

“The Circumcision and Name of Jesus”

“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.” (Luke 2:21).

The child is only eight days old, and already His Father is putting Him to work! It’s a necessary work of our Lord – and included in the Church’s calendar.

On the eighth day, every male child in Israel was to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses – and it was also the day the child received his name. Circumcision was a sign of the Lord’s covenant – by which one is incorporated into Israel, made to be a child of God and an heir of His promises.

So, Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day – taking His place under the Law of God – in order to fulfill the Law. His blood is shed because He has come to redeem those who are under the Law and in bondage to sin. On this day, He receives His name, Jesus – a mighty sermon – for He is the Lord who has come in the flesh to save His people from their sins.

Circumcision may seem like an odd topic to discuss on New Year’s Day – but at this time when we think of casting off the old and putting on the new – it is very appropriate. Circumcision was the means chosen by God through which He bestows His gift of salvation. It was a mark of God’s favor – His visible Word – applied to the individual.

This mark showed that you belonged to God. The Creator, who “in the beginning” names His creation – now puts His name on you and declares you to be His very own. Therefore, with all boldness and confidence, the circumcised one declares – “The Lord is our God, and we are His people.”

The fact that circumcision took place on the eighth day was not a random choice. It teaches that the blessings bestowed on creation reached beyond the seven days of the old creation – and into the eighth day, the everlasting day of the new creation.

It was a sign of new birth. St. Paul says that – “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” This is baptismal language – for to be “in Christ” as a baptized believer, is to live in the eighth day – the everlasting day of the new creation.

For us New Testament believers, circumcision has been fulfilled by Christ – and now, in Holy Baptism – the Lord puts His name on us, and marks us His beloved child.

Circumcision, and therefore, also Holy Baptism – teach us about original sin. God’s Word reveals that sin is handed down (in an inherited way) through the procreation of children. The original sin of Adam is passed down from one generation to the next – from the father to his children.

It’s not random that God puts His sign of the covenant precisely at the procreation point – reminding us in a very graphic and telling way – that every child born of a natural father and mother is sinful, and in need of the cleansing forgiveness of Jesus.

Circumcision and Holy Baptism teach us that God’s covenant involves the putting away of our sinful flesh and its desires – a decisive break with sin – putting sin to death in our flesh. It shows us that God’s covenant involves suffering, pain, and the shedding of blood.

On this eighth day we don’t sing – “but little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.” Babies and manglers, swaddling cloths and shepherds and angels – that’s appealing – but circumcision, not so much. And yet, it goes to the very heart of Jesus’ work as our Savior.

This is why He is born! He comes as our Substitute – to fulfill God’s Law with His holy life – and to suffer, shed His blood, and die as the perfect Sacrifice for sinners. Jesus takes the place of all mankind – and in Him, all the world is circumcised in His flesh.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal. 4:4-5) In obedience to His Father’s will, Jesus sheds His blood for our salvation.

Faith rejoices that this little Child endured all this for me. Faith says that “My God and Savior was circumcised so that I might be saved from death and hell. He didn’t have to do any of this – He had no need of circumcision for Himself – He didn’t need to fulfill the Law for His own sake. He does this for my sake – to take away my sin – and make me to be a child of God.”

You are baptized into Christ – and in Him, all that the Father demands and desires is fulfilled. Jesus has done it all. His redeeming blood is poured out on you – making you to be holy – a new creation.

St. Paul writes: “For in [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.” (Col. 2:9-14)

Dearly beloved, let us rejoice in this gracious forgiveness of Jesus – by which we have life and salvation – a new creation, a new life, even life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.