

The Festival of the Circumcision of our Lord
St. Luke 2:21
January 1st, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Circumcision of the Child

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Merciful and Eternal God, heavenly Father, Who didst cause Thy Son to endure circumcision and to be made subject to the law, that we might be redeemed from the curse of the law: We beseech Thee, grant us grace to become partakers of this redemption and thus obtain eternal salvation, through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is unfortunate that this Festival falls on the day of the civil new year. For there is the temptation to supplant this important Festival with talk about the coming year. The Church has never connected this day, January 1st, with the beginning of a new year. The new year for the Church has always been the *Ad te levavi*, the First Sunday in Advent. The Lutheran Reformers deplored deeply that the idea of the civil new year had made the Festival of the Circumcision of our Lord secondary. Martin Luther wrote, "This day is called the New Year's Day after the custom of Rome. This and other things which we have received from Rome, we now let pass away. Since, however, the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ has been appointed to this day, it is proper that we preach about this event today." Therefore, the focus for the Church this day is not on the beginning of the civil new year, but its focus is on the circumcision and naming of our Lord + Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Luke, the shortest Gospel of the entire Church's year, two things are spoken of that happened to the Baby + Jesus: He was circumcised, and He was named. In His circumcision He reveals that He is truly man. In His Name He reveals that He is truly the Lord God. We will examine both of these points.

As I hope you remember, circumcision was established by God with Abraham. This was a sign of the covenant between God and His people. Every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. It is now eight days after the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, which is why this holiday falls on the first day of the civil calendar, since the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord falls on December 25th. Our Lord + Jesus is circumcised on this day. In His circumcision He places Himself under the Law. He places Himself into the family of Abraham. He becomes part of the seed of Abraham. All the male descendants of Abraham were circumcised on the eighth day, and by virtue of the cutting off of the flesh were made heirs of the promises given to Abraham.

This circumcision of the descendants of Abraham was a sign that the Lord God would deliver them from their sins; that He would not count their sins against them. The organ of procreation was cut as a testament that the image in which we were created had become corrupted, and on account of that a payment needed to be made in order to appease God's wrath. In the shedding of the blood of the

male children eight days old, there is made a payment for sin. Their circumcision was a testament that they belonged to the Lord God, and He had claimed them as His own. Our Lord + Jesus, however, is without sin. In His circumcision the Law of God has overreached; it has stepped over its boundaries. He required no payment for sin. Therefore, the payment for sin that He makes is gifted to us; it is given to all those who cling to Him in faith.

Circumcision was a precursor to Holy Baptism. The cutting of the flesh signified that that person belonged to the Lord God; that he was a part of the family of God. In Holy Baptism there is now no longer a cutting of flesh but a washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Ghost. Holy Baptism, unlike circumcision, is not just for the male children, but it is for all nations who are brought to the font to receive this washing away of sins. We have been baptized into the Lord + Jesus Christ. We have been made heirs of the heavenly Kingdom.

Our sins have been washed away, and we are now clean and pure before the Triune Lord God. The Holy Ghost has entered into us and created in us faith in the words and promises of the Lord + Jesus Christ. We are now brothers of the Lord + Jesus, and as brothers, we are also co-heirs of the gifts of Heaven; all the gifts He won for us by His death on the tree of the holy cross. The same death into which we were baptized. The children of Abraham shed the blood of their foreskins and were claimed by the Lord God as His children. In the death of our Lord + Jesus He sheds His Blood on the tree of the holy cross, and like in His circumcision where He passes on the gifts that are His to us, He passes on to us the forgiveness, life and salvation that He won for us on the tree of the holy cross.

At the circumcision of our Lord + Jesus, He is given a Name. This Name is actually given to Him long before this event. The Evangelist St. Luke writes that this Name was given to Mary when the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Savior to her. The angel Gabriel also told the Lord's guardian father, Joseph, that His Name was to be called + Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins. This is what + Jesus means, "He Who saves." But since holy Scripture tells us that the Lamb of God was "slain before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) we can rightly say that He had this name from before the foundation of the world. The Lord + Jesus is the Lamb of God Who was slain from before the foundation of the world; He is the Lamb Who is the One Who saves. He saves His people—He saves us—from our sins.

In our Holy Baptism, this Name of our Lord + Jesus was placed upon us. We are now called by His Name. He is the Savior. We are the saved. This is why this Name should be held in high honor among us. We should not misuse or abuse His holy Name.

One of the ways in order to teach ourselves to honor this most holy Name is to do as holy Scripture teaches us: to bow at the Name of + Jesus. When we get in the habit of honoring His Name in such a way, it will not be misused by us. Or be used flippantly, or be used to curse and swear inappropriately. When we bow our heads every time we say or hear the Name of the Lord + Jesus, we are teaching ourselves to have honor for that Name, and ultimately to have honor for the One Who bears that Name.

Another way in which we teach ourselves to honor that most holy of Names is to use it to call upon the Lord + Jesus whenever we are in distress or trouble. The devil and his angels hate the Lord + Jesus; they hate His Name. Wherever the Lord's Name abides Satan and his horde cannot stand to be. This is why we honor the holy Name of our Lord + Jesus here in this holy sanctuary; why we call upon it in every prayer, praise and thanks. The Lord + Jesus has even promised that wherever two or three are gathered in His Name He is there in the midst of them. The Lord + Jesus is here among us today. He is here among us as we gather in His Name. The Name placed upon us in our Holy Baptism. For we are indeed baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Under this Name placed upon us at our Holy Baptism we were made children of the heavenly Father, and we given a share in the inheritance of our Beloved Brother, the Lord + Jesus Christ. The Jews were circumcised in the flesh, but we are circumcised in the spirit. Our hearts have been circumcised to receive the Lord + Jesus Christ in faith. Through the working of the Holy Ghost, faith has been created in us, and we cling to the works and merits of the Christ. Moreover, we now bear the Name of our Savior, our Lord + Jesus Christ. He is the Savior. We are the saved. Thanks be to God.

Therefore, let us celebrate this first day of the civil calendar properly, by reflecting upon what our Lord + Jesus has done for us in saving us from all our sins. And let us live each day of this new year with the knowledge that we belong to the Lord + Jesus and we bear His Name. Let us also give thanks throughout this coming year, that we have the good gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation and we can enjoy those gifts whenever we are gathered together around our Lord's precious Name of + Jesus. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

O Lord God, heavenly Father, we give thanks to Thee that Thou hast made Thy dearly beloved and Only-Begotten Son obedient to the Law, that He might redeem them that were under the Law from its curse; and we beseech Thee, enlighten our hearts by the Holy Spirit that, when our conscience accuses us of sin, we may be comforted by His obedience, may walk in newness of life, and at last inherit everlasting salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!