seven of Numbers gifts are brought forward for the consecration of the Tabernacle. It will be a place of blessing and God will bless through the priests, Aaron and his sons. God tells Moses they are to do it this way, with these words. “The Lord bless you and keep you.” The you is singular. Each is to know the blessing is for him or her. For the concept of “keep” envision a shepherd keeping watch over his sheep. “The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.” God will look upon you in favor, not in anger or judgement. That would be a terror. “The Lord lift up His countenance upon you (actually, it’s the word “face” once more, we have used a different word in our English translations to give it more variety?) and give you peace.” Peace, shalom, is a lot more than a absence of negatives, the presence of positives, it is well-

being. “So they shall put my name on the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” (vs 27)

This is His holy nation, the people of His own possession. He longed for good for them and not evil. In Deuteronomy 28 we read of blessings of crops, of the womb, of the defeat of enemies as they remembered the covenant and lived as His people. It was not magic. God’s name indicates His presence and the ability to bring the blessings about. As they gathered at the tabernacle bringing their offerings God would put His name on them through the words of the priests. Now when they left, they didn’t go out directionless or powerless. Maybe they should have had T-shirts, the LORD’s. Actually in Numbers 15 they are not given T-shirts, but blue tassels on the corners of their garments to remind them of the covenant.

That was a long time ago. As mentioned before we are still using the same words. As we gather as God’s people God puts His name on us to bless us. The particular blessing (the Aaronic Blessing) comes at the end. But God’s name is over us from the beginning, “In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Perhaps you have heard it expressed as “we make our beginning in...” I prefer not to do that. Yes, we make our beginning, but God’s Name is with us through out, from beginning to end, to beyond. Of course these words remind us of one big event, a very individual one, baptism, baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It’s God’s blessing to us. As we read from Galatians three of our epistle reading today, “²⁶for in Christ

Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." The Holy Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:38) to give us faith through which we receive with thanksgiving God's blessings.

How blessed we are here in this place. Here we are forgiven. Here we are affirmed. "You are mine." Here we are strengthened in the game plan, instructed on what God has called us and equipped us to do, shown what walking in His service looks like. Here we have that connection with God, that faith connection, made stronger. And then just before we go we hear the words, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." These are good parting words for they remind us that as we depart, God doesn't part from us. I said earlier maybe Israel needed T-shirts. Maybe we do also, or at least tags. On Christmas Eve I emphasized the "for us," the child given for us. Our tags could say, the LORD's, or even "God's treasure," or could say, "returning to owner." We go to live as God's blessed people being a blessing to those around us, His salt and His light.

But let's face it, that's not always evident. It's easy to lose sight of ownership, stuff that tag under and get back with the routine. It's back to business as usual and what does the face of God have to do with that?

Maybe we just need to get our game face back on. The peace stuff all sounds good enough, but we may have to really get in someone's face every now and then. Is this the face of God we want to present to those around us?

There are lots of distractions out there, some pretty faces to grab our attention, and when they succeed our lives reflect their values, you know, stuff, like more stuff, more money, more prestige, more recognition.

Israel had much trouble with the distractions, those pretty faces of predatory wealth and other gods. Those upon whom God's name had been placed, many of them, left the presence of God to run after the gods of gold, silver, iron or copper. They had been called out to be a blessing, but how could they be when they went forth and lived like all the other nations.

Then there are those frowny faces. We have a hard time seeing the blessing in the face of hardship. We do all face those, those hardships like sickness, loss of job, broken relationships, even death. We strive to walk after the Lord and still the hardship comes. When others see us do they see those who know they are blessed, or faces all scrunched up and lips pouring forth a stream of complaints?

The fact remains, God causes his face to shine upon us to bless us. God has done something remarkable. He has put on our face to bless us. It starts with that baby face. The bulletin cover today is meant to bring to mind that face so long ago, that seven day old face. Do not babies bring smiles to our faces? Think of the first time you saw the face of your child.

Yes, we have high resolution sonograms, but it's still not the same. But then you see that face, suddenly that new face is there in front of you. What a joy, what a delight! Imagine Mary and Joseph's delight in seeing the face of this special child.

Of course there is a name that goes with the face. Putting names and faces together is something we wish we were better at. So Mary and Joseph put the name with the face, the name they had both been given individually before the birth. "And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb." (Luke 2:21) His name is Jesus—Yahweh saves or Yahweh is salvation. This child is the Blessed One, the one in whom blessing is given. He has been long foretold and long anticipated. This is the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the Son of David, and more, the Son of God.

The face of this baby is the face of God. It is God in our place, God come to save us. The first blood shed will be on this 8th day, this sign of the covenant. God gave this sign to be performed in infancy, not later in life, no promises or pronouncements being made by the one circumcised. It is a reminder that God is the One who blesses. It is not human strength. Yes, on this 8th day He sheds His first blood as He is fulfilling all righteousness. It's non other than the face of God drawn up in pain at the event.

We know there is much more pain to come, the pain of rejection, the pain of faces drawn up in anger and contempt. The Christmas scene is so

peaceful. “The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.” The day of circumcision not quite so peaceful from the child’s prospective, yet only a small foretaste of the suffering to come. The day is coming when there will be no talk of peace or blessing, instead it will be “crucify, crucify!” We will see that face bloodied and distorted by pain. And we will see that face a peace as He finished the work of redemption giving His spirit into the hands of the father and breathing His last. As we look at this sweet scene of mother and child, we know what is coming.

It happened so we may indeed be blessed. Yes, we are still using the same formula. The same God who brought Israel out with a mighty hand and outstretched arm is the same God who has put His name on us at baptism. We are here knowing God’s promises, believing them to be trustworthy because our Lord Jesus lives. In Him we are transformed. We have gone from those with faces dirtied with sin belonging to those tagged for death and damnation, to those washed clean and given robes of white tagged for life.

Look at the bulletin cover again. We know where this picture was leading to, leading to the cross, and actually beyond to the resurrection, the new heavens and earth. Maybe I should have you take out your phones and snap a selfie. This you, right now, but where will you be tomorrow, or next week, or next year? Wherever, remember you are tagged for life in Jesus. God puts His name upon us to bless us. We go forth back to the routine with the good news that God has broken the routine of sin and death so we may walk and live in His light. For Jesus’ sake. Amen