

The Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate for adults and older children as well as the Rite of Baptism for Children begins with the question: “What is your name?” or in the case of infants and small children the parents are asked, “What name have you chosen for your child?” This is an important question. More than a label, a name confers personal identity; it unites us to our family history, and the broader community. For example: my given first and middle names are the first names of my paternal and maternal grandfathers: James and Louis.

Recently I began reading Alex Haley’s 1976 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Roots*. The opening chapter provides an immediate tie-in to today’s celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. After relating the birth of the book’s central character, Kunta Kinte, Haley details the elaborate African rite of naming. On the eighth day following the birth of a child, a public ritual is held at which the name of the child is revealed. Kept secret until that time by the child’s father, the ritual begins with the father whispering the child’s name three times into the child’s ear, the child being the first to hear their chosen name. Then the father whispers the name to the child’s mother. Finally, the father announces the child’s name to all gathered. In the case of the novel’s central character, Kunta Kinte, he bears the name of his paternal grandfather, a great tribal leader, connecting him with his family and community history.

Jesus is God’s Son. In the story of the Annunciation to Mary in St. Luke’s gospel and to St. Joseph in St. Matthew’s account, an angel reveals the name “Jesus” to his earthly parents. On Christmas night an angel also reveals Jesus’ identity to the shepherds. Today’s feast, celebrates Jesus’ identity revealed to John the Baptist and the crowd gathered at the River Jordan.

The Hebrew “Joshua” which we translate “Jesus” means “God saves.” Today the voice of God speaking at Jesus’ baptism spells out just how God-in-Jesus will carry out the mission of his name. “You are my beloved Son.” Son and Servant in Hebrew are the same term. Jesus is the Servant/Son of God. As Servant/Son Jesus has come to

“comfort” God’s weary people, speak “tenderly to Jerusalem” offering pardon and forgiveness, and “like a shepherd” Jesus will feed God’s flock, having special care for the weak and powerless “gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them close to his heart.” (Isa. 40:1-5,9-11)

Just as Jesus’ baptism reveals his name and mission, so too, our baptism names missions us. Like Jesus at our baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon us marking us out in a particular way as belonging to God. Like Jesus, our baptism is our vocational call to give ourselves totally to God. Baptism is not primarily about personal/private salvation. Baptism makes us a member of the body of Christ in the world today, the Church, uniting us with each other and all other baptized people in a common mission of discipleship and witness to Christ in the day-to-day of our lives. This gift of divine life and its attendant call to self-giving discipleship makes demands on us. Taking our baptism seriously means that the ritual moment of immersion or the pouring of water is just the beginning of a lifetime of openness to God’s continuing grace “training” us to be faithful to who God has made us to be a commitment to die to self and strive as best we can to live for and in God.

“Called by name” and anointed with Holy Spirit we live out our baptismal vocation through the particular vocation to which God calls each of us. As we celebrate Jesus’ and our sharing in his baptism and mission, our archdiocese observes “Vocation Awareness Week.” In your pews you will find these “Called By Name” forms. “Called By Name” is a program where we the baptized are invited to help discern those among us God may be calling to servant ministry in the church as priests. If you know or observe a young man you believe God may be calling to consider the priesthood, I invite you to fill in his name and return the form to the parish. The person listed will, in turn, be contacted either by Fr. David Schatz, the Vocation Director for the Archdiocese and/or me. Confidentiality will be maintained.

Today, we rejoice in being “Called By Name” by God as his beloved children.