

#10 – The Holy Name of JESUS
“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in all the earth.” – Psalm 8:1.

“Thou Shalt Call His Name Jesus”

When the Eternal Word, God’s Son, became a Man, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the heavenly Father did not leave the choice of His Name up to St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin. The Father gave them specific directions as to the choice of a name when He sent His angel to St. Joseph in a dream and said, “Thou shalt call His Name Jesus” (St. Matthew 1:21).

The Name chosen for God’s Son when He became also Mary’s Son exactly describes Who He is and what His work is; because the Name Jesus means “Savior,” in the Hebrew language. As the angel said, “Thou shalt call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.”

The Son of God, Who was also the Son of Mary, lived out the meaning of His Name—Savior. He lived a perfect life—for us. He suffered much—for us. He died—for us. He rose again on the third day—for us. And in doing these things He became our Savior—our Jesus. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved” (Acts 4:12). “To Him all the prophets bear witness, that through His Name whoever believes in Him shall receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43).

“Take Not His Holy Name In Vain”

Since the Blessed Name of Jesus is the Name of our Savior, we must never be anything but reverent in our use of it. We must not break the Second Commandment by using the Name Jesus (or His title of Christ) to express surprise, irritation, or anger. Never should we use the Holy Name in cursing or swearing. To dishonor Jesus’ Holy Name is to dishonor Jesus Himself.

“Whatever You Ask . . . In My Name”

Though we Christians may not take His Name in vain, we ought to have His Name on our lips frequently in its true and proper use, namely, as Dr. Luther says in the Small Catechism, to “call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” Jesus Himself gives us this great and precious promise in St. John 16:23, “Whatever you shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it to you.” Furthermore, calling upon God’s Name, says Dr. Luther, is “very effectual against the devil . . . who is very loathe to hear God’s Name, and cannot remain long where It is uttered and called upon from the heart . . . To vex the devil, I say, we should always have this Holy Name in our mouth, so that he may not be able to injure us . . .” (Large Catechism, I).

Father Luther also advises in Part I of the Large Catechism that we teach our “children to cross themselves when anything monstrous or terrible is seen or heard, and to cry out . . . Help, dear Lord Jesus!”

Devotion to the Holy Name

Through the centuries, various customs have arisen in the Church to show reverence, respect, and devotion to the Savior’s Name.

One custom observed for many hundreds of years is the special Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus which is usually celebrated on January 1st, along with the Feast of the Circumcision.

It is also an ancient Christian custom to bow the head slightly at the mention of the Holy Name of Jesus, as a sign of reverence and respect, and submission to the Lordship of Jesus. This custom is based upon the passage in Philippians 2:9, which says, “God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a Name which is above every name; that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow.”

O God, Who hast made Thine Only-begotten Son the Savior of mankind and didst give Him the Name of Jesus, mercifully grant that we who worship His Name on earth may joyfully behold Him in heaven: through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

—The Collect for the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus