

Called by Name: From Fear to Adoption

The Feast and Our Identity

What name are you called by—the name the Father knows you by? Hold that question; we will return to it at the end.

Today's Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is really about one thing: your baptism and what it means. It is fitting that we end the Christmas season with Jesus manifested as the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased—important for His public ministry. But the feast is placed at the start of Ordinary Time to fix the first thing about us: our identity. If we get our identity wrong, the rest of Christianity will not make sense, and our lived experience of the faith will be poor at best.

The fundamental truth is this: you are a beloved child of God. As the Father says of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son," so He speaks over you: beloved. Even on the days you don't feel it. If we truly live from this identity, everything else follows. When we do not, there are consequences. Most of us carry places where love was not affirmed—ruptures in love—that have wounded our identity and our experience of God, self, and others. Those wounds—rejection, abandonment, shame, and the like—often drive our sins and our defenses.

St. Paul contrasts two interior postures closely tied to baptismal life: a spirit of fear and a spirit of adoption. Psychology sometimes names the first "fear bonds"—habitual ways we organize life to avoid pain. However we label it, the question is simple: in my heart (not just my head), am I living more from fear or from adoption?

A Heart Check: Seven Areas

Examine these seven areas at the level of the heart. Where do you recognize fear? Where do you recognize adoption?

1. **Image of God.**

Fear: God feels distant, aloof, irrelevant—or angry and frightening when fear goes deep.

Adoption: God is experienced as an intimate, loving Father involved in every aspect of life.

2. **Security.**

Fear: agitation, chronic lack of peace, anxiety fueled by the constant news-cycle.

Adoption: a general sense of peace, rest, and rootedness in God's love.

3. Affirmation.

Fear: striving for praise and others' approval.

Adoption: feeling accepted and affirmed by God—and that is enough; we do not *need* others' validation.

4. Desire.

Fear: desire runs toward counterfeit fulfillment—addictions from devices to more destructive escapes.

Adoption: desire becomes a delight in the Father's presence; we seek Him daily and want more of Him.

5. Purity (an undivided heart).

Fear: cycles of guilt and shame.

Adoption: intimacy with God naturally leads—progressively—to holiness; purity flows from communion, not mere willpower.

6. Love.

Fear: love is guarded and conditional—both how we imagine God's love and how we offer love to others.

Adoption: love is open, affectionate, and self-giving; God's love feels this way, and we begin to love likewise.

7. Freedom.

Fear: "freedom" is getting my way; God's commandments feel like a burden, and the result is captivity.

Adoption: freedom is living with the Lord by the Spirit; we can be ourselves because we know we are loved, and the commandments are a loving path to thrive.

If you find yourself "in the middle," you are not alone. Many of us need ongoing healing—especially of our image of God. Small traumas and disappointments can distort that image. The Lord desires to restore it.

Prayer Exercise: The Name the Father Knows

Return to the opening question: What is your name—the name the Father knows you by? We often live under false names: performance, productivity, labels others gave us (some intentionally hurtful, others unintentionally minimizing). Here is a brief prayer to exchange the false name for the true.

Sit comfortably with feet on the floor, hands on your thighs. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Gently close your eyes, or fix your gaze on a single point.

Pray: “Come, Holy Spirit.” (Say it slowly several times.)

Visualize the Lord Jesus standing before you. This is not fantasy; He is truly present in the Tabernacle. Attend to His loving gaze upon you as a beloved child of the Father.

Notice a chain or necklace around your neck with a name tag. It feels heavy, cutting into the back of your neck. This is a false name you have believed about yourself—drawn from experience, from others’ words, or from a “false self” you adopted.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what this false name is. When you are ready, lift the tag and read it. Then give Jesus permission to remove it and take it away. As He does, the weight lifts; you feel light.

Now notice that Christ places another chain around your neck. It is light. Without looking yet, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the name the Father truly calls you. When you are ready, read the tag.

Thank Jesus for realigning you to your true identity and for His love. When you are ready, return to the present.

If nothing came, try this again later in quiet. Group settings can feel awkward; at home you may perceive more clearly that the Lord is speaking. As we move into Ordinary Time, make it your aim to live from intimacy with the God who loves you and who calls you by name.

Praise be Jesus Christ.