

The Circumcision and Name of Our Lord Luke 2:21

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem for a census. There was no room in the inn. Mary gave birth in a stable and laid her Babe in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths. This Baby is the Son of God—God in the flesh. Remember everything you’ve heard from me this past month as regards God in the flesh, because it’s all right there in the manger. (cf. Luke 2:1-7)

Shepherds were in the field tending their flocks that night. Then, an angel of the Lord appeared to them. They were frightened, but the angel brought them good news and was joined by a whole host of angels to sing a song:

[T]here is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger...Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

The angels depart. The Shepherds make their way to see this thing of which they heard. They marveled, then went around telling everyone the things which they had heard and seen, then returned to their fields and folds. But Mary kept all things and pondered them in her heart. (cf. Luke 2:8-20)

Pause, because that’s what St. Luke does. The Son of God, who is the Word of God, is born in Bethlehem, as the prophets foretold, then Luke pauses for 8 days.

It is now 8 days since Christmas day, and this is the Gospel appointed for today. “And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.” That’s it; a blip among so many words, but in such a short text, Luke tells you everything that you need to know. The one born “to you, [your] Savior, who is Christ the Lord,” is already at work to save, even at eight days old.

And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Genesis 17:9-14)

Thus was the Law given prescribing the ritual now being kept in Immanuel’s eighth day. It was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, a sign marking the male child of eight days as part of that covenant and, more importantly, a part of the People—God’s Chosen People. He who was not circumcised was to be cut off from the people, for that male child, eight days or not, has broken the covenant with God—he has rejected God’s choice. Moreover, any male wanting to be part of the People must observe this ritual, no matter how old, for it would be a sign that he was a part of the People.

So, why is Jesus being circumcised? For one, He’s keeping the Law, and He’s doing it for Himself. For another, He’s keeping the Law, and He’s doing it for you. Jesus is born among the Jews. His mother is a Jew, His guardian is a Jew, and He will grow up a Jew. For Jewish boys, it was prescribed

to be circumcised, so the foreskin of His flesh was cut off, and He remained a Jew. He was a part of the People of God—the Chosen People of God—and, therefore, fully subject to all of the laws and commandments of God.

St. Paul picked up on this when He wrote, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5) God is born under the law; it’s a profound statement. And, as part of being under that law, He has to be circumcised.

But, since He is born to you, a Savior, He places Himself fully under His law, including the covenant of circumcision, for you! Back on His eighth day, He continues being YHWH saves—as He has been since His conception, though He didn’t have the name just then—as He first sheds His blood for you. Jesus becomes for you the Chosen Nation, for in His circumcision, He assumes all of Israel in His flesh, becoming the Nation rolled into one Person, as it has been said.

Then you are brought into Him by way of your baptism. Jesus is conceived, born, lived, died, and risen again for you. His circumcision is included in that. And the Word of God commands Holy Baptism and calls it a joining to Jesus’ death and resurrection—indeed, His entire life. (cf. Romans 6:3-5) He is the fulfillment of the Law for you so that in Him, you keep the law. Therefore, while circumcision is no longer prescribed, having been baptized into Christ, you are circumcised and a part of the New Israel, the New Chosen Nation. And, in fact, you are circumcised, as St. Paul wrote:

For in [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:9-12)

He described it to the Romans as a circumcision of the heart, of the Spirit, which is the cutting off of the flesh of sin. (cf. Romans 2:29) And this circumcision places you into the New Chosen Nation. Today, that nation is called the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ. This is the adoption as sons that St. Paul wrote about.

On the Eighth Day of Christ, it is the Son of God who is circumcised—God in the flesh. He sheds His blood for you to bring you into the Nation with Him, and He sheds His blood for you to bring you into the everlasting kingdom with Him. That shedding of blood was on the cross, whereat the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God was done for propitiation. The wages of sin—of your sin—are paid, and you are redeemed, bought back; you are saved, and propitiation has been made.

And it’s a good thing, too, because you know those laws of God under which Jesus was born. And not one of them have you ever perfectly kept. Sure, from time to time, you keep the letter of the law, but the spirit is never, if ever, kept by you or the rest of fallen humanity. Only one person has ever done so, and that person was God, who was given the name Jesus, the name given to Him by the angel before He was born. You fall short, but you are baptized into Him who was circumcised and named, lived and died, and rose again for you!

This is what is required of you, every one of you: to walk perfectly in the laws and commandments of God. So, examine yourself! Consider your station in life according to the Ten Commandments. You’ll find that you haven’t walked that straight and narrow line. In fact, I bet that in many instances you can’t even be sure whether you have walked that straight and narrow line; the safe bet is that you haven’t. Therefore, the only thing that you can be certain of is that you deserve to be cut off from the People.

But God would not have it that way if there was anything that can be done about it. Therefore,

"when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Today's Gospel, short as it is, describes Jesus, who was born under the law and kept that law—the law of circumcision—for you. But it is an important part. Only St. Luke gives it to you, and all he gives is one, short verse. Without it, the telling of Christ's fulfillment of the law would be incomplete. Jesus is made a part of the Chosen Nation—He is the Chosen Nation, and He is the Chosen Nation for you. Therefore, in Christ, baptized into Christ, you are all circumcised sons of God and a part of his Chosen People.

I've said it before, and it bears repeating: if you celebrate Christmas, I dare say you have to celebrate this day, the Circumcision and Name of Our Lord. Babies being born is something the whole world can get behind, but when that Baby is the Creator of the universe who takes on flesh and blood in order to spill that blood and give that flesh over to death, it gives meaning and the purpose to the first 20 verses of Luke 2. Christmas is a fine thing to celebrate—the birth of the Son of God; but what is that birth without the circumcision and name of Jesus? Jesus came as propitiation, and He begins that propitiatory sacrifice on His eighth day. Jesus is the reason for the season, and it's salutary to keep Christ in Christmas; therefore, Luke 2:21 is the reason that Jesus is the reason for the season and is a means of keeping Christ in Christmas. Jesus is God who has flesh and blood and can shed that blood and bruise that flesh, and does so in order to keep the Law for you and for all.

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:11-13) Dear Baptized, you are marked with the sign of the People—the **new** sign of the People—for at your baptisms you have received the sign of the cross on forehead and heart, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified and Christ the circumcised and Christ the named. In your Baptisms, you were born of God. There, you received Him and the benefits He gives in His birth, circumcision, crucifixion, and resurrection. You do believe in His name—Jesus, YHWH saves. Therefore,

[y]ou are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Yes, you are children of God, you are sons of God, every one of you, for in Him, in His shedding of blood, in His name, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.