

The Festival of the Circumcision of our Lord
St. Luke 2:21
January 1st, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When Eight Days Were Fulfilled

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“And when eight days were fulfilled for circumcising Him, His name was called JESUS, which was so called by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

Happy new year, my dear friends! The calendar year in the Church begins with the Octave of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, which is this festival which we celebrate today: the Festival of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus. On this eighth day of our Lord's earthly life, He subjects Himself to the Law. When the eighth day was fulfilled, the day when all male children of the Jewish nation were circumcised, our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ is also circumcised. And He is given the name by which He was called by the angel Gabriel nine months ago when His birth was first announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He is today given the name of JESUS, the name which means “Savior.” For He is our Savior from sin and death.

On this eighth day after the birth of our Lord God in our flesh, He first sheds His blood for us poor, miserable sinners. This is a foreshadowing of the blood that He will shed on the tree of the holy cross when He offers up His life as a ransom for ours. Every sin requires a sacrifice. Every sin required the shedding of blood. When Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden, the Lord God sacrificed the first animal on their behalf. This animal's death was a substitute for their deaths, and it also provided Adam and Eve with clothing, for the Lord God made for them coats of skins for covering and protection from the harsh elements of this world outside the Garden of Eden.

We see this offering up of animals as a sacrifice in place of mankind beginning with Adam and Eve's second son. Abel offered up as a sacrifice and offering the firstfruits of his flock that he raised. He offered up the first spotless lamb as an appeasement for sins. Noah offered sacrifices also after he was rescued from the ark after the flood. Even his descendant, Abraham, offered sacrifices for the remission of his sins and his family's sins. But we are told by Moses, who established the sacrificial system in the wilderness after the Lord God had led His people out of the bond of slavery to Egypt, that Abraham had something else that appeased the Lord God even more than the sacrifices of animals. He had faith. So too, did Abel and Noah, and Moses.

Faith was credited to them as righteousness. Faith in the grace and promises of the Lord God

was greater than the sacrifice of animals. As King David wrote in the Psalter, "I (that is, the Lord God) desire mercy, rather than sacrifice. The shedding of the blood of animals could only appease the wrath of the Lord God if such sacrifices were accompanied with faith in the promise that this sacrifice would grant the remission of sins. This is why Cain, Abel's brother, had his sacrifice rejected by the Lord God because he offered it as another work he must do, and not in faith in the grace and mercy of the Lord God. We are told that Abraham had faith and it was credited to him as righteousness. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Church at Galatia sums this up with the foundation upon which the entire Church is established, "We are justified by faith."

Abraham had this faith in the Lord God from the beginning; from the time when the Lord God told Abraham to get out of his own country and go into a foreign land of which the Lord God would lead him, into the promised land of Canaan. This faith in the Lord God remained with Abraham throughout his wanderings in the land of Canaan. And as a sign and testament to this faith, the Lord God gave to Abraham and to all his seed, the gift of circumcision. This would be a physical sign of the faith that Abraham and his seed possessed. The male Israelites would bear in their flesh the mark of their faith. But just like it was with the sacrifice of animals, where they were offered up as a work that must be accomplished, and not as a means to appease the Lord God's wrath and receive remission of their sins, so too was it with circumcision. Many were circumcised in the flesh, but not in the heart, as St. Paul talks about in another Epistle.

Circumcision was meant as a sign of Israel's faith, but many rejected their circumcision because of their lack of faith. For faith looks to the promise of the Messiah, the Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of circumcision, for faith looks to this promise of a Savior. And on the eighth day after the birth of our Lord in the flesh, Christ fulfills the promise. He is circumcised and fulfills the promise that was made to Abraham when circumcision was first established, that from his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. For circumcision was an outward sign of the inward faith that dwells in all those who cling to the promise of a Messiah. For faith is greater than the shedding of the blood of animals. But a sacrifice must be made for sin.

The blood of rams and goats appeased the wrath of the Lord God for mankind's countless sins when that sacrifice was offered in faith. But these sacrifices could never fully appease the Lord God's wrath. Circumcision was a sign of the inward faith born in the outward flesh of mankind, but this too was only a foreshadowing of something greater to come. For these were only signs which pointed to a Savior from sin and death. These signs pointed to this tiny Baby Who is eight days old. This Baby would fulfill circumcision. This Baby would first shed His blood on this eighth day as a foreshadowing of His innocent suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross. For this Child bears the Name which is above all names, the Name at which every knee should bow both in Heaven and on Earth. This Child bears the Name of + JESUS, the Name which means "Savior." For He would save His people from their sins by His sacrifice of Himself upon the tree of the holy cross.

The blood of rams and goats, and other animals, were a foreshadowing of the true sacrifice of the Lord God in our flesh. His sacrifice appeased fully the wrath of the Lord God heavenly Father. His sacrifice—His shedding of blood—won the remission of sins for all mankind. Now all those who cling to Him in faith can lay claim to the rewards won in that sacrifice. Through faith we are justified. Through faith we have the forgiveness of sins. And where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal life and salvation bestowed.

Circumcision was supposed to be a physical sign of the faith that dwelt in the heart. It was an outward sign of the inward circumcision of the heart. But now that the Christ has come, now that He has been circumcised, and thereby fulfilled the requirement for circumcision, man no longer needs to be circumcised. For we have been given a greater gift than the cutting off of the flesh. We have been given the gift of Holy Baptism. Holy Baptism is a greater gift than circumcision, not only because it does

not require the shedding of blood and pain and sacrifice of the flesh, but because Holy Baptism confers upon all those who are baptized the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost creates faith through the washing of water and the Word in all those who are baptized. This faith is nurtured through our daily living in our Holy Baptism. For in Holy Baptism, we are joined together with our Lord + Jesus in His sacrificial death on the cross. We are buried with Him in His death, so that we also rise again with Him in His resurrection.

Holy Baptism now becomes for us a sign of the circumcision of our hearts. It is a sign of the faith that dwells within us. All we need to do to remind ourselves that we have saving faith is make the sign of the holy cross. The sign that was placed upon us at our Holy Baptism with the Name by which we are now called, the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. All of our sins are washed away in the waters of Holy Baptism, for in those waters we are washed in the blood of the Lamb of God. The blood which He shed for us on the cross to win forgiveness of sins for us, covers us and appeases the Lord God's wrath for our sins. And we are thereby, as St. Paul wrote to the Churches of Galatia, now called sons of God. For through faith, we are co-heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven with the Christ.

We have been adopted as sons of God because through the waters of Holy Baptism, through the sign of the faith that dwells within our circumcised hearts, we have put on the Christ. And if we have put on the Christ, we have put on His works and merits. We bear His righteousness and innocence. We are clothed no longer with the skins of animals but are now clothed with the white robes of our Lord and Savior's righteousness. We are free from the bondage of sin. We are no longer under the penalty of the Law, for the Law has been fulfilled by the Christ. We are now the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham by the Lord God. The promise that all the nations would be blessed through his seed. For all those who cling in faith to this Baby Who is eight days old and Who is the Savior of the world from sins, are now heirs of Abraham. We now possess the same promise of a Redeemer and Savior from sin that was given to Abraham.

This is why we celebrate this Festival of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus on this first day of the calendar year; this eight day after the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. For on this day, we are reminded once again that we have been gifted faith, and with it life and salvation. For we have been baptized into the Christ. We have been baptized into all of His works, even this work of circumcision that He endures today. Through this gift we have faith. Faith clings to the promises of the Lord God. It clings to the promise of a Savior from sin and death. This promise is fulfilled in the One Who is today named + JESUS.

What a wonderful reason to celebrate a new year! We have a Savior and Redeemer from sin, death, and the power of the devil. We have been given forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. All the gifts of Heaven have been bestowed upon us. If we have these gifts, then every new year is a happy new year. Therefore, my dear friends, let us cling in faith to our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ, and rejoice that He has covered us with the blood He shed on the tree of the holy cross, and has granted us the remission of all our sins. Let us come to this altar and receive His true Body and Blood given in bread and wine, and remember His sacrifice for us—His shedding of Blood for us—and rejoice that by His Body and Blood given in bread and wine we have the forgiveness of sins through faith in Him and His gifts. With these gifts let us all have a happy new year! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved

so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the 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!