

Introduction: What Christmas joy to have God's name given to us in the birth of Christ! At Bethlehem, God took His Son and gave Him the lowly name "Jesus", knowing full well how that name would be blasphemed and abused by this unbelieving world ... and even promised to listen to us every time we use that name in prayer! What an act of grace for the Father to give His Son a name we could hold onto – an act every bit as profound as His giving His Son a body! May this week's notes inspire us to new gratitude as we contemplate the privilege of knowing that God has indeed condescended to our weakness by giving to us the name 'Jesus' to use.

Monday: read Judges 13:15-23. From the beginning of time, mankind has sought to inquire into the nature of the name of God. The response to Manoah's request for a name for the Angel of the Lord still holds true from Judges 13:18:

*"Why do you ask my name? It is **beyond understanding.**"* (or in the ESV) ... *And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is **wonderful?**"*

The word here means *absolutely and supremely wonderful*. In other words, we have an ineffable God whose infinite and holy nature we are not able to comprehend: because of our fallen reason and sin nature. No wonder Manoah was terrified upon discovering that this "Angel" was actually the Lord Himself, (Judges 13:22)! He had not understood the awesome name or the holy nature of the One who spoke to him! Yet how comforting Manoah's wife's words of peaceful assurance in Judges 13:23: *His wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."*

What a comforting realization that the first name we are permitted to give God, by virtue of His willingness to grant us forgiveness through sacrificial blood, is the "God of Peace." This is what Manoah's wife realized: that there was peace between this Divine, angelic visitor and Manoah's family because the sacrifices had been accepted and had risen to Heaven with a sweet, sacrificial savor! As if to underscore how pleased the Angel of the Lord was with their sacrifice, He ascends in the very flames of the sacrifice back to God's throne in Judges 13:20!

Meditate and Pray: How comforting for us that our ineffable God has revealed Himself to us as the "God of peace." In other words, with all the temptations and obstacles which threaten our life of faith, we can still have peace. By virtue of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, God is at peace with us, and will undertake *everything that was necessary* in order to preserve that peace between us and Himself! What abundant grounds for thankful prayer we have this Christmas season, knowing that Christ Jesus has purchased peace for us by His blood.

Prayer: *"Lord, give me peace of conscience; here is Christ's blood, the price of it."* (Spurgeon)

Tuesday: read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2. At our conversion we first call on the "God of peace" to provide us with peace through Christ's blood. But such peace is to grow in our lives and experience beyond those early days of Christian faith. This is because

it is connected to the living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. In terms of John 14:27, it is Christ's own peace which He gives to us – by virtue of His identifying with us as a real Savior who took “our flesh and bones” as His own! Because He abides in our nature, we can grow in our communion with Him and His peace can increase in our lives.

But now we must also learn today about the *twin gift which God gives besides peace, (namely), grace*: It is by pardoning grace that we are saved, as Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us. But such a gift of ‘grace’ always brings peace with it - since it is the *quality* of God's saving grace towards us in Jesus Christ which conveys peace! This is why Paul opens and closes almost all of his letters with that precious couplet: “Grace and Peace”, (2 Thess. 1:2). He expects that peace to grow as we increase in our appreciation for the perfections of Christ's saving grace!

Meditate and Pray: Thank the Lord Jesus Christ for this second name of God which we can use and appeal to in all our daily and desperate needs: “The Lord of grace”. Thank Jesus especially that it is His personal presence which especially is identified with grace. It is His grace which is sufficient for us in all our afflictions and circumstances! Sing about such grace as it issues in peace in hymn # 699 in our Red Trinity hymnal:

Like a river glorious, is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious, in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth, fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth, deeper all the way.

Refrain

*Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.*

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there. *Refrain*

Every joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do.
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true. *Refrain*

Weds/Thurs: read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 and Deuteronomy 12:11: God so closely associates Himself with the gifts and graces He gives that He wraps these gifts within the very structure of His names! For example, neither peace nor grace are commodities which we can order online when we run low. They are gifts which only come from the Lord's personal presence with us through His names. That is why, in the Old Testament in places such as Deuteronomy 12:11, God required that His people seek for all needed spiritual help at the place “where He caused His Name to dwell”. It was only there, where His Name could be accessed

through the proper priesthood and in accordance with the required blood sacrifices, that Israel was to fulfill the vows which they had taken in God's Name, as well as enjoy the glory of His presence in worship. Wherever the Name was to be found, there was power and glory.

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to give your church family access in worship to the power and glory of the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us depend on Christ in accord with all the saving grace His Name promises us, using hymn # 378

*Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face;
Here would I touch and handle things unseen;
Here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.*

*This is the hour of banquet and of song;
This is the heavenly table spread for me;
Here let me feast, and feasting, still prolong
The hallowed hour of fellowship with Thee.*

*I have no help but Thine; nor do I need
Another arm save Thine to lean upon;
It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;
My strength is in Thy might, Thy might alone.*

*Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness:
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood;
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace;
Thy Blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord my God!*

Fri: read Luke 1:26-35. As we admire the work of God the Father in furnishing His Son with all He would need to be the perfect Savior in our nature, let us not forget the work of the Holy Spirit who was the Craftsman, "putting flesh" to the human blueprint which the Father had designed. It was the Holy Spirit who went into the dark "studio" of the womb of Mary to produce His greatest work in the birth of the Christ child! This is why, in answer to Mary's wondering question, "How will these things be?", (Luke 1:34), Gabriel tells her that it will be the Holy Spirit's "overshadowing" of Mary, (Luke 1:35), that will produce the miraculous conception of the Christ-child: in our nature, yet without sin! Because of this "holy" conception, the angel declares that the one to be born would *not merely be called "Jesus", but also "Son of God"* (Luke 1:35)!

Meditate and Pray: Thank God for the sending, not only of His Son to be our Savior, but of His Spirit to be the creator of our new humanity: first given to Christ, and then shared with us through the miracle of being "born again" by the Holy Spirit! As one of the best known of Christmas carols puts it:

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell; o come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*