

The seventy-two are excited. Their mission trip was a success! Better than they had ever imagined. *“Even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”* they tell Jesus. As they went from town to town, encountering people possessed by demons, they were able to expel them using the name of Jesus. This calls for a celebration! Life is good. It’s reason to rejoice with high fives all around.

But not so fast. *“Do not rejoice in this,”* Jesus cautions them. Really? Yes, really. Did the seventy-two not hear Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount? His words are recorded by St. Matthew. *“On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name?’... And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me.’”*

Casting out demons is a mighty work of God. A work Jesus was doing through the seventy-two. But what Jesus does through us for others is not the same as what Jesus does for us. Pastors do not have a ticket to heaven because they preach the Gospel to their congregations. Missionaries do not have a ticket there because of the work they do in the mission field. It’s important that all Christians use the gifts God has given them to serve those in the church and their neighbor in the world. But no one is saved by using their gifts. Our salvation is in, and only in, what God has done, not through us but for us, in Jesus Christ our Lord. And this is reason to rejoice. *“Rejoice,”* says Jesus, *“that your names are written in heaven.”*

We do not know the names of the seventy-two that Jesus sent out. These are not the twelve disciples. They are seventy-two others. Their names are not known to us, but they are known to God. And not only known to Him. Their names, says Jesus, are *“written in heaven.”* And there is no greater joy than this. On the Last Day Jesus will not say to the seventy-two, *“I never knew you; depart from Me.”* He does know them. Their names are written in heaven.

Who wrote them? God did. No one writes their own name in heaven. Nothing that we do, no matter how great a work for the kingdom of God, can inscribe our name in heaven. The names that He writes in heaven He writes solely by grace. He does not look to our works for Him as He writes. He looks to Jesus’ works for us.

And is this not because He writes with the ink of Jesus’ own blood? This is why the names of the seventy-two are written there. Not because they suffered and even spilled blood as they went out like *“lamb in the midst of wolves.”* But because Jesus suffered and died on the cross, shedding His blood for them and for all sinners.

So, why aren’t the names of all sinners written in heaven? Jesus spilled His blood for all sinners. Why some and not others?

If I could answer that, I would be God. And if I were to attempt to answer that, I would be Satan. For Satan always gives answers where God chooses to remain silent.

But where God speaks, there is certainty, there is assurance, and there is reason to rejoice. God speaks to you in your baptism into Jesus Christ. There is God’s mighty work for you. And there in your baptism are Jesus’ comforting words, *“Rejoice that your name is written in heaven.”*

When you deal with doubt, when your sins weigh heavily upon you, remember your baptism and rejoice that your name is written in heaven.

And also this, when you come up to God's altar to receive the Holy Supper, Jesus speaks these words to you as He feeds you, "*Rejoice that your name is written in heaven.*" How can I say this to you with such certainty? Because your name is not written on a cloud somewhere up in heaven. Your name is written on Christ Himself, within His holy wounds. And here in His Supper He opens His wounds to you so that you see, by faith, your name written there with His words, "*Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*" Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation, and there is reason to rejoice.

If anyone had reason not to rejoice, it was the thief on the cross. No one would have thought, nor he himself, that his name was written in heaven. And yet it was. He did not just see Jesus' holy wounds as did the other thief. He believed that those wounds were for him. And so he said to Jesus, "*Remember me.*" For 2,000 years we in the church have remembered him only as the thief who repented. But Jesus remembers him by name, for his name is written within Jesus' wounds.

This is for you also to believe. It is not necessary to see Jesus' wounds. The other thief saw them and yet did not believe. But it is necessary to see, by faith, your name written within Jesus' wounds. For believing is seeing.

Look to your baptism into Christ, therefore, and believe. Come to His Holy Supper and believe. Believe that all your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. And believe that your name is written in heaven. And then rejoice. For what you now believe, in heaven you will see with your eyes – your name written in Him who suffered and died for you, Christ Jesus your Lord and Savior. Amen.