

What's in a name?

By Bishop Duane C. Pederson

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But [Elizabeth] said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed (Luke 1:59-63).

Prior to the birth of our granddaughter, I did an Internet search and came up with about 2,000 Norwegian names for girls that I copied and gave to my son. From that, Brandon correctly surmised that I thought it might be a good idea to consider giving their yet to be born daughter a Norwegian name! I didn't think he'd bite, but he did and the first and middle names selected were Maia ("star of the sea") and Rane ("queen" or "pure"). Then the spelling for each was changed to Mya Rayne. Mya's name was chosen carefully and deliberately.

The Advent text from Luke's Gospel is about naming a baby. The parents are Zechariah and Elizabeth, and they have a baby boy who needed a name. It was Jewish custom to name children after a relative.

It was the eighth day after the birth of their son, the time for circumcision and naming. Those in attendance thought that the baby's name should be Zechariah in honor of his father. But Elizabeth said, "No, his name is to be John." Zechariah motioned for a tablet on which he scribbled, "His name is John." The father's word was final—John it would be.

What does John mean? It means "God's favor" or "God has been gracious." Certainly this promised child is a reflection of God's favor. Certainly, God has been gracious to an old couple with the incredible gift of a son, a son who would one day prepare the way of the Lord.

So, John, the favored one of God, would announce the coming of another whose name was announced by an angel—Jesus. For the name Jesus means "he who saves." The one who is "God's favor" announced the one who is "savior."

It is little wonder that old Zechariah was swept up by the Spirit and, like Mary who sang the Magnificat, sang his own song of thanksgiving and praise: "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

May Jesus, "he who saves," lighten your darkness and guide you to the peace that passes all understanding during this holy time of Advent. Sing praise and thanksgiving to God! □



Bishop Duane C. Pederson

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin



Each year, congregations throughout the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin reach out to help others. The pictures and stories that follow are examples of the work that is being done by people of all ages who are “walking together for the sake of mission in God’s world.”

Walking together for the sake of mission in God’s world



Bethel Lutheran Church in Hudson, Wis., seeks to send followers of Jesus into the world. In spring 2011, 14 Bethel parishioners, along with the Rev. Van V. Bredeson and members of the congregation’s Disaster Relief Mission Team, traveled to Port au Prince, Haiti. They visited an orphanage and helped rebuild a school and church following the devastating earthquake last year.

Bethel’s Disaster Recovery Mission Team made two trips in 2011 to the southern U.S. to continue rebuilding following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as the Gulf oil spill.

Return trips to Haiti and the southern U.S. are planned again for 2012, as well as another mission trip to Bethel’s sister congregation in Iringa, Tanzania.



Eight high school students and two adult chaperones from **Christ Lutheran Church, Somerset, Wis.**, traveled to the Wind River Reservation in Fremont County, Wyo.

In addition to five days of mission work, where they painted, cleaned and led the Kid's Club day camp, the group stayed overnight with ELCA congregations in Hardin, Mont., and Jackson, Wyo.

They also visited the Custer battlefield, which included a very educational tour by a parishioner from the local ELCA church. They traveled through Beartooth Pass and visited Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

On the return trip they visited Custer State Park and Mount Rushmore and stayed over at Atlantic Mountain Ranch, a Lutheran camp in South Dakota. At Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church, Jackson, Wyo., they worshiped with the Rev. Al Schoonover, who served in our synod at one time.



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin



Twenty people from **Hope Lutheran Church, River Falls, Wis.**, spent seven days working at the Robin's Nest Children's Home and Melody House for girls in Jamaica in 2011.

They filled more than 60 suitcases with supplies—diapers, laptop computers, clothes, uniforms sewed by Hope members and food items—and lots of plans for helping improve the



lives of the children.

At Melody House, the group spent time with the girls baking cookies, playing games, dancing, sharing stories and just having fun. At Robin's Nest, the Hope group painted, finished sewing school uniforms for all the children, tiled a bathtub, repaired broken windows, and played with the children and read them stories. They also painted a mural on the side of one building and a map showing where volunteers came from on another building.

It was a very positive project for the congregation. They started more than a year in advance doing projects (like sewing hundreds of mittens made from old wool sweaters) and working out details of how they were going to make a positive contribution to a few lives in Jamaica.



The focus at **Living Water Lutheran Church in Cameron, Wis.**, is “serving others through Christ.” One way they live out that statement is through an annual mission trip.

This year, they took a crew of 30 people to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Wolf Point, Mont., to provide vacation Bible school to the children there.

Almost 50 children registered for Bible school. That's four times as many children as they typically enroll in the church's Sunday school program!

Members of Living Water are building relationships and making memories while serving others.



God's work.
Our hands.