

I'm sure that the parents of Louise and Arden worked hard at thinking about what names to give their new babies. One of the reasons that giving names is important and we take so much care when naming our children is because it sets them apart. It makes them unique and special. Some of you may have seen my favorite film, an old film called *The Third Man*. If you haven't seen it, you must see it. It's absolutely brilliant. It's all about a man that goes bad called Harry Lime. And he makes a lot of money in Vienna selling corrupt penicillin. And he damages a load of people but makes a lot of money. And in one very memorable scene, his friend comes to see him, an old friend. And they take a trip on a Ferris wheel. And he gets to the top of the Ferris wheel. And the friend says to Harry Lime, "How can you do it? How's your conscience clear?" And Harry Lime just points down at all the people that they can see way below in the square. And he says, "Look, they're nameless. They're like ants walking around. Who cares?" And he says to his friends how easy it was to do what he was doing when he thought of the people who he was harming as just nameless individuals.

And some people think that God is like that that He looks down from on high and He doesn't see us. He just sees a load of ants running around. But the Bible is clear that God looks at His people and knows each one by name. We heard that in our reading from the prophet Isaiah. The Lord says, "Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine."

And the prophet Jeremiah reinforces the message. "Before I formed you in the womb, God says, I knew you. I called you by name." I used to be a teacher in a high school, and I'm happy to take this up with anyone afterwards, but I think I had the worst teaching job in the world. I taught 27 classes a week for half an hour. So, in the course of a week, I saw 720 children. So, I didn't know their names. Well, I knew the very good and I knew mostly the very bad, but I didn't know the 650 in the middle. And again, many people think that's how it is with God. He knows the very good and he knows the very bad, but he doesn't know the rest

of us in the middle. But we are told in the Bible and assured that God knows each of us. The good, the bad, and those in the middle, He knows each of us by name.

And names don't just set us apart as individuals. They also shape our identity. We need to be comfortable with our name. They need to fit who we think we are and our sense of self. There was that famous sign that went up in Balboa Park and it read, "Lost dog, three legs, one ear, full of fleas, answers to the name of Lucky." Well, what's funny about that is that the name clearly doesn't fit the dog. There's something going on there which isn't quite right. And we've heard recently in the Christmas story that great importance was attached to the naming of the Christ child, that an angel appeared to Joseph, His father, and told him what the baby was to be called, what name was to be given. And the angel said you ought to name Him Jesus, which in Hebrew means God saves, because the angel knew what Joseph didn't know, that this baby was to grow up and save the people from their sins. He was a baby who was born to save, so He was given the appropriate name.

We're now in the season of Epiphany, and epiphany means to make known, to reveal. And if Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus, then Epiphany which comes next is about His identity, reaffirming who He is, establishing the identity of the one born in a stable. That's why each Epiphany we have this feast day of the baptism of Jesus. And we remember every year the story of His baptism, because it's in this story that His identity is most clearly seen and revealed. What we have in this story is the divine identity of Jesus being made known. The voice from heaven proclaims, this is my son. And in this season of Christmas and Epiphany, we celebrate that the God who knows us by name, has revealed Himself to us and invites us to know Him. In Christ, God makes himself known to us. To use another of the names that was given to Jesus at His birth, he is Emmanuel, God with us. God come amongst us.

And I want to just finish by teasing out the implications of this. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with

us. Jesus identified with us so that we might be identified with Him. St. Paul writes about this mystery. He talks about how in our baptism, we are baptized into Christ Jesus. He says this in Romans, "We were buried with Him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." By being baptized into Christ, we are identified with Him to such an extent that we share His victory over sin and death and win eternal life.

In our baptism, we are baptized into Christ Jesus, and we're adopted into God's family. So, what we are about to do with Louise and Arden is deep and mysterious stuff. What we see in the baptism of Jesus is a glimpse into the nature of God. We have the Father addressing the Son and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. All three persons of the Trinity are interacting. It's a glimpse into the divine, and it's also an invitation. We're invited to share in that circle of love, that family of love, the communion of love, which makes up God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are invited in. The mission of Jesus, which begins at His baptism is that we might be brought into that fellowship of love that is God. Paul writes, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under the law so that we might receive adoption as God's children."

We too can hear these words: "This is my beloved child with whom I am well pleased." We too can hear those words and claim them as our own. And we reply, we're invited to reply, by calling God as Jesus did. "Abba, Father". That's the invitation. And remember, we'll be praying that later, we're all invited to say a prayer that begins "Our Father". And we should never take the wonder of those words for granted. They remind us of the amazing truth that we are adopted children of God. Jesus is our brother we share in his sonship. He is identified with us so that we might be identified with Him.

These are profound, mysterious truths that we think of today, but they're wonderful truths that we hope and pray that Louise and Arden come to embrace. We pray on this their baptism day, that they will grow up knowing that God loves them and

knows them by name, and that they have been adopted into God's family and are His children. Amen.