

## Mark 1:4-11 – God’s Name—For Us

What does it mean for you to have a last name? It means you belong to a specific family. Your name identifies who your parents are, who your father and mother are. And in many ways, we try to live up to that name. We don’t want to bring shame and dishonor to our parents. We don’t want our behavior to reflect poorly on our family. Instead we want to honor them with our words and actions. This is exactly how it is with the name of the Lord. We receive God’s name in Baptism, we’re declared His children; and with faith, we want to live up to that name.

In our Gospel reading today, we once again hear John the Baptizer in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people of Judea and Jerusalem went out to him, and they heard his preaching. They repented. They confessed their sins and were baptized. Jesus also came to John, and He too was baptized. And in His baptism, we see the words of John fulfilled.

As John preached to the people, he always pointed away from himself. He always pointed to the One who’d come after him. He said, **“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** At Jesus’ baptism, He was revealed to be the mightier one who came after John.

Immediately, after Jesus was baptized and stepped from the water, the heavens were ripped open and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of God the Father was heard: **“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”** God proclaimed Jesus’ identity. He declared Jesus’ sonship. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God; He is the promised Savior. And in His baptism, He was marked for this saving work.

God the Father sent His Son, born of the Virgin on Christmas Day, to save His people, not from some earthly enemy, but from sin and death. That’s why He was given the name Jesus. That name means “The Lord is salvation.” Christ Jesus took on our flesh at His birth so that He could take on our sin, so that He could stand in the place of sinners, our place, and receive the just punishment for our sin. His baptism pointed to and marked Him for this work.

The people who came out to see John were sinners: tax collectors, cheats, thieves, liars, abusers, adulterers, murderers; and they confessed their sin. They were baptized in the Jordan for the forgiveness of sins, and Jesus, the perfect, sinless, Son of God was there too. He stood side by side with these sinners and He stepped into the same river water that they did, taking their sin upon Himself, becoming sin for them, so that He could carry it to the cross and pay for it with His death.

This is why God the Father declared His good pleasure in Christ, because He was fulfilling the plan of salvation that God had laid out before the foundations of the world. Before He spoke everything into existence, the Father knew that we’d sin. He knew that we’d turn from Him and that we’d listen to Satan. And because of this, we justly deserve the punishment of death. But God the Father wouldn’t let this be for you.

The Father created the world knowing what would happen, with the plan to sacrifice His Son for you, to save you from your sin. That’s the depth of His love. God gave up His Son and sacrificed Him on the cross in your place, so that He could have you, so that He could give you His name, so that He could declare you His child.

God gives you His name in the waters of Baptism. The same God who spoke all of creation into existence calls you His child. He makes you a new creation, joining you to Christ your Savior both in His death and His resurrection. St. Paul says, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”** Your sinful self was crucified with your Lord. Your sin was put to death so that you’d no longer be enslaved to it. The guilt of your sin is forgiven and you receive everlasting life in Christ as a child of God.

In the rite of Baptism the pastor made the sign of the cross both on your forehead and on your heart, marking you as one redeemed by Christ. And as he poured water over your head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, God placed His name upon you. You are part of His family and heirs of everlasting life with Christ. The Spirit who descended on Jesus in the form of the dove also descended upon you, and He created faith within you. This faith wants to live as God's child. It wants to live up to the name that God has given to you.

When the people came out to John to confess their sins their repentance wasn't just lip service. It was a turning from their sin and it was seen in action. Having received John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins, the people were changed, they showed fruits of repentance. They didn't live the same sinful lives they did before, and neither should you.

Having been baptized into Christ, walk in the newness of life. Leave your sinful life behind. Don't lie and cheat. Speak the truth, be fair to others. Don't be an abuser and adulterer. Live sexually pure lives in thought, word, and deed; honoring your spouse and the bodies of those around you. Don't be a murderer, both in word and action. Speak well of others, help one another in physical needs. Live holy lives according to God's Ten Commandments. Show forth the righteousness of your Savior that you receive in your baptism.

Will you do this perfectly? Absolutely not. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't strive to live up to the name God has given you. St. Paul says, **"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"** God has graciously forgiven you and given you the gift of life in Christ. You didn't earn it with your works, but your works do show the life you have.

In the waters of Baptism, you receive God's name. You're joined to Christ Jesus your Savior. Your old self was nailed to the cross with Him, and your new self was raised to life with Him. In this new life, live according to the name you've been given. Don't go back to your old sinful life that leads to death. Live faithfully to your calling as a child of God: repent of your sin and show forth fruit of repentance.