

From the time of Abraham all male Jews were circumcised as a sign of their covenant relationship with God.

And so in accordance with that same law Mary and Joseph had the 8 day old Jesus circumcised and he was called Jesus, the name given him by the angel at the annunciation to Mary before he was conceived.

In the Bible names are very important, particularly in the Old Testament. Names were much more than a means of identification, they believed that there was a vital connection between a name and the nature of the person it belonged to, and the reality it signified.

Choosing the name for a baby would reflect the circumstances of the child's birth the parent's own feelings and their hopes and prayers for the child. The changing of a name was also of great importance. For example, Abram's name was changed to Abraham when God promised he would be the Father of many Nations. God gave Jacob the new name of Israel which means God strives, because he struggled with God and men and prevailed. The giving of a new name often signified a crucial turning point in the person's life. In the New Testament when Simon meets Jesus. Jesus, recognising his potential says, "You are Simon you are to be called Peter".

You will remember also, after Saul’s conversion, he was renamed Paul, a Greek name, appropriate for someone who was destined to become the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

The naming of Jesus is a reminder of the special relationship with God which we as Christians have by virtue of our baptism. We are sealed with the sign of the cross to show that we have passed from darkness into light; we are washed with water the symbol of life and cleansing; we are called by name, a sign that we are each unique and precious in God’s sight. Let me remind you of something St. Paul said in his letter to the Galatians, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those

who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God”

And In his letter to the Philippians he said this

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” Philippians 2 v 5-11

These words from this morning’s Epistle contain one of the earliest Christian hymns which has come to be referred to as The Christ Hymn”

Most scholars will agree that this passage constitutes one of the earliest reflections on the nature and mission of Jesus.,

The conceptual background of the hymn can be explained by looking to the Old Testament especially to the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah.

“The Christ hymn” presents Jesus as the supreme example of humble, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service.

Here, within these words, is reinforced the model for Christian living following Christ's example and in these few verses is encapsulated the story of our redemption - the Word which existed before all time, the incarnation , the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension to return to the Godhead in Glory.

The baby whose birth we celebrated last Monday was named Jesus, and that is significant because this Hebrew name means to save or to deliver.

You see the birth of Christ is only the beginning of the story. It starts the road that he took to the cross where he suffered and died that we might be brought

back into a right relationship with God and gain eternal life in the nearer presence of God our creator.

God in all his glory became like us so that through his life, death and resurrection we might become like Him.

Picture if you will the stable in Bethlehem - A warm shaft of light comes in through an opening, but a rafter distorts its beam and as it falls by the group of figures gathered round the baby in the manger and it casts a shadow in the shape of a cross.

You see the birth of Christ is only the beginning of the story. It starts the road that he took to the cross where he suffered and died. The manger moves inexorably to the cross; Christ's birth goes forward to his death and Christmas gives way to the sorrow of Good Friday and the joy of Easter.

Jesus whose name means to save came to fulfil God's plan for our salvation.

Jesus -God with us was born to die and rise again for us. That was his vocation.