

Names [Christmas, 2017]

Intro. Names are very important. Parents awaiting the birth of a child want a special name for their child. They get many suggestions and ultimately choose two or even three. For centuries, people only had a first name. Joseph had no last name. He was identified by his famous family – David. Peter was first known as Simon, son of John. In the Middle Ages, people were known by their first name and the kind of work they did; eventually it became a last name. If Tom worked at the mill that ground the wheat into flour, he was Tom, the miller. A woodworker was a sawyer, from the tools of *his* work. So someone in Tom's family was a sawyer. Luke's story of the angel Gabriel's visit in this morning's gospel gave us the names of the geographic region (Galilee); the town (Nazareth);

and the people (Mary, Joseph) because each was important in the Jewish tradition and the story.

I. In chapter one, Luke tells us the genealogy of the Lord's family. There are forty-seven names; forty-two men and five women. Like all of our families it includes some interesting people. Tonight (today) we hear more names: Caesar Augustus, Quirinius, Bethlehem and again, Joseph and Mary. By including these particular names of places and people Luke is telling his first readers *and us* what happened was very important. It was the fulfillment of a promise made by God and repeated by the prophets through times of peace and times of disturbance. The promise had several names: Messiah; the Christ; Emmanuel, God-with-us; Jesus, Son of God.

In the early days of their lives together, Joseph and Mary were on the road a lot. They traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the birth of their child in a strange town, away from family. Shortly after that, they fled to pagan Egypt to protect the child Jesus. After some years finally they returned to live again in Nazareth, their home base.

Concl. Many of us have traveled a long way from where we started. Some, many *miles* from we were born and raised. Others of us have traveled only a *few* miles from where we were born, but a *lifetime* from what we started as. Our journeys at times have been rocky and dark but also bright with the light of faith, love and friendship. I'm back in the Jacksonville area after thirty-four years; *it* has changed and *I* have changed too. I believe the Lord

has led me for thirty-six years, preparing me for each place even though I couldn't see it; and now here.

It is not chance that we are here. There are so many other places we might have been. The Lord has been leading all of us by different paths, from around the country and the world to this place. We have met new people; added new names to our families and friends. Tonight (today) we celebrate the most important name of all: Emmanuel, God-with -us, Jesus the Messiah. Our journey does not end here; it continues. May the Lord Jesus Christ bless us and give us the grace we need for new journeys and a new year.