SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Friday, June 24, 2022 **Solemn Eucharist**
The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist 5:30 p.m.

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for Children and Family Ministry and Choir School Chaplain*
on
Luke 1:56-80
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Called by Name

Names are important.

Many of you will have been to a Baby Shower where hopes and dreams, as well as gifts, are shared, names are predicted and even….'tada'…. revealed.

Such a Shower probably didn't happen for Elizabeth and Zechariah, and they wouldn't have had catalogues of baby names to consult, however we can probably guess that they would have experienced the age old excitement, anticipation of greeting, and even the joy of naming their long awaited surprise, their miracle baby. This child, John, their first born and only child is one for whom, and in whom they remain faithful to God's call to them, in the way Gibran, famously recalls in the Prophet,

> Your children are not your children.
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
> They come through you but not from you,
> And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
> Kahlil Gibran 1883–1931

These parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah recognize that their child is not a possession, but a God given gift whose very name means, 'graced by God'.

This child, whose name is John, who is to be a forerunner of Jesus, who will prepare the way of the Lord, who will be a voice in the wilderness and in the King's Palace, will also be imprisoned and also killed. John the Baptizer who will grow into his very own God given name, knowing that in his life and beyond his death, the hand of the Lord is always with him.

During each baptism ceremony of babies and infants, families are asked for their child's name. In preparation for the special day, I often ask parents about the meaning of their child's Christian name. It is never chosen lightly; there is often a story, or deep-rooted memory why and who they are named, or named after. Names are important.

In the sacrament of baptism, we are marked with the Sign of the Cross, by name and in the name of the Blessed Trinity: I baptize you (*your name*), In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As we have been reminded in our sermons only recently, our Baptism is a pivotal moment in our own life story and that of our faith community, each time in this services we all are called afresh into our Baptismal Covenant with God and our neighbor, wherein we promise to respect the dignity of every human being. Names in our community are important, not just in our memorials, in stone, or sewn into our chasubles, but also in our noon day prayers at the Shrine, in how we respond to one another, to those who are joyful, as well as hurting, and to those who have died, just as we did in our prayers after the recent devastating Texas and Alabama shootings.
Names are important.

But how do we respect the dignity of those in mass graves resulting from genocide in Rwanda, or in multiple images of our brothers and sisters in concentration camps, marked with a number instead of a name, or for those people closer to home buried in Hart Island in communal graves, because their bodies had not been claimed.

I recently heard it said, *We don't die when we take our last breath but when no one remembers our name.*

Names are important.

How do we recognize the dignity of our fellow human beings silenced and imprisoned, not only behind bars, but imprisoned by all manner of pain?

How too do we respect the dignity of one another?

How do we honor God's very own calling to each one of us by name whether it is to be (Matthew) a gift of God, (Carl)a free man, (Prisca) imbued with esteem, (Mark) warlike, (Maks) the greatest, (Linda) beautiful, (Lizette) my God is bountiful or (John) graced by God.

Not only by virtue of our baptism, but scripture also reminds us time and time again, God loves and calls each and every one of us, not by number, but by name.

As we lovingly reminded in the words of *Isaiah 43:1 I have called you by your name, you are mine.*