Last night a sermon wrote itself for me in my sleep. Unfortunately, as happens with many dreams, it disappeared even as I was trying to write it down on awaking at 5:00 am. If it really was good, I’m sure it will come back to me in time for a year from now.

Names and times. Or naming and timing. Those were the two elements.

Today is the feast of The Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was formerly known as the Feast of the Circumcision, as the eighth day in the life of a baby boy was (and is) in Jewish custom the day of the *bris*, or circumcision and, as part of that ceremony, giving him his name. This practice comes from seventeenth chapter of Genesis, verse 12: “Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old.”

It has become customary in some Jewish circles to wait until the eighth day to give her name to a baby girl as well, at least to do that formally.

From *Finding Each Other in Judaism* by Harold Schulweiss: “On the eighth day, the infant reenters this world and gains a new status through the covenant. He or she becomes a co-creator with God, a partner with God responsible to help transform the uncompleted world. . . .  For after seven days, the infant has lived through the act of the creation of this world in which the child is to participate. On the eighth day, this covenanted child is more than a passive part of nature, but rather a human agent actively engaged in the development of a moral universe. The guardians of this baby are mandated to nurture this sacred life so that this potentiality may be actualized.”

There is more than a little to be said for this understanding of our partnership with God. The guardians’ responsibility in the passage I just quoted sounds a lot like the promises made by godparents at infant baptism.

Mary and Joseph were followers of the Torah, of Jewish law, and they undoubtedly followed the mandates of that law. This helps us, yet one more time, to understand that Jesus was born into a Jewish family and was steeped in Jewish law and practice and custom even at the time of his birth.

For us Christians the story of this commemoration also reminds us that the Incarnation was real. Unlike various heresies and conjectures and theories from the earliest days of Christianity, Jesus was a human being, born into this world with all its wonders and horrors. He is for us the quintessential and literal co-creator with God. Quoting again from *Finding Each Other in Judaism*, “Alongside the Jewish reality principle of the imperfection of the world stands the Jewish ideality principle that assigns to the human being the task of turning the world that "is" into the world that ‘ought to be.’”

For us, Jesus is not only God made human, but also the model for *our* human lives. The name Jesus, after many permutations and filtered through other languages, is the translation of the Hebrew Yeshua, derived from the semitic root meaning “to deliver, to rescue.” On the eighth day this child was named Savior or Rescuer.

God’s generous and act of entering the world in the person of this Jewish child extends to our being baptized. Here is the definition from our Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer: “Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.” In essence, we are given the name Christian in addition to our own names. We, too, become embodiments of God’s grace, the same grace given at Jesus’ naming 2,000 years ago.

We are incorporated into Christ’s Body, and by our receiving holy communion we receive Christ into our selves, nourishing us with Christ’s own Body and Blood.

So, about timing. It was 2,000 years ago that Jesus received the name, as he entered this physical world, the world we also inhabit. It is today, at every baptism, that Jesus’ name is made manifest in the child (or adult) being baptized. It is this moment, as we receive Christ’s Body and Blood in this Holy Communion.

God’s time is neither linear or limited, as we humans normally view and measure time. We say in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer “Christ *has* died. Christ *is* risen [note that it is not ‘Christ has risen, but *is*]. Christ *will* come again.” Past, present, and future, as we human beings see it, but all present in God’s perfect time. Christ *was* born, and Christ lives now, in defiance of all our neat categories of time and space.

This rescuer is present with God in the heavenly realm and present with us in this very place, at this very time.

Part of our cooperating with God in perfecting this world—I prefer *improving* this world toward perfection—is behaving as people, children of the Divine, people who know that God is present in every one of us, whether we can see that plainly or not. If we have difficulty seeing God’s presence in someone else, the fault lies not in God’s creative activity but in our limited vision as we seek God in each other.

But God—for us Christians, Jesus (Rescuer)—is here to help sharpen that vision, to see God’s divine spark in every one and to act accordingly, as God would have us do. + + +