

Many of you know, I am one of those who celebrate a birthday during the Christmas season, and I really appreciate the cards I get. Over the years, my friends have made it a point of sending me cards which are, at best, marginal in taste. I believe they send that kind of card because they think I need to keep my sense of the outrageous well honed -- now more than ever -- and I guess that's true as far as it goes.

There are two cards from this year's crop I'd like to talk about: The first is from a colleague in Dallas Texas, who always makes a point of reminding me he's a couple of years my junior. It says...

*"Hooray, it's your birthday – This is the season to be jolly – It's that time of the year when the birthday elf comes down the chimney, when you blow out the candles on your Easter eggs, sing halloween carols, eat new years' cake and open your pumpkins." On the inside, it says, "What the hell; you're old; you're confused; you don't know the difference.."*

And that's kind of the way I feel; that's the way many folks I've talked to feel. We sit here on New Years' Day, kind of shell shocked... With giving and receiving gifts, travel, renewed contact with friends and family -- extra bodies in the house, extra cooking and cleanup, some of us are kind of reeling.

We sit here on new years' day contemplating the season's and the year's end; contemplating the unfulfilled expectations as well as the unexpected fulfillment we experienced during year -- and it does all kind of run together. But you know, we're old -- were confused -- we don't know the difference.

In the midst of all that confusion, it's easy to forget that God has given us a brand new year -- that we're starting fresh with a clean slate, and that this new beginning in Christ is what Christmas is all about.

In the midst of our mixed feelings about the coming and going of the Holiday Season, and the new year, we need to remember what we've seen and heard this Christmas season: Once more we have heard the message of new life and new light in song and in word. Once again we have visualized it in the symbols of Christmas. Once more we have seen and commemorated the birthday of our King and today we celebrate the day of his naming.

This Sunday is called the feast of the Holy Name on the Church Calendar.

I wanted to tell you about another card I received – From my parents: It's a "Peanuts one."

On the outside, Linus says, *"Don't think of it as just another birthday! Think of it as another year spent mastering the intricacies of a rewarding and demanding life!"* ---- On the inside, Snoopy says, *"Well, that sounds better than 'There goes another year down the tube.'"*

It's true: How something is described or named counts for much, and in this morning's Gospel, Jesus parents follow through and name the child Jesus, as the angel said they would. They named him Jesus.

The name Jesus was a common name, in those times, and reflected a hope the people had. You see, Jesus means God saves, or God is with us. It was a common name -- like our name John, and with the variations of the name John -- Jack, or Johnnie, the name Jesus has variations too: Joshua, or Emmanuel.. But it means the same thing: God saves -- God is with us.

And as we recover from the confusion, and work to reestablish routine -- as we contemplate the sometimes forbidding clean slate of a new year, His holy name needs to figure into that somewhere:

God saves us -- God is with us.

He gives us the gift of new life, and new beginnings any time we ask.

In Jesus holy name, AMEN