

The Circumcision of our Lord (New Year's Day)

“A Name Above All Names!”—Luke 2:21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A Name Above All Names!”, is Luke 2:21 → *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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

The celebration of a new year is actually just a national holiday with really no religious meaning at all. Another day to add to “the holidays” with parties, parades and, of course, football with lots of junk food to fortify such energetic ringing in of the new year.

However, it seems during the past century it became traditional in many congregations, especially in rural America, of gathering for worship, with a communion service on New Year's Eve accompanied by another service on New Year's Day. The religious recognition which came to be associated with New Year's Day (or vice versa) is the Circumcision of Our Lord. Thus our text says: *At the end of eight days Jesus was circumcised.*

Jesus' circumcision was an action that has significance for us in two ways. First, it was part of His fulfilling God's law on our behalf by identifying Himself with God's *everlasting covenant*. In Genesis 17:10-14 Yahweh reaffirmed His covenant of grace with Abraham, instituting *a sign* with it. *Every male throughout their generations were to be circumcised in the flesh of their foreskins at eight days old*. There has been much written striving to understand the reason for such a strange *sign* and, in our gender sensitive society, wondering about how women fit into this *everlasting covenant* with such a *sign*. You can peruse those ideas yourself. What is most important is that the very One Who came to fulfill this *everlasting covenant* was circumcised in obedience to God's command. Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the temple by faith in the promised Messiah, **while holding Him in their own arms!**

The second way Jesus' circumcision has significance for us is that it was a part of His humiliation where He identified Himself with **sinful** mankind. In Colossians 2:11-13 the Holy Spirit reveals how Jesus' humiliation *to the point of death . . . on a cross* (cf. Philippians 2:6-8) is connected with this *sign of circumcision*. He says: *In Christ you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. Putting off the body of the flesh* refers to living in obedience to the Lord rather than living to satisfy the desires of your sinful nature (i.e. *the uncircumcision of your*

flesh).

So, when did His circumcision described here become yours? Colossians 2 continues: *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. The sign of circumcision as Yahweh's everlasting covenant with **His** people was fulfilled for you when you were connected to Christ's death and resurrection in your baptism (cf. Romans 6:3-14), becoming His son (cf. Galatians 3:26-29).*

Our text also says that when Jesus *was circumcised He was called Jesus*. At the time Jesus was circumcised it was customary to give the son his legal name. It may have to do with Yahweh changing Abram's name to Abraham when He instituted this *everlasting covenant* (cf. Genesis 17:4-8). However, His naming was in accord with *the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb* (cf. Matthew 1:21).

In Biblical times a name had much more meaning than simply to whom you belonged, to whom you were related or after whom you were named. Many times the name was given because of a certain experience. For instance, after Jacob *wrestled with a man* he was renamed Israel which means "He strives with God" (cf. Genesis 32:24-28).

In fact, the meaning of his new name bring us to believe that Jacob was actually wrestling with Jesus in a pre-incarnate state, God in the flesh.

Many times a name was given to describe the person and his relationship to Yahweh. For example, names ending with “iah,” which was “shorthand” for “Yahweh.” Thus, Isaiah means “Yahweh saves.” Jeremiah means “Yahweh establishes.” Zechariah means “remembered by Yahweh,” and so forth. Another example is a name which ends in “el,” which is the Hebrew word for “God.” Thus, Michael means “who is like God.” Daniel means “God is my judge.” Eli simply means “my God,” and so forth.

When the angel told Joseph about Mary’s pregnancy he also told him they reason he was to name the Son Mary would birth Jesus. He said in Matthew 1:21 → *She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.* The name “Jesus” was actually a very common name. Many people may be more familiar with the Hebrew version of that name, “Joshua,” both meaning “the LORD saves.” This name also complimented His title of “Christ.” No, Christ is not Jesus’ last name. It is the Greek word for the Hebrew word “Messiah”, the Redeemer and Deliverer from sin promised in the written Old Testament Scriptures.

From the outset of His conception Jesus’ name would ring with the reminder of His purpose for leaving the glory of heaven to come to earth

—to deal with sin and its hellish punishment once and for all. I wonder what He thought about every time someone called His name?

Actually, the name “Jesus” brings images of sin and hell to many people within your circles each day. While people may freely talk in the abstract about “God” they may quickly refrain from any discussion of “Jesus.” Why? Because Jesus cannot be divorced from the cross and the cross cannot be divorced from your sins and your sins cannot be divorced from guilt and the punishment of eternal separation from God. Titus 1:15 says: *To the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.* Sinners need you to connect them to Jesus **who saves all people from those sins**. They need to be led to the grace of the cross through confession of sins and the pronouncement of absolution.

While His name may have brought images of sin and hell for Jesus in His humiliation and cross, it will bring glory to Him. Philippians 2:9-11 says: *Therefore . . . that is, because Jesus “lived up to His name” by bearing the cross for your sins . . . God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and **every tongue confess** that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Every person **will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**, either to their salvation in

faith or their damnation in faithlessness. We who bear His name want all to *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* to their salvation in His *everlasting covenant* with all flesh!

By faith, trusting in Christ's atoning work **alone** for the forgiveness of your sins as He fulfilled the Law **perfectly** for you as the **perfect** sacrifice for your sins, His name is now *the name that is above every name*. Confessing the name of Jesus is to confess both His Person as true God and true man, and His Work of perfect obedience to and fulfilling of God's Law.

The Holy Spirit moves you from simply referring to the name of Jesus in some kind of religious discussion about a guy from Nazareth. The Scriptures were not written just so you could have philosophical-religious discussion about Jesus. They *are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name* (cf. John 20:31). The Holy Spirit also moves you from attaching the name of Jesus to the end of a prayer, like some kind of magic word, actually in disobedience to the 2nd Commandment. He moves you to rely on His authority and the power bound up in His name.

May you confess the name of Jesus because of what He did and continues to do for you by His grace daily. May you confess the name of Jesus confidently as the name above all names in faith, now and into eternity! Amen.

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

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