

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Lord said to Abram, **“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations ... As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ... I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her”** (Genesis 17:4-5, 15-16).

God has a way of changing names. To name a handful: Simon is called Peter, Saul is called Paul, Jacob is called Israel, Abram is called Abraham, and Sarai is called Sarah.

Why the name changes? What’s the importance of a name?

First, Simon. When St. Mark introduces Peter in his Gospel, he writes: **“[Jesus] appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter)”** (Mark 3:16). Later on, Jesus says why He chose the name Peter for Simon. Following Simon’s great confession about Jesus. Jesus says, **“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church”** (Matthew 16:17-18a). Jesus chose the name Peter for this moment. He knew that Simon would make this great confession, which is the rock that holds up the Church, the Rock of Jesus Christ.

Saul is a bit different. Saul was a pharisee of pharisees and a persecutor of the Church. After Saul fell from “his high horse” to faith in Jesus as the Christ, his name suddenly changed from Saul to Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, **“To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews. ... To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some”** (1 Corinthians 9:20, 22). So, to the Jews, he was Saul (meaning: “prayed for”) and to the Gentiles, he was Paul (a transliteration of Saul into Greek meaning, “small or humble”). He became all things to all people, so that he might save sinners by bringing them to faith in Christ Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Like Simon Peter, God is active in re-naming people. Following his wrestling with God, Jacob is renamed Israel, which means “God prevails” (Genesis 32:28). And even with Abram and Sarai, God is active. God says to Abram, **“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations”** (Genesis 17:5). No longer is this man to be the “exalted father” or “chief,” but now he will be “the father of a multitude of nations.” The same goes with Sarai, which means “princess.” For now, she will be named Sarah, which means “princess of a multitude of nations.” And God repeats the significance of the name changes: that all nations would be blessed through their offspring.

The name change to Abraham and Sarah was the seal of the covenant, a guarantee that God would keep the promise He had made. And if God would fail to keep His covenant promise, the names Abraham and Sarah would be constantly testified against Him. But we know that God has kept His covenant: Abraham and Sarah would bear a son Isaac. Abraham did become the father of a multitudes of nations. Some are *blood* descendants, such as the Israelites, the Edomites, and the Arabs. And some are *spiritual* descendants of Abraham and Sarah by faith. As Christians, we have Abraham as our spiritual father, since like him, we too, are saved by faith alone.

For the triune God – *the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit* – names are very important to Him. He promises to bless Abram, now Abraham, and Sarai, now Sarah, so that they would be a blessing to others. He promises to make them the father and mother of a multitude of nations.

This brings us to today. God says to Abraham, **“I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you”** (Genesis 17:7).

Earlier this morning we all experienced this “everlasting covenant” as the triune God adopted Braxton Henry “to this lifelong comfort sure” as His redeemed child of the heavenly Father.

As I have been mentioning the importance of names, I cannot ignore Braxton Henry. Jessica and Brandon, in case you aren’t aware, “Braxton” means “badger,” so be ready if he fulfills his name. But his middle name “Henry” has been a name chosen by many in royal families for it means “house ruler.”

Today, little Braxton Henry has inherited the gift of paradise – the gift of eternal life. So as long as Braxton remains clung to Christ and His promises, the power of sin, eternal death, and Satan have no effect upon him.

We all experience this “everlasting covenant” as we pass through the waters of Holy Baptism and hear God’s Name pronounced over us: *“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

But how can this be an “everlasting covenant”? Abraham and Sarah have died. They are no longer with us. Human beings, indeed, have a life expectancy. We begin and we end. We each end because the result of sin is death.

So, to be an everlasting covenant, it would take a special descendant who would be like Abraham, a human descendant, but also like God, who would have no end. God fulfilled His promises to Abraham and Sarah as the promised Descendant who would make them the father and mother of multitudes of nations has come – Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Jesus, the promised Offspring, paid for the sins of our weak faith. He paid for our doubts. He paid for our constant desire to do things our way. He did so by suffering our punishment. He shed His own blood to cover our sins. His own death paid for our wage of sin. And His glorious bodily resurrection conquered the power of death itself. Through Christ alone, ***“we have been justified by faith”*** (Romans 5:1) and are at peace with God.

It is only through Jesus Christ that all the promises given to Abraham, to Sarah, and to us are fulfilled. So, that by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, we are now numbered among the multitudes of descendants of Abraham.

Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords who has made this covenant everlasting to a multitude of nations. This was fulfilled when He sent forth His apostles to ***“make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age”*** (Matthew 28:19-20).

Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we each become a *spiritual* descendant of Abraham. Through Baptism, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and we become an heir of eternal life, an heir of the “everlasting covenant.” And it is through Baptism, that God gives us a new name too: a Christian.

But Baptism does not complete us as Christians. Neither does the Rite of Confirmation. It's faith that is given to us from the Holy Spirit through Baptism that completes us. It's the faith that grows and matures in us through the work of the Holy Spirit as we are taught the Scriptures and what the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession, and the Lord's Supper mean. It's the faith that grows and matures in us through the Holy Spirit that leads us to confess our sins to God our Father and receive the forgiveness that His Son – our Brother – won for us on the cross through His atoning suffering and death. It's the faith that grows and matures in us through the Holy Spirit as we love God by receiving His gifts in Word and Sacrament, and from these Means of Grace, we learn to love and serve our neighbor.

The triune God fulfills His promises as He upholds His everlasting covenant for you and me. He gives you this covenant in His blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. He has sealed you through His holy, precious blood, which strengthens your faith and keeps you in faith to life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +