

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy, prosperous and blessed New Year. May God who has been our rock and our refuge in the past year continue to lead and guide us in the coming year. Many of you have gone through tumultuous times over the last year through sickness, bereavement, financial difficulties, broken relationships, business failures and many other difficulties. As a nation itself the demonetisation process has put us all in great difficulty. We cannot even withdraw our money and the government wants to have more and more control over what we earn and what we have. It is almost as though big brother is watching over our shoulder all the time. But through all this God has been faithful in protecting us and keeping us in the land of the living. Many who started the year with us are no more with us. We need to look back and give thanks to God for his faithfulness in our lives.

The theme for our morning's meditation is, "The naming of Jesus." Names are important to all of us and we name our children in India particularly with the hopes and aspirations we have for them. This morning I would like us to look at the revelation of God's name in the Old Testament, the revelation of God's name through Jesus and its implications for us.

In the Old Testament reading from the book of Exodus we notice that Yahweh had asked Moses to go to the Israelites and tell them that God had sent him to deliver them. Moses in response tells God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" Moses is clear in his mind that he needs to have all the answers before he can begin his mission. God's answer to Moses was, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what that you have to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." This name in Hebrew is just four letters, transliterated YHWH, and is connected to the verb 'To Be'. Before this time God's people knew him primarily as **Elohim**, translated God. Now God reveals a name with a deeper meaning.

The name I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE describes God as the living God who is active in history and will particularly reveal himself in and through the events of the Exodus. The name signifies that God is self-existent and independent of anything else. He is the unchanging eternal God. He is the God of action, the God of power, the God who releases people from bondage. The Exodus reveals Yahweh in all his power and might.

When we are called to honour his name we are asked to offer exclusive allegiance even in the midst of a hostile environment. We can take courage knowing that God is a powerful and a mighty God who is able to release us from all our bondages and set us free. He is powerful to save and so as we go into the New Year we can be assured that he will watch over us. Just as he revealed himself in the Exodus with power and authority so also will he engage with us.

In the New Testament reading from the gospel of Luke we noticed that on the 8th day when it was time to circumcise the child he was named Jesus. Circumcision was a sign that the child was part of God's family, the Covenant people. The name Jesus means 'Yahweh is salvation' indicating that he will save people from their sins. The name of a person also stands for power and character. In the Old Testament 'Saviour' was usually used for God who delivers people from various types of peril: enemies that seek to destroy and disease that seeks to kill. Luke intends his readers to see the meaning in terms of rescue or delivery from peril, in both physical and spiritual senses. So as we step into the New Year we are reassured that we are stepping into it with the Saviour who will deliver us from all kinds of perils, both physical and spiritual. The name Jesus offers us strength and power against the attacks of the evil one. So we are to be encouraged that we are not alone as God is with us.

In the New Testament we read from the book Acts that Peter and John go to the Temple and see a man who is crippled from birth. When he saw Peter and John he begged them for money. Peter told him, "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Immediately the man was healed and he went around walking and jumping and praising God. People saw this miracle and a huge crowd gathered around Peter and John. Peter explained the gospel of Jesus and how they crucified him but he rose again on the third day. The Priests and the Sadducees and the Temple Guard came to arrest them. Since it was already late in the evening they put them in prison and called them the following day. When they were questioned about the healing they answered, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the corner stone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

As we begin this New Year we are reminded that Jesus is the one who can offer us both physical and spiritual healing. He is the one who gives us salvation. He delivers us from all the bondages of sin, sickness and death. The name of Jesus stands for all the power and authority that is made available to us as his children. Let us in this New Year reflect his character in our lives as we bear his name. May God Bless us abundantly in the coming year that we may be channels of blessing to many.