

## THE CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS IS A SIGN OF GOD'S PROMISE KEPT

### Sermon for New Year's Day 2022

#### Luke 2:21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 2:21: **On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named "Jesus," the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The *Feast of Stephen* falls on the Second Day of Christmas, December 26. On that day, the death of Stephen is remembered as he was stoned to death for confessing his faith in Christ Jesus. We read about this in chapters 6 and 7 of Acts. The Fourth Day of Christmas, December 28, is remembered as *Holy Innocents Day*. This is the day when the Church remembers the slaughter of the sons of Bethlehem. That was the day when King Herod ordered all male children, two years old and younger, to be executed. It is a day of blood.

It has been said that if you want to find the church, *just follow the trail of blood*. In that respect, the week after Christmas is one more week of bloodshed where we remember the innocents and the martyrs who had bled because the world hates Christ and His church.

On this day, we remember another shedding of blood, but this shedding is of a different sort. To get an idea of what we are talking about, we go back to a covenant God had made with Abraham. We read in Genesis 17: "*Then God told Abraham: "You shall keep My Covenant, you and your descendants after you in their generations!"*<sup>10</sup> *This is My Covenant, which you shall keep, between Me, your people and your descendants after you: Every male among you must be circumcised!*<sup>11</sup> *You shall have yourselves circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and that will be the mark of the Covenant between Me and you!*<sup>12</sup> *When any boy among you is eight days old, he shall be circumcised, every male in your coming generations, whether he is born in the household or purchased with money from any foreigner who is not one of your descendants!*<sup>13</sup> *Every boy born in your household or purchased with your money shall certainly be circumcised, that My Covenant in your flesh may be an everlasting Covenant!*<sup>14</sup> *If any male is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people! He has broken My Covenant"* (9-14). God gave this command to Abraham and to his descendants to set them apart as His people. This command produced a mark in the flesh that set a man aside as a member of this community - this culture.

The mark of circumcision took on an added significance when a man became a father. It marked the instrument by which he had passed his image on to his children. Just as he had inherited a sinful image from his father, so he passed that sinful image down to his children. The mark of circumcision was one more symbol that we are all conceived and born sinful and would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. The mark was also a sign of God's covenant promise to send a Saviour through the descendants of Abraham. Sadly, although the bodies of God's people were circumcised, their hearts were not; they frequently worshipped and served other gods and walked in other ways.

The day of circumcision soon became the day of naming as well. Since this rite set a man aside as a member of the community, it was reasonable that that man should receive his name as part of that rite. So, it became the custom. When a baby boy passed through circumcision, he received the name by which he would be known in this circumcised community. This initial shedding of blood was actually a time of celebration for the men as they welcomed their newest member into their community. Of course, the guest of honour did not do any celebrating as he was too young to understand the significance of this rite. All he knew was that it was painful.

We have already heard an example of this day of circumcision and naming in Luke's Gospel as he recorded the rite for John the Baptist. He wrote, "*On the eighth day they came to circumcise the baby. They were going to call him "Zacharias" because that was his father's name.*<sup>60</sup> *However, his mother spoke up and said, "No, he will be named John."*"

<sup>61</sup> *They told her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name."*

<sup>62</sup> They motioned to his father to find out what he would like him to be called. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John" (Luke 1:59-63). The record of this event shows that the naming and circumcising are so intertwined that the connection is simply assumed.

Today, January 1, is the eighth day since we celebrated the birth of Jesus. It is the day of His circumcision and naming. We heard it in the Gospel for this day. **"On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named "Jesus," the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb."** Jesus must fulfil the Law perfectly for you and for me. He must fulfil all the moral, civil, and ceremonial Law, even this law of circumcision. He must fulfil it on the eighth day, and so, on the eighth day, He shed real, human blood. This shedding of blood also reminds us that God has come in the flesh of a real, human male. He has come in the flesh for you and me.

But the eighth day is also the day of naming. Most people don't notice this, but Luke never refers to Jesus by name until this point in his account of the Gospel. He is Mary's firstborn son, the Saviour, the Christ, and the Lord. He is the baby lying in the manger, but He is never *Jesus* until this verse in the text.

Names in the Bible are more than just labels for identifying people. Names have meaning and significance. Recall that both Mary and Joseph received instructions for naming the Child from angels. The angel had told Mary, "*You see: you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a Son and you shall call His name 'Jesus'*" (Luke 1:31). An angel also appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "*[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him 'Jesus'! For He will save His people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

The name Jesus means *God saves* or *God is salvation*.

As His name says, Jesus is God in the flesh who has come to save us from our sin. His circumcision is not merely a reminder of the promise of the Messiah. Unlike previous generations, His circumcision was not the sign of a promise made but of *God's promise kept*; He was the Saviour of the world, the promised offspring of Abraham.

As the God who saves, Jesus must be perfect in every way. His obedience must be both active and passive. He must actively keep every law perfectly without sin. He must also passively allow Himself to endure the punishment we have earned with our sins. He must fulfil the Law that God had placed in Adam before the fall, and He must also keep the Law that God had given to Moses on Sinai. He must allow mere mortal men to nail Him to a cross, and there, He must endure the punishment of God's wrath against our sins. It is in this perfect righteousness that He does what His name says ... *Jesus ... God saves*.

Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives His perfect obedience to you, and He bears the suffering and death of your failure to keep the Law. So the circumcision of Jesus is also your circumcision. Its former theological meaning is now found in Him. You no longer need circumcision. Instead, you need Jesus - His circumcision - His perfection - and His fulfilment of the Law. Through your Baptism into Jesus, His circumcision counts for you, male or female, and gives you the rights of a son of God.

The shedding of His blood in His circumcision foreshadows the cross as the final place of salvation. It shows us how Jesus saves: by blood, by suffering, and by death. In Jesus' crucifixion, our sin and death have been removed and "cut off" so that we may have true circumcision of the heart. In place of the old covenant of circumcision, Jesus gives a new covenant and promise: He takes bread and, by His promise, it is also His body; He takes the cup and, by His promise, it is also His blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. At this altar, you receive Jesus, the entire Jesus, the true body and blood of the One who is your life and your salvation. You are heirs of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the blood of Jesus.

In this sinful world, every New Year begins with bloodshed in many places, and that is an evil tragedy. But there can be no better beginning in the Church than the shed blood of our Saviour whose name is *Jesus ... God saves*. And so we begin this New Year and live our lives with the blood of Jesus on our tongues and with the name of Jesus on our foreheads and our hearts. For the One who has shed His blood on the eighth day after His birth and has risen from the dead on the third day after His death now gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation so that we may live with Him and enjoy His presence forever. Amen.

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

## PRAYER FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY

Almighty and ever-living God, You have been our dwelling-place in all generations, and from everlasting to everlasting You are perfect in wisdom, power, and goodness. We worship You as our creator, protector, and provider, but, above all, for Your wonderful love in sending Your Son into the world to free us from sin for a life of joyous obedience to You.

We praise You, in particular, for the name given to Your holy Child, for it is a sign for all ages that Jesus alone is the source of all redemption and salvation for sinful mankind. We praise You that You have set Him at Your right hand in the heavenly realm, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every other name, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. Help us always to hallow the name of Jesus by a living faith in Him, and by obedience to His teaching and example. Help us to trust in His death for us that our hope might be built on His blood and righteousness, and not on any efforts of our own.

We offer our thanks this day for the blessings of the past year and for the way You provided for our many needs. We thank You for family and friends, for home and harvest, for food and clothing, for health of mind and body, for work and leisure, for law and government, for peace and order, for our preservation in the faith, and for those precious hours in which we were able to worship and commune with You. Forgive us where we have sinned. Heal the hurt we have caused others. Forgive us the good we have left undone. Deliver us from the consequence of all our mistakes and transgressions.

Father in heaven, let Your blessing rest on us during the coming year, that we may grow in understanding of Your mercy in Christ, that in sorrow or joy we may know and accept Your loving will, that in prosperity or trial we may experience Your power working in us and know the hope to which You have called us. Give us Your Spirit so that everything we do or say may be done in the name of the Lord Jesus as we give thanks to You, our Father, through Him.

Be the shepherd of our youth, the guardian of all children, the health of the sick, and the support of the aged. Grant that in whatever happens to us we may see Your loving hand and have the sure confidence in Christ that in all things You work for good with those who love You. Be the defender of Your people everywhere. Be the constant guard of our nation. Prosper us in everything that leads to peace and righteousness. Protect us from every evil of body and soul. We ask these things in that one name in which there is salvation, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS

(1 January)

Numbers 6:22-27

<sup>22</sup> The LORD told Moses, <sup>23</sup> "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is how you shall bless the people of Israel. Say to them: <sup>24</sup> "The LORD bless you and keep you! <sup>25</sup> The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you! <sup>26</sup> The LORD look on you with favour and give you peace!"

<sup>27</sup> "In this way they will put My name on the people of Israel and I shall bless them."

Galatians 3:23-29

<sup>23</sup> Before the faith came, we were being imprisoned by the Law, locked up until the faith came, which was about to be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore, the Law was our He was conceived in the womb.

guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> However, now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. <sup>26</sup> For you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> because all of you who were baptised into Christ put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Moreover, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise.

Luke 2:21

<sup>21</sup> On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named "Jesus," the name that the angel had given Him before