*H*e will be prayed for by that name in church, and by all who love *him* and pray for *him* in private. If *he* takes upon *himself* the vows of Holy Matrimony, the priest will address *him* by that name. *He* will called by that name when *he* is summoned to the throne of God, and it is that name that has now been written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

With God's help and the guidance of *his* parents and godparents, *his* teachers and *his* pastors, and all *his* fellow Christians, *N.N.* will never have cause to be ashamed of *his* name or to confess the Name of *his* Lord.

That is my hope for *him*. And that is what we have prayed for today.

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St. Anne's Anglican Catholic Church December 16th, 2007
Charlotte Hall, MD

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[1] Priest Associate, St. David's Anglican Catholic Church, Charlottesville, VA.

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
At a Baptism**

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw[1]

Homily:

This is going to be an unusual sermon for me because, like all good Catholic preachers, I follow the Lectionary and usually preach on one of the passages prescribed for the day. But this morning I'm not going to do that. There will be plenty of scriptural references but no text as such. Instead I want to focus on an important element in the ministration of baptism – the naming of the candidate.

Names are important because without a name you have no identity, no definition of yourself, and no sense of place in the order of things.

God does not have a name because God cannot be defined. A definition implies boundaries, and God is without boundaries of any kind. God is infinite. He cannot be categorized or described. So when Moses asks God His Name, God simply replies, "I am what I am."

But people are creatures, and creatures are finite and have names. In the Bible, the name is always given by someone in authority over and responsible for the one who is named. In giving this child a name, his parents have exercised authority over and assumed responsibility for their child. They have given him an identity and defined him as a person.

In the Bible the giving of names begins in the very first book, right after the account of the creation. Adam gives names to all the animals. He also gives his wife a name, a name that in Hebrew describes her as his counterpart, his "better half", as the popular phrase has it. "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh", as Adam puts it.

In the secular world, we are not identified by our names. We are identified by our Social Security Numbers. I remember one time long ago when I went to register for a graduate course at my university. I was already ordained and I was wearing my clerical collar. The student in charge of registering people for the course that I wanted asked me my Social Security Number.

Well, back in those days participation in Social Security was voluntary for clergy and I had elected not to participate. Nowadays it is compulsory. But I told the student that I did not have a Social Security Number.

When he looked up and saw my collar he said, "I guess your boss didn't give you a number." I looked him in the eye and said, "No, He gave me a name."

Well, the system didn't work with just names, so he made up a number and signed me up.

All of us are known to the government, and to the credit agencies, and to many other data bases by our Social Security Numbers. But God knows our names and calls each one of us by the names we were given when we were baptized.

There are instances in the Bible when God changes peoples' names because they have taken on new identities. The first such person to have his name changed is Abram **[ABE-rumm]**. When God calls Abram **[ABE-rumm]** out of his pagan culture to become the founder of a new monotheistic culture, his name is changed to Abraham **[ABE-ruh-_hamm_]**, which means "father of a great multitude".

Later in the Bible, a conniving, grasping, deceitful man who has cheated his older brother out of his inheritance, wrestles all night with his conscience and finally succumbs to it. As a result his name is changed from Jacob, which means "someone who trips people up", to Israel, which means "God prevails".

A well-known instance of a name change occurs in St. Matthew's Gospel when one of Our Lord's disciples recognizes who Jesus really is and confesses Him as the Messiah and the Son of God. This disciple's name is Simon, which in Hebrew means "someone who pays attention". But Jesus renames him Peter, which, in its Greek form "Petros", means "rock". The change not only indicates that Peter's confession has become the foundation of the Church, but also the change from a Hebrew name to a Greek name anticipates the great commission at the end of that same Gospel: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

Our Lord Himself was given a name, not by His earthly parents but by His heavenly Father, by way of an angel. The name He was given means in Hebrew "God saves". But St. Paul says that when Jesus had accomplished His mission and had been crucified and raised from the dead, He was given the name that is above every name. That is Paul's way of echoing what Jesus says of Himself at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

There is a hymn that recalls that passage. Listen to these verses by Caroline Maria Noel:

Humbled for a season to receive a name,
From the lips of sinners unto whom he came.
Faithfully he bore it, spotless to the last.
Brought it back victorious when from death he passed.
Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast,
Filled it with the glory of eternal rest.

_N.N._ has now been given a name that _he_ will have the opportunity to fill, not with cosmic glory, but with honor nevertheless. _He_ will bear that name forever in the Kingdom of God, to which _he_ has just been admitted by this Sacrament.