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The name Jesus appears to have been a fairly common name in Judea at the time of Jesus' birth. And it is, of course, an old Biblical name that goes all the way back to the end of the Exodus story—to the days when *Yeshua* fought the Battle of Jericho and the walls came tumblin' down! In Luke 1:26-33, the angel Gabriel told Mary to name her child Jesus and in Matthew 1:21 the angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus: "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." That sort of takes the fun out of the back-and-forth most parents go through in considering names, but that is what the Bible says: Mary and Joseph didn't have to fight over that one because they both got it on good authority that this would be the name.

In the same way that we Christians are officially "named" at Baptism, so little Jewish boys are named at their *bris*. Luke tells us that "after eight days had passed it was time to circumcise the child..." So it is not only the name of *Jesus* that comes on this eighth day of Christmas; circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Luke wants us to know that Jesus is a child of that covenant, *a faithful Jew*. Jesus is born into a tradition that goes back to Moses and the Exodus, to David and the psalms, to Jeremiah and the exile, to Isaiah and homecoming.

*Jesus bears the name of God.* His very name includes the name revealed to Moses at the burning bush: YHWH delivers. Obviously Jesus bears that holy name in a special way, but the point of circumcision, as with Holy Baptism, is that we also bear the name of God, for we have been marked and sealed and claimed as beloved children of God through that Sacrament. Patrick or Richie or Billy Bob or Charles or Steve or Maryanne or Susan or Carol—we carry not only those “Christian names” given to us at Baptism, but as people of the New Covenant we also carry the name of Jesus. We bear the name of the One who has claimed us and marked us and sealed us and loved us into this new resurrected life. *And we are called to live into the truth of that claim on us.*

Today we’ll do that in part by sharing in a Covenant Renewal Service that was written by John Wesley. Now you may have been taught that John Wesley was a “Methodist” but that isn’t exactly right, or at least it isn’t the whole truth. What is in a name? Wesley was an Anglican priest who felt the Church in his day was in need of being reformed and revitalized. So he created small group ministries, groups that covenanted to pray together and study God’s Word together and to be accountable to each other in order to grow in faith. He was so organized—so *methodical*—that he was labeled a “Methodist,” a name that was not necessarily intended as a compliment. But it stuck. Eventually his followers broke away and became a separate denomination, but both John and his brother, Charles (who has contributed more hymns to our hymnal, than almost anyone else) remained Anglicans.

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As we come to the end of 2011 and turn the page to 2012, we remember that Name and renew our commitment to live more fully into that claim. We are invited to make a new beginning. Along with any resolutions we may be making to lose weight or exercise more or spend less time playing computer games, we are invited to renew our commitment to Jesus. May the year ahead be another year of grace for each of us: filled with possibilities, a year of peace and health and joy. And as we continue the journey to the twelfth-day of Christmas, when the magi finally arrive to pay homage to the newborn king at Epiphany, may we continue, like Mary, to “treasure all these words and ponder them in our hearts.”

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