

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Mary,
The Holy Mother of God

+

January 1st vies with February 2nd as the Catholic feast day with the most titles or names ascribed to it! That is because so much is going on. The first day of the secular year, New Year's Day, is also *The Solemnity of Mary Mother of God*. It has also enjoyed the title of *The Circumcision of Christ*, and *The Holy Name*. Since the Church celebrates Christmas for a season up until The Epiphany, this day is also called *The Octave Day of Christmas*. We have so many causes for celebration. No wonder Christmas is a season and not just a day!

Holy Scripture tells us when eight days were fulfilled the Child was called JESUS. What is the big deal about a name? The answer is *plenty*! You and I are annoyed, and rightly so, when someone calls us by the wrong name. Our name is so closely linked with our identity we do not want anyone being careless with it or mistaken about it. Your name is not a PIN number. Your name is your personality encoded in a word.

The ancient Jews did not think there was anything funny about the Name of God! They knew His Name was connected to His personality, and that meant to the mystery, power, and danger of holiness. They were *afraid* to even use God's Name, and so in their Scriptures they would leave a *big blank space* when it came to mention God's Name, or they would refer to Him by His attributes. That is why the Psalmist says, "Our help in in the *Name* of the Lord." That is why Our Lady says, "And holy is *His Name*."

Christmas changed all that! God was given a personal Name and we were told to use it. The Name JESUS was formally given on the Eighth Day of Christmas, and the use of that Name created a familiarity the ancient Jews could not understand. Being born in a stable and dying on a cross are things that can happen to a real person. When real people stub their toes in the night, it hurts. And that is *exactly* the point. Jesus still had all the mystery, all the power, and all the holiness. But at Christmas God was born incarnate, *in our flesh*. Almighty God always was personal: expressing, enjoying, and sharing the personal love of the Holy Trinity. The Old Testament prophets glimpsed this Divine personality when they portrayed God as a Father or Husband to Israel. Nevertheless, for the ancient Jews God was pure spirit. Now He was also incarnate. That was the game changer. God could

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Mary,
The Holy Mother of God

+

leave footprints in the sand at Nantasket Beach! And He could be called by a Name.

At the Incarnation the relationship between God and man entered a new stage. On our part, it took time. Only in the Middle Ages did preachers like St Bernard begin to single out the Name of Jesus not with less awe, but with real intimacy and love. Christians began to understand that the sweet Name of Jesus makes us feel at home with the Lord even as His holiness also reminds us of our sins.

In a huge multinational corporation you may never ever get to meet the chief executive officer, much less achieve a first-name relationship with him. But in the largest organization of all, (and the oldest by far in continuous existence, the Catholic Church), you are *required* to not only meet the CEO but to get on with Him intimately right *from the start*. The Great Forty Days before the Ascension Day are the lasting impression of this new relationship. Jesus stands with us in the Easter Garden, calls to us on the Emmaus Road, and sits with us at table in the Upper Room. At the miracle breakfast on the beach, we kneel with Peter and hear the Master say “Do you love Me?” And when we say we do, He graciously lifts us up and tells us, “You can call Me by My Name. It’s Jesus.”