

Luke 2:21**Name above all names**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A couple of years ago at this service, I preached on the more common names and titles of Jesus, and today I want to go on a journey through some more of them. And I want to start with one that we use quite often through Advent and Christmas and Epiphany, and that is the Light of the World. This is especially found in the gospel of John, and it is a title that Jesus uses for himself. For example, in John 8, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, and he says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, NRSV).

Jesus uses this title again in chapter 9 after healing the man born blind. This passage then gives us some understanding of what Jesus means by the title, as he talks about spiritual blindness. He is the one who illuminates the truth. With the light of Christ shining in our lives, we are able to see the true reality. This is one of the few titles that Jesus also ascribes to his disciples. In Matthew 5, the sermon on the mount, Jesus proclaims the beatitudes and then describes his disciples as salt and light. He says:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16, NRSV)

This contrast of light and darkness is a common theme through all the scriptures. First John chapter 1 says that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. By faith in Jesus, his disciples share in this godly light, also shining in the world dispelling the darkness, and bearing witness to the one who is the Light of the World.

The second title I want to look at takes on a bit of a different focus. From Paul's writings, we get the title of the New Adam or the Second Adam or the Last Adam. These all refer to the same thing. Where Adam's disobedience meant sin and death for all, Christ's obedience more than made good the harm due to Adam by bringing righteousness and abundant grace. The birth of Jesus counterbalanced the fall of Adam, bringing forth redemption and repairing the damage. Where Adam failed, the New Adam succeeds.

In First Corinthians, St Paul says, "As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:22, NRSV) Described as a "life-giving spirit", the Last Adam is risen from the dead and will transform us through resurrection into a heavenly, spiritual existence. This understanding of Jesus as the Second Adam is what St Paul means when he writes this in Romans 5:

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19, NRSV)

This leads us into title number three, given to Jesus in his act of obedience that led to our justification and life. When Jesus was crucified, Pilate nailed a sign calling him Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. This title is used on just three occasions in the scriptures. Once at the birth of Jesus, and twice at the death of Jesus. Unlike any other title, all three of these uses are by Gentiles. At his birth, it's the Magi who are seeking the King of the Jews. Led by the star, they do eventually find Jesus. This title was threatening for King Herod and led him to the drastic action of ordering the murder of all boys in Bethlehem who were two years old or younger.

At the crucifixion, this title is used by Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers. It was actually used in part to condemn Jesus because anyone who assumes the title of King must be standing in rebellion against Caesar and the Roman Empire. Such rebellion is, of course, punishable by death on a cross. And the soldiers who carried out this punishment used the title to mock Jesus: "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself." (Luke 23:37, NRSV) What they didn't know is that Jesus was in fact saving us through that very death on the cross. And he is King. King of the entire universe, the king of kings, to use another title that I won't go into today.

But I do want to cover one more, also given to Jesus by others. That is the title of Rabbi, sometimes written as Rabboni. When Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus, she calls him Rabboni, having recognised who he was. Rabbi is just the Jewish word for a teacher or master. It's quite a normal word for his disciples to use when speaking to Jesus. But it is also used by Bartimaeus, the blind man, in Mark 10.

Despite being a fairly normal title, Jesus teaches his disciples not to let themselves be called Rabbi. He says, "you have one teacher, and you are all students". This comes in contrast to the Pharisees that claim the title Rabbi for themselves, loving the place of honour at banquets, and being greeted with respect in the marketplaces. They were using the title to claim status and authority, but all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus. So even a fairly mundane title takes on a very important meaning when applied to Jesus.

All four of these titles tell us some very different things. Jesus is the Light of the World and the New Adam and the King of the Jews and our Rabbi, and of course, he is so much more. As our Rabbi, he has much to teach us, and we have much to learn. So much that even a lifetime isn't enough to learn it all, but thankfully he gives us an eternity with him to do so. As the King of the Jews, Jesus demonstrated his true power and authority by dying. Dying on a cross so that he could pay the price for our sin and give us that eternity with him. As the New Adam, Jesus has undone the fall into sin, restored as the children of God who are made in the image of God, and ushered in the creation, of which we now belong. And as the Light of the World, Jesus illuminates our lives, exposing our sin and need for a saviour, and giving us hope and strength as we live in him.

All of this means that he is most worthy of our praise. So, let us continue to thank and praise him for all he has done for us. Let us join with all creation in confessing that Jesus is the name above all names and that he alone is our salvation. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.