Numbers 6:22-27

One of the first things that parents must think very hard when are expecting a child is name(s). What name will you give to this new life that is about to come into this world? And if you are like me, of a particular ethnic group, you would probably need to think of 2 names, one English and the other Chinese (as in my case). And if you are one of those people who does not want to know the gender beforehand, you would then need to think 4 names, and this can give you enough headache.

And we do this with our friends too when we give them nicknames. Sometimes or most of the time they will not like their new names or titles, but that's how we see them and that's how we identify them with. Indeed, names are important and we have all sorts of names placed upon us since birth. Names are given us not only to distinguish us from one from another but it gives us an identity, it tells us who we are, where we come from, and to whom we belong.

But on top of all these names and nicknames and titles and whatever else, we have the name of God placed upon us. Listen to these words from the end of Numbers chapter 6:

**The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,**

**The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**

**“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”**

These words should be familiar to you all as you hear them here on Sundays week after week. Indeed this is the way God placed his name upon his people in the Old Testament worship. And of course it is not a mere coincidence that this blessing has a three-fold structure with the name of God repeated three times (the English bibles usually translate the name Yahweh into "LORD" in keeping with the Jewish tradition of reading "adonai" instead of pronouncing the name of God so as to avoid breaking the 2nd commandment). But notice the last verse here, the blessing of God is based on have his own name placed on his people, in other words, without God's name no blessing would come.

But what is God's name? Where do you hear of that name that was placed upon you? Yes, you heard it at least 4 times today (once in the gospel reading at the end of Matthew 28, once at the end of the Psalm reading, once in the absolution, and once at the beginning of the service at the invocation). But that's not where you first heard it. For most of you who grew up in the Lutheran church or any other traditional churches, you would have first heard it when you were baptized. As the water was poured on your head, you would have heard the pastor say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” This is the name that has been bestowed on us when we were born again. That is the new identity that has been given us, this is what makes us Christian.

But how often we forget this! Of course I don’t mean that we actually forget that we are a Christian, but that we forget to live in and under that name. 6 days a week we live as though God is not involved in our lives, that he merely watches you and then maybe deal with you occasionally during the week, and then on Sunday you have fellowship and communion with him and the cycle repeats. And I think part of the problem is that we don’t even know what it means to live under that name. The name of God is not just a name, an identifier to distinguish between Allah and Buddha, but it tells us who he is and what he does in our lives today.

And so now it is a good time to review Luther's catechism. Who is this heavenly Father? Luther explains that this is the **God who has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, etc, etc, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing, food and drink, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.**

To live under this name in the first person of the Trinity, is to live as a creature, as created people, not as God because we are not the master of our lives or destinies. To live in this name helps us see that we really don’t deserve anything nor have we earned anything, but that all thing are gifts for us to use and enjoy and also for us to give thanks.

Then Luther continues with his explanation with the 2nd person of the Trinity: **I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.**

Here to live in the Son means to live in his cross, in his forgiveness of sins. It is to see that life is more than just food and drink and the material world, that there is a spiritual and eternal life also. In this life of forgiveness of sins means also that we live to forgive one another because this is what this name is all about.

And finally Luther explains that it is the Holy Spirit who brings us into this life in the Son: **I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.**

To be in the Holy Spirit is to be in the gospel with one another, to be in the faith with one another so that we may believe all of the above, so that not only do we have the one true God, but that in him we have true life, a life that is in a right relationship with him, a relationship of creature and his creator, a relationship of adopted children and their heavenly father, a relationship of church and her head, and a right relationship with one another. To be in the Holy Spirit means to be in the church, it is a life being called and gathered with other believers to receive the same gifts so that we may together pray, praise, and give thanks to God.

This is what it means to have God's name placed upon us. It is to start with God in all things. He is the creator who gives to us all and sustains this life by providing all that we need. He is also our savior who also gives us eternal life by providing his only begotten son to die on the cross for us. And he is our sanctifier who gives us faith to receive all the words and promises and gifts from him.

And so it's not a coincidence that the Sunday divine service officially starts and ends with the name of God (yes, we do sing hymns before and after that, but the actual service of God, that is, God serving us starts with his word, his name, and his blessings). The service here is to be a pattern for our daily lives. It starts and ends with God's name and that's why also in the small catechism, Luther teaches us when we wake up in the morning and when we go to bed to make the sign of the cross and say (at the same time) "In the name of the Father, Son, and holy spirit" and then say a little prayer. This is to remind ourselves that the day begins not with a yawn or breakfast or whatever else you do when you wake up, but that it starts with God's name so that we are also reminded to live each and every day in his name, in his gifts, in his mercy, in his forgiveness of sins, in his church of believers.