

The maternity ward of any local zoo not only increases the animal count of said zoo but, if the birth is in the headlines, increases the human visitor count as well. One such nativity is the starting point for this week's connection between news and Scripture.

On September 11th, the Louisville Courier Journal announced, "Louisville Zoo Wants Help Naming Baby Giraffe By Voting. Find Out How." The zoo is not conducting an experiment in democracy. The staff has already selected three possible names for the male giraffe, "Tana, the name of a Kenya river where the giraffes reside, Nyasi, meaning 'grass' in Swahili . . . and Mdogo, meaning 'little' or 'young' in Swahili." These names were selected to honor the baby's homeland.

The September 12th edition of the New York Times proposed that some monkeys do not need human help to find a name. The article, "These Monkeys Call One Another by Name," was based on the findings of a research paper published in the journal Science. The research team, ". . . used A.I. to uncover name-like labels hiding in the calls of common marmosets." The increasing use of technology on animal communication may show that "name-bestowing behavior" exists in many species besides humans.

The New York Times article on marmosets referenced an earlier discovery of "name-bestowing behavior." On June 10th, the journal Nature asked, "Do Elephants Have Names for Each Other?" A combination of technology and human observation reached this conclusion, "The elephant humans have named 'Desert Rose' might respond more readily if her specific elephant rumble was used." The research team had determined which infrasonic call, or "name," belonged to each elephant in the study.

Name-bestowing is very important in the Bible. At the very start of creation, when the earth was barely a week old, God brought the "zoo" (all animals and birds) to Adam, ". . . to see what name he would bestow on them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen 2:19). When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, Moses asked God to reveal His name. God told Moses that His name was, "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). In Judaism, the four letter name God bestowed on Himself (YHWH) became so sacred that the name is never spoken, and is changed to "the Lord" in reading or translating Scripture verses that include God's name.

There is a final name-bestowing in the Bible that is even more important than the one that took place in the Garden of Eden. John the Apostle was given a message to believers around the world, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious . . . I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it" (Rev 2:17).

Until that day, every Christian is like the giraffe in the Louisville Zoo, we are waiting to find out what our name will be.