

KNEELING IN BETHLEHEM
Advent Sermon Series: "Power in the Name"
November 30, 2014 –Philippians 2: 1-11
The Church of the Covenant

Have you already pre-planned Christmas and do you already know how it will come this year? Then, may I say, you are choosing not to kneel in Bethlehem. Our wonderful scripture verse from Philippians notes that there is a day coming when at the mention of the name of Jesus, *"the name above every name", "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2: 9-11) There is POWER in the name of Jesus. When we name the name of Jesus we invoke His presence and He comes to us. When we name the name above every name then Jesus comes and all the power, love, grace and majesty of God with Him. In Advent this year we are studying the importance and power in the name of Jesus, why He was named what He was named. For our purposes today, I am saying that naming the name of Jesus Christ at Christmas is the very thing that brings Christmas, that invokes Christmas, if you will, and that makes it spiritual present and vitally real within our heart and life. There can be no Christmas without the name of Jesus at its center. And to experience Jesus at Christmas is not only to name the name above every name, it is also to kneel before Him, to bow down and humble ourselves before the Christ Child, in the Christian poet Anne Weems wonderful phrase, we must be "KNEELING IN BETHLEHEM".

A lot of very wise and smart people in Jesus' day missed the coming of the Christ Child. If you search the prophets you will find a seeming contradiction. Some things suggest He will be born a child, "a little child shall lead them". But some suggest that the Christ will come in power, as Messiah and Lord and King. Our scripture for today is really about the advent of Jesus coming at the end of all days, at the final judgment, when at a mighty thunderclap, the clouds will open, the trump will sound, and He will descend out of heaven to judge the quick and the dead. Indeed, in that coming, future day, all of creation, as it says "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (v. 10) will hear the name "JESUS" and bow before Him as Lord, to the glory of God. Jesus will come in power, at the head of an innumerable angel army to reclaim His Father's creation and to be named as Savior and Lord of all the earth. This is the "Second Coming". Jesus comes in power. There is POWER in the name.

So the scribes and the Pharisees and the high priests all were expecting Jesus to come in power. They had missed the other quieter, weaker, milder version of His advent. The Messiah wouldn't come from Nazareth, they huffed. He wouldn't be a simple peasant and a carpenter to boot. He would be like us; He would act like us and dress like us. He would be self-righteousness personified, as are we. He would believe as we believe. And He would come to throw out the hated Romans, not love and convert them. He would preach holiness, not grace; righteousness, not mercy; justice, not forgiveness. WE KNOW who this Messiah would be. And this Jesus from Nazareth, whose advent comes in a manger, this is no Messiah; this Jesus is no Christ, no anointed One. They did what we human beings always do. We reach a conclusion, a judgment, and then fit all the evidence into the conclusion we have already drawn. We don't like some person or some issue and so we gather evidence to support our already foregone conclusion. We ignore all evidence to the contrary. This person is no good and so we ignore something good they do. This person doesn't love me so we ignore all the ways they have tried to demonstrate their love. This person isn't a Christian because they don't agree with my perspective and ergo then I do not see all the evidence that indeed they are a Christian. I always like to say –I am never WRONGER than when I think I am RIGHTER! So the learned and scripture wise people of Jesus' day concluded that Jesus couldn't possibly be Messiah and then assembled evidence from their narrow perspective to support their already foregone conclusion. They expected the Messiah to come on the clouds of power

and glory. Instead, Jesus came to little Bethlehem, born in a manger, born of unimpressive parents, hailing from an obscure backwater. This Jesus couldn't possibly be Messiah. So they missed His advent and His birth, His life and His salvation. Their pre-conceived conclusions kept them from seeing truth.

We do this with Christmas, of course. Christmas is going to be the presents we unwrap around the tree with our family. Its about sending and receiving Christmas cards. Christmas is going to be a nice turkey dinner. Christmas is going to be getting out all the decorations. Christmas is going to be giving and receiving presents. Christmas is going to be hearing Christmas carols while we go shopping. But maybe that's our conclusion of what Christmas should be. Maybe that's not how Jesus is going to choose to come to you this year. There's how WE choose for Him to come; but there's how HE chooses to come. Maybe our conclusions are getting in the way of really experiencing the Christ Child this year. Maybe we're just being like the Scribes and the Pharisees and the High Priests in shaping the Messiah how we want Him to be and how we want Him to come?????

So I want you to try something with me this Advent season. I want you daily, please, to name the name above every name. I want you to take time to say over and over again, "JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, JESUS, JESUS." "Jesus, come into the midst of my Christmas." "Jesus, I surrender my plans to Your far better plan." "Jesus, I give up my ego, I offer You gifts of my own self-will and what I want." "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, name above every name, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, I lay my pride down at the foot of the manger. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, I choose to kneel in Bethlehem this year." JESUS, JESUS, JESUS. I invoke Your name. I invoke Your presence. I invoke Your power. I invoke You to come and make Christmas as YOU choose this year. At Your name, Jesus, I bow before You and I confess You as Lord...

If you are willing to invoke the name above every name this December then I will tell you what to watch for. You will see the presence of Jesus show up and in that moment you will experience Christmas. Maybe it's the clerk in the department store, who's trying to calm the angry line of people who have come in to buy what you came in to buy, the perfect toy for your child that was on special, and that now they are out of them. Such anger in the midst of celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace! And when it comes your turn, instead of giving this poor clerk a piece of your mind, you say, "I am sorry and I want to apologize to you for all these angry people; I pray that for all of this anger you will receive many blessings of peace and love and joy this Christmas. God bless you and Merry Christmas." I bet that store clerk's whole being changes and I bet that you experience Christmas for free, instead of buying the latest Play Station. JESUS, JESUS, JESUS. Or maybe someone comes up to you on a street corner with a sad story that they haven't eaten today. And instead of just throwing a dollar bill at them because you are too busy and running on to your next assignment at Christmas, instead, you take them to McDonalds and talk with them and find out about their life. Something that no one has done for a very, very long time. I bet you experience Christmas in that moment and it only cost you a Big Mac. JESUS, JESUS, JESUS. Or maybe you volunteer to help take the Angel Tree gifts down to Turning Point this year, when you clearly do not have the time to do it and it will mess up your plans to bake Christmas cookies, and instead of just running in and quickly dropping off the gifts you take some time to sit and speak with one of the girls who are there, with her child, and a little afraid, and not having much of a Christmas. And suddenly as you are speaking with her, you hear a little baby cry, and then you know where the manger in Bethlehem is for you this year, right over on Main Street, talking with someone whom the world has largely forgotten. JESUS, JESUS, JESUS.

I love Anne Weems poetry and as I conclude want to share this poem with you...

*If there is no cross in the manger
There is no Christmas.
If there is no commitment in us
There are no Wisemen searching.
If we offer no cup of cold water,
There is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh.
If there is no praising God's name
There are no angels singing.
If there is no spirit of alleluia
There are no shepherds watching.
Then, "Merry Christmas" mocks the Christ Child,
And the Holy Family is just a holiday card
And God will loathe our feasts and festivals.*

*If Christmas is not NOW,
If Christmas is not born into the everyday present,
Then what is all the noise about?*

Name the name about every name. JESUS, JESUS, JESUS. Name often and with each breath the name of Jesus this December. As we invoke the name, we invoke the presence. And the Lord Jesus Christ will come. But make sure that first we humble ourselves, and lay down our own wants and plans and conclusions. Make sure we are first KNEELING IN BETHLEHEM...

You know, beloved, you might as well kneel in Bethlehem this Christmas. Because the day is coming when at a thunderclap a trump will sound, and the clouds will part, and the glory of the Lord will shine all around, and Jesus will come in HOLY POWER. Jesus Christ, the name above every name. For at the name of Jesus every knee will bow...and every tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father. We might as well kneel today. Because one day we will all kneel. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*