

The Circumcision and Name of Jesus, 2006

Text: Luke 2:21

Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL

Pastor H. R. Curtis

+Grace and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ +

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What an odd festival we celebrate this Lord's Day. Everything about it is strange. While the world celebrates the beginning of a New Year with parades, sleeping in, and hangovers here we are in Church to mark the observance of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus. While most Sundays have a Gospel lesson that is a parable of our Lord, or a miracle of healing, or a bit of his teaching, today the Gospel lesson is only one verse long: Luke 2:21, "And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

A whole festival from one verse? Yes, for there is enough in that one verse to shame all the tomes of man's philosophy and wisdom. For this one verse spells the end of our condemnation under the Law and the beginning of our salvation.

The circumcision and naming of a baby boy in Israel was an everyday occurrence. Hardly worth mentioning really. Every baby boy since Isaac had gone through the ceremony – the reception of the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham to bless him, make him a nation, and to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. It was just what happened on the eighth day; everyone was used to it. But this circumcision of Mary's baby boy was different – different by far.

From Isaac, son of Sarah, on down all the baby boys had to be circumcised to be in the covenant. As our Old Testament text said, those not so circumcised were cast out of the community. But what need has baby Jesus of this circumcision? Jesus has no need to be in Abraham's covenant, for he is the God of Abraham who made the covenant in the first place! Jesus has no need of the Law, for he is the great Law-giver. Jesus has no need to spill his blood, for he is the God to whom the blood of all the sacrifices of old was spilt.

But here, on the eighth day, for the first time Jesus feels the knife of the Law on your behalf. Here, on the eighth day, for the first time, Jesus steps into the place of sinners and takes upon himself their duties, their burdens, their punishment. On the eighth day, Jesus comes under the Law so that you may come

under grace. On the eighth day, Jesus is circumcised so that you don't have to be. On the eighth day, Jesus fulfills the Law and circumcision and sacrifice and all of the shadows of the Old Testament so that now these shadows are past.

It is on the eighth day that this happens for the eighth day is the day of new creation; and in his coming under the Law Jesus makes all things new. For it was on the eighth day after the flood that God started over with Noah and his family – eight people in all. It was on the eighth day – the first day of a new week – that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And consider how Jesus is the son of the seventh barren womb that miraculously gave birth by God's command. For first there was Sarah, then Rebekah, then Rachel, then Samson's mother, then Hannah, then Elizabeth, and then Mary, the seventh, the most barren of all, for no one looks for a Virgin to be a Mother. But there is one womb more barren than even Mary's virgin womb should have been: the eighth womb. The womb of Mother Earth – the womb dug in the ground – the womb of the grave – the eighth womb which our Lord Jesus Christ opened in his resurrection. These correspondences – all these eights in God's Word and plan of salvation are not coincidence, for God does not roll dice with the universe. Rather, God is a poet and an artist painting the poem of the history of our salvation with scenes and happenings that rhyme and echo his love for us down through the ages. So look on Jesus on this eighth day and see your salvation. Listen to God's poem and God's song in this one-verse Gospel lesson and hear the dark, minor chords of your sinfulness laid upon the Son of God. For make no mistake, it is your burden He bears, it is the knife meant for you that cuts Him. For your unclean thoughts, for your cruel words, for your back-stabbing and bickering and grudges and despair – for all this and more, he is consigned to bleed and die on the cross.

So repent. Turn from evil and toward this bleeding Lord. For the blood spilt is for you. For his Name, after all, is Jesus, and it means "The Lord saves." No one gives him this name. No one has the honor of naming him: not his guardian Joseph nor even his most honorable Mother Mary. Adam once named all the creatures, but no son of Adam or daughter of Eve may name this baby boy, for this baby boy is the Lord of creation in the flesh. And so he names himself and announces it through the angel: He shall be called Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.

And again see the work of God's poetry. For his name, Jesus, is in Hebrew Yeshua, or as we say it in English Joshua. This is His name, but beforehand there was a shadow of this name: Joshua son of Nun, successor of Moses who led God's people in battle

against the enemy and brought them safely to the promised land through the Jordan's waters. But all that was a shadow. That old Joshua has nothing on this new Jesus. Joshua was the successor of Moses, taking over where he left off and walking in his footsteps – Jesus is the true Successor of Moses who blazes a new path bringing grace and truth where Moses brought only Law. Joshua battled and defeated the flesh and blood enemies of God's people with the sword – Jesus defeats sin, and death, and hell, and the devil himself not with worldly weapons but with his death on the cross and his resurrection from the eighth barren womb of the grave. Joshua led the people of God through the Jordan's waters and into the promised land – Jesus, with water and Spirit, baptizes his people into the very Name of God and thus brings them everlasting life.

So behold the mastery of God's work and the mystery of your salvation. The Old Covenant made with Abraham through circumcision is fulfilled as Jesus submits to it and finally satisfies it, thus bringing it to an end. Jesus steps into the breach and dies in the place of sinners, for the Lord saves. Jesus now makes all of us heirs to all the promises of God, for all the promises of God are Yes in Christ. Indeed, as St. Paul said to the Galatians today, we are now all sons of Abraham through baptism and faith in the promise. We are all sons of God for we are all baptized into his saving Name. There is therefore, now no more condemnation for you. You are forgiven and free. The knife of the Law holds no danger for you for it has already cut Another and was consumed in the process. But, wonder of wonders, still there is more. Still the Lord loves us beyond measure and has more gifts to give. For on this Holy Festival Day the Lord is not far from us, but near. When we speak of Jesus and his salvation we do not speak of long ago history, but of what is present with us even today. For our Lord Jesus has given us the gift of the fruits of his cross in the Holy Supper of his body and blood. This is surely the best celebration of the Name of our Lord Jesus for here we see and receive with mouth and soul the great truth that the Lord saves. Surely this is the best celebration of any and every Lord's Day, every Eighth Day, every Sunday for it is the Word made flesh giving us his flesh and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Would you know you are forgiven? Do you want to know if the Lord who saves, saves you? Then come, and as the Holy Liturgy says praise his glorious name with angels and archangels, receive his true body and true blood, given and shed for you, and cry out with the faithful of all ages, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!" Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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