

Daily Devotional, Thursday January 1, 2021
Feast of the Holy Name
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

Psalm 103, 148

Genesis 17:1-12, 15-16; Col. 2:6-1`2; John 16.23b-30

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Old Testament Reading, Genesis 17:1-12, 15-16

17:1When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' 3Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

4 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.' 9God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. 13Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'

15 God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.'

David's Reflections

The year 2020 has been the second worst twelve month period in my individual life, second only to the year of our divorce, 1992. The stresses of COVID associated with trying to keep a parish safe from illness and trying to preserve some semblance of common life, plus the death of my younger brother yoked to yield a rather dark time. From a national perspective, few years in my journey of 76 compare to this one for darkness and turmoil and stress. Here's hoping that watching 2020 recede into the rear view mirror will be accompanied by a more pleasant forward view in 2021.

Today, the first day of 2021, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name. I am feeling especially joyful about this feast day as a marker of a new beginning. Every Jewish son was circumcised the eighth day after birth and named in that ritual. Joseph had been instructed by the angel (Matthew 1) to name the boy Jesus (Hellenistic form of the Hebrew Joshua). That name, common among first century Jews, means something like "God is salvation."

Abraham experienced God's call to leave his homeland and wander in a land that would belong to his descendants (Genesis 11-12). He and Sarah were childless in their old age, but God promised them many descendants (Genesis 12, 15, 18). According to the Genesis record, when Sarah gave birth to Isaac, God commanded Abraham to circumcise him and every boy born to them. Circumcision was to be a distinctive mark of this new people God was creating in Abraham and Sarah.

Joseph and Mary were obeying this command and perpetuating that ancient practice in the circumcision and naming of Jesus. He was a Hebrew, adopted by Joseph as his own in the ritual of circumcision and naming. Circumcision served as a boundary distinction, a way of identifying oneself as a Hebrew, one who had hope in the promises made to Abraham. (Note Paul's statement to that effect in Philippians, "circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin," Phil. 3:5.)

In his adulthood, Jesus demonstrated a distrust of the traditional boundaries bequeathed to him as markers of the identity of his people. He touched the unclean, shared table with the despised, and called on his fellow Jews to stretch the boundaries of community to include those normally excluded (Luke 15, 19). The resistance of key religious leaders to this call to reconciliation was a driving force in Jesus' rejection and death.

On this first day of the new year, what are the boundary markers that distinguish us as Christians? As Episcopalians? Obviously, the former are much more basic. To me, the primary boundary marker is faith. Faith in Christ most distinguishes a Christian from a nonChristian. If we live in the spirit of Jesus, we want to be cautious about making the boundary between us and nonChristians anything other than permeable; we want our style of life to be inviting and desirous of their inclusion.

Lines from Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" speaks of that caution.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

.....

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.

[*The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), pp. 33-34.]

Collect of the Day, The Second Sunday after Christmas Day

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 214)

On January 1st, we celebrate the Circumcision of Christ, the Feast of the Holy Name. For an historical note, readings, and prayers see the web link Web site: http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Holy_Name.htm and *Lesser Feasts and Fasts: 2003*, p. 114.

Collect of the Feast of the Holy Name

Eternal Father, who gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.* (*LF*: 2003, p. 115)

A Collect for Guidance

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP 100)

Of the Holy Trinity

Almighty God, you have revealed to your Church your eternal Being of glorious majesty and perfect love as one God in Trinity of Persons: Give us grace to continue steadfast in the confession of this faith, and constant in our worship of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; for you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 251)

A Prayer for Light

Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O Lord; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, Jesus Christ, *Amen.* (BCP, 111)

A Collect for Mission

O God of all the nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in your image but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that, by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and worship you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 257)