

**The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza**  
**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
**The First Sunday after Epiphany – January 11, 2026**  
**Matthew 3:13-17**

*We give you thanks, Lord Jesus, that though you had no need of baptism, you entered the waters to lead us to the fountain of forgiveness and new life; pour out on us, we pray, the Spirit's power that we may live as your beloved children. This we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good morning! My name is Christine and I am a Child of God. I was born on a beautiful spring day in San Antonio, Texas. My parents tell me that they had struggled for a while to decide on baby names. Apparently, they went through just about every female name they could think of before finally agreeing on "Christine" at some point mid-pregnancy. And family lore has it that Christine was the only appealing girl's name for which neither one had an unpleasant association.

Now, I did not grow up in a Christian or otherwise religious household – and I bring this up because of the curious irony around this story. You see, it turns out that I was impatient even in the womb and, much to everyone's surprise, I decided to be born three weeks early. And that beautiful spring day on which I was born just so happened to be Easter morning that year, making my given name remarkably significant, as the name Christine means follower of Christ.

Now, I am certain that my parents didn't name me Christine because they believed I would be a follower of Christ. And I am equally certain that they never imagined that I would later become a priest of the Church. Yet, while all that may be true, it doesn't mean that the name had no significance.

Ever since I was a young child, I've sought a relationship with God. The many and varied paths of these searches may not always have been fruitful, but they have been intentional searches for the divine, nonetheless. Looking at me today, ordained and preaching to you now, and with hindsight being 20/20 and all that, my name doesn't seem merely coincidental. Perhaps a name can be both formative as well as revelatory of hidden truth.

Human cultures over the sweep of history have certainly thought so. Most cultures place great meaning and value in a name given to a person. And many have elaborate naming ceremonies in which names and attributes are conferred – both those believed to be present already, as well as those desired.

About twelve years ago, I had the privilege to preside at a Yoruban naming ceremony, baby blessing, and Eucharist for a pair of twin baby girls. Among the Yoruba in Nigeria, names are traditionally conferred upon children seven to nine days after their birth. The names given have great significance and meaning, and each of these girls received five names in addition to their family name. I can no longer accurately pronounce them, but I can tell you that each name was special and imbued with meaning, such as: "Consecrated to God," "Eternal happiness", "Child of the crown", and "Child gives joy."

Naming assumes importance throughout our scriptures, as well. Not only were names given to children in the prayerful hope that God will confer certain grace upon them, but also new names were sometimes given to adults to mark a life-changing and identity-altering event. After his night visit and struggle with the angel, Jacob was given the name Israel, which means "Wrestles with God." Abram and Sarai are renamed Abraham and Sarah as a sign of the covenant that God made with them, and to signify God's promise that from this barren couple will now come a multitude of nations. Jesus renamed Simon upon his confession of him as Messiah, calling him Peter, which means "the rock," and declaring him the foundation upon which the church will be built.

Over the past couple of weeks, we have also heard a great many names for Jesus. On Christmas, we heard the nativity story of the angel announcing to the poor, frightened shepherds that Jesus, the “Savior” and “Messiah” to the world, had been born that very night. In our Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Messiah and declared that the world will call him “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The next Sunday, we heard the prologue to John’s Gospel, in which he pronounces that the *Logos* – the Eternal Word, who was God and was with God – has taken on flesh in Jesus to come and dwell among us.

On New Year’s Day, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Holy Name. In our collect for that day, we pray, “Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation” and are reminded that the name Jesus means, “the Lord Saves”. And then last Sunday, we celebrated the Feast of Epiphany and the arrival of the three Magi, who traveled great distances because of the appearance of a star and brought royal gifts to the infant in Bethlehem, the one they referred to as the “king of the Jews.” Lord and Savior, King of the Jews, Messiah, Eternal Word, Mighty God, Prince of Peace – such formidable names to be conferred on so small a baby.

Today, the narrative scene shifts our attention from the baby in the manger to the adult man Jesus. In our Gospel lesson, God no longer speaks and acts through intermediaries – whether angelic or prophetic – to reveal the nature of Jesus. God now does so directly. John the Baptizer has been calling Israel to the banks of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance to prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah. And now Jesus joins him there and inaugurates his public ministry by being baptized by him. As Jesus comes up out of the water, Matthew tells us that the heavens suddenly opened, the Spirit of God descend upon him like a dove, and a heavenly voice claims Jesus and acknowledges his nature, saying “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

The time of private revelations of Jesus’ nature has passed and now he is proclaimed as the beloved Son of God for all to recognize. So, in addition to the names given Jesus by the angels, prophets, and Magi, God himself weighs in and confers upon Jesus the two most important ones: God’s Son and Beloved.

Throughout the course of our lives, we, too, may be called many things. I have received numerous names over the decades of my life: daughter, wife, mother, student, friend, leader, recovering alcoholic, bereaved, priest... Child of God. Some names are conferred because of some achievement, others in recognition of a significant change in my very being. Some are commonly shared with many people, while a few are more unusual to come by. While they are all true and each reveals some distinctive aspect of my identity, only one is the root of them all. Before all others – underneath, beyond, and above all others – my name is Child of God.

In the Christian tradition, we receive our names at baptism. Sometimes these are names that we may have been called for a while – perhaps even for decades – before being declared at the baptismal font. Some even receive a new baptismal name at that time. Whatever names are pronounced at that font, the rite of baptism most especially affirms and pronounces our true name and identity as Children of God. All other names we receive may change over our lives, but Child of God remains ever true.

In baptism, Jesus was claimed and named by the heavenly voice as God’s Son, the Beloved. As such, he is the complete expression of God’s nature and the perfect example of what it means to be human in the image of God. To follow Christ and to live and love as he did, is to achieve the great high calling of our humanity.

That Jesus was baptized is both scandalous and glorious. It is scandalous because, as God’s Son, he is without sin and, thus, has no need of the cleansing of sin provided in baptism. And it is glorious because it affirms the wonder of the incarnation - Emmanuel or God-with-us. Through our shared human nature, Jesus’ baptism connects him with all others who would be baptized. In his baptism, he brings us with him into the waters, that he might bring us with him into that mystery of his life with the Father and the Spirit.

In other words, because Jesus was baptized, we can be united with him through our own baptism. And so united, we are invited into participation in his life and proclaimed as God's own Beloved Children. This is the new and everlasting life promised in Christ. May we all inhabit that holy place today and boldly declare our name as Child of God.

Amen.