

Jacob

Jacob had been estranged from his twin brother Esau for many years, having stolen his birthright through deception. They were soon to meet. The night before that meeting Jacob met "a man" who wrestled him. What a strange story—a wrestling match that lasted all night! How does such a story shed light on this advent season? Note that God took the initiative and came directly to Jacob, in the form of a human being. We know Jacob was filled with fear and anxiety about meeting Esau—Esau indeed might kill him. This time of physical wrestling was more than it seemed, especially since Jacob was more than 90 years old. God used the experience, including damaging Jacob's hip tendon, to draw Jacob to Himself. God offers Jacob a blessing, giving him a new name—Israel. When God gives a person a name he has selected, something marvelous will happen: Abram became Abraham, Saul became Paul, Simon became Peter. And here Jacob is given the name Israel—meaning "one who has struggled with God."

Sovereign Father, who has worked for the good of humankind throughout the centuries, we thank you for sending your son Jesus to earth. We thank you that His name gives us life and hope. Most of all, we thank you in this advent season, that he indeed saves us from our sins. AMEN.

The courage from this divine encounter enabled Jacob to meet Esau without fear, and to become a father of a great nation.

In our advent season we are reminded that names matter. While we were still in our sins, God took the initiative by sending his angel to visit a young Galilean virgin. Part of his message to Mary, and one that Joseph, too, will receive is this: the baby that will be conceived in Mary's womb is to be named Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." And to Joseph, the words: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Surely, names do matter. Israel became the father of a great nation. And Jesus became the savior of sinners. Our Jesus, who is the hope of our Advent, and the giver of life.

Bill Henderson

Genesis 32.22-32

sunday December 6

Jacob Wrestling With the Angel | Rembrandt | 1659