

Sermon – Luke 2:15:-21; Galatians 4:4-7
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Name of Jesus – Year A
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“Born to Bring Redemption”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. 2022, now in the review mirror, was the year that NIL took over the college sports world. First allowed in 2021, NIL is short for “name, image, and likeness,” and refers to college athletes now being allowed to profit from the rights to their own names, images, and likenesses. Until a few years ago, it was against NCAA rules for students to earn money in such ways; now, big time college athletes can earn in the ten thousands, hundred thousands, or – in a few cases – even millions of dollars per year. Even small-time college athletes can earn a few bucks here or there through branding and partnership deals. The big-money industry that is college athletics now financially benefits the young women and men who make it possible. Some may say a free education is benefit enough, and maybe they’re right. On the other hand, telling young people they can’t earn any money while participating in college sports is a bit ridiculous. Either way, NIL is here to stay, and the college sports landscape is shifting to accommodate the new reality. Clemson University football coach Dabo Swinney was recently asked about NIL; the coach, who wears his Christian faith on his sleeve, playfully smirked and said, “We built this program on NIL. We really did. It’s probably different from what you’re thinking, though. We built this program in God’s name, image, and likeness.” Now, some might think it’s inappropriate for an employee of a public institution so speak in such a way. Others might find it a bit heretical to suggest that a football program is like God. I mostly just think

that if God were to be made visible through a football team, would it really be so . . . orange?

2. Today is not only New Year's Day. Today, the Eighth Day of Christmas, we celebrate the Name of Jesus. Other Christians refer to this day as the Festival of the Circumcision of Christ. Today is a day to reflect upon the name, image, and likeness that God assumes in this world in the Incarnation. We hear the end of Luke's Christmas gospel, with one verse added: "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." While the makers of the lectionary perhaps included verses fifteen through twenty because one verse does not a gospel reading make, this single verse is packed with proclamation about who Jesus is and what he has come to do.
3. Jesus, as you likely know, is the same name as Joshua, one of Moses's twelve spies and the leader of the Israelite tribes after Moses's death. It is Joshua who leads the people into the Promised Land after their enslaved suffering and wilderness wandering. Joshua's name means, roughly, "Yahweh is salvation." When the Son of God is born into this world, what name is he given? Jesus, Yahweh is salvation, the One who will lead all tribes, Israelite and gentile, out of our suffering; the One who will break the chains of our slavery to sin.
4. Earlier in the gospel, the shepherds are sent by the angels to "see this thing that has taken place," the birth in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. They go, not to find a mighty warrior or a garish king, but a little baby of low estate. In the wonder and mystery of the Word made flesh, our eyes our opened to see God, and God is the little One in the manger. This Jesus is, as Paul writes to the Colossians, the image of the invisible God. What is God's image? What does God look like? Like this little One, born lowly and

later laid low in the crucifixion. This is what God looks like, One willing to become weak in order to save and redeem us.

5. On the eighth day, Jesus was brought to be circumcised. Why? Because he was a Jewish boy in every way, which means that he was fully human, born, as Paul writes to the Romans, “of a woman” and “under the law.” His humanity is of the exact same nature as yours and mine. Born under God’s covenantal law, he is put under the knife at this tender age, shedding blood for the first time, but not the last. His circumcision marks him as a child of the promise made long ago to Abraham and Sarah, and it foreshadows the greater sacrifice that will follow. In the fullness of time God takes on the fullness of our flesh, bloody and breakable, in order to redeem us. As St. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote during the trinitarian debates of the fourth century, “that which He has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.” This Cappadocian Father’s view won the day, for it is rooted in the biblical witness. Paul, again, this time to the Philippians: God in Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” Jesus, alike to us, is able to save us because he is God, and because he is one of us. Joined to us, Jesus joins us to the life of the Triune God.

6. Jesus, God Incarnate, bears the name, image, and likeness of God into this world, and he does so to save us. We were made in God’s image, too, but through willful sin have found this image marred, disfigured. In a blessed and happy exchange, Jesus assumes our nature and lot that we may receive his. We who were dead are reborn through baptismal waters; we are raised, redeemed, and righteous on account of Christ. We are renamed as God’s sons and daughters, heirs of a glorious and eternal inheritance. Named anew in baptism, we are renamed each week as we come to receive Christ’s true body and blood in the Eucharist. Rowan Williams, erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury, writes, “hearing ourselves named and remade as the Body of

Christ,” we “move to a new place within creation itself, naming it with gratitude and delight instead of fear and the lust for power.” And that, friends, seems as good a New Year’s resolution as any, if you’re still looking to make one. I know that my life would benefit from a little more gratitude, a little more delight; perhaps yours would, too.

7. Today, as we greet the New Year, we welcome anew our Savior and Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is God who will save. He is the image of the invisible God. He bears the true likeness of humanity. On this Eighth Day of Christmas, we anticipate the great eighth day of Creation, when this world’s cycles of sin and sorrow will give way to a new dawn, in which God’s resolutions will resolve in the coming of a new Kingdom with Christ at its center. May we live this year with Christ at our center, bearing his name in faith and looking to him with hope. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.