

Luke 2:21
Circumcision & Name of Jesus
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
January 1, 2023

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

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.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus,

On December 25th, we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eight days later, on January 1st, our Lord was circumcised according to the Law of Moses. He was born when the time had fully come, sent forth from God to be born of woman. Jesus was born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal 4:4). God became man to fulfill the law perfectly for those of us who fail at every point (James 2:10). Our Lord was circumcised into the Old Covenant on our behalf, and there He received His name, a name that is above every other name. Our Lord gives us that very name, His own name, when brings us into His family in Holy Baptism. What circumcision was in the Old Testament, Baptism has far exceeded in the New Testament.

Circumcision first shows up in Scripture in Genesis 17, where God changes Abram's name to Abraham. Abram was 99 years old and had no children, yet the Lord says He will make a covenant with Abraham and multiply him greatly, making him the father of a multitude of nations. Hence the name change. Abram means "the father is lofty." Abraham means: "father of a multitude." God promised Abraham: "I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." As a sign of the covenant, God instituted circumcision for all the males of Abraham's people. Every male eight days old and older would have his foreskin cut off. Any male not

circumcised would be cut off from the people. So circumcision was the sign of being included in the promises of God.

Circumcision was a sign in the flesh of God's everlasting covenant with His people, yet even in the Old Testament circumcision was seen more as a matter of the heart than merely an outward ritual. Deuteronomy 10 says: "the LORD has set His heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, the awesome God." Circumcision of the flesh was not enough without a change of heart. Circumcision meant inclusion in the promises of God, but it also pointed to the repentance God expects of His people. Those who belong to God are to cast off the works of darkness, to cut off anything that causes sin (Matt 5:40). Later in Deuteronomy we are told that the Lord Himself will circumcise His people's heart. Repentance, that is, turning away from sin and towards God, is something God works in us: "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says in Romans 2[:25, 28–29]: "circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision . . . For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter." In that way, circumcision is like citizenship. You are born with a certain citizenship, received from your parents. Yet we recognize that to be an American or a German or to be an Indian or an Englishman includes more than simply a piece of paper issued by whatever government. Even worldly citizenship is a matter of the heart, a matter of your identity. There is

a certain inner loyalty implied. For God's people in the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign of who they were as inheritors of the promises of God. Circumcision meant receiving God's promises and a pledge to live according to God's commandments.

And so we come to January 1st, eight days after our Lord's birth. As a Jew, Jesus was brought to be circumcised, to receive the sign of God's covenant promises to Abraham. Jesus was born under the Law, and according to the Law He would need to be circumcised, lest He be cut off from His people. There Jesus first spilled His blood for us, the spilling of blood the Law demands. Jesus had no need to be circumcised; He is the one who instituted circumcision in the first place! Yet to identify with those who are under the Law, our Lord goes under the knife in solidarity with us. That's the whole life of Jesus, really. He made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Throughout his life, the spotless Lamb of God took on our sicknesses and our sins and iniquities. He suffered as though He were a sinner, to take away our sins: at His circumcision, throughout His life, and ultimately in His death on the cross, where once again our Lord shed His blood for us all.

In the shedding of His blood for us Jesus acquired for us all those things promised in the circumcision of the old covenant. Jesus won for us not the physical land of Israel, but the entire world, the new Heavens and the new Earth. Jesus made us not only children of Abraham, offspring according to faith, but Jesus also gave us the right to become children of God, born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12). In Holy Baptism, our Lord actually makes us His own. There He applies to us personally everything Jesus won for us by dying on the cross and rising again from the dead. Baptism is where our Lord circumcises us with a circumcision not made with hands. He circumcises our hearts, cutting out the sin and giving us new hearts that begin to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Apostle Paul makes the connection between circumcision and Baptism explicit. In Colossians 2[:11–12], he says that in Jesus Christ “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.” The circumcision made without hands and promised in the Old Testament is the Baptism of the New Testament. In Baptism, we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection. God forgives our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh and makes us alive together with Christ. In Baptism, you were crucified and buried with Christ and granted new life, so that when you die physically, you will once again rise from the dead physically to live with Christ for eternity.

Just like circumcision in the Old Testament, the New Testament equivalent of circumcision, Baptism, also includes receiving a new name. It’s no wonder that many baptisms continue to take place on the eighth day after birth. Sometimes the baby’s name is not uttered until the baptism, or a Christian name, the middle name, is given. When our Lord was circumcised, He received the name Jesus, the name the Angel Gabriel told to Mary (1:31) and to Joseph (Matt 1:21). He would be called “Jesus” because He would save His people from their sins. That’s what the name “Jesus” means: “the Lord saves.”

And so in Baptism, in the new circumcision, you too, dear Christian, receive a new name. There the Lord places His name upon you and makes you part of His family. You are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the name of God, the divine name Jesus shares with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. At Baptism, you had God’s name placed upon you and you became a member of God’s family, a family that includes people from all times and places, and cultures and languages and people. In Baptism, God circumcises your heart and brings you

into a life of repentance and faith. As a baptized child of God, you daily repent of your sins and you daily receive the forgiveness of sins Christ won for you by dying for your sins. In Baptism, God has circumcised your heart so that you fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. Yes, in this life you will continue to fall. But our Lord promises that in Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven, washed away and remembered no more. You are now part of God's family, and our heavenly Father is always ready to welcome you home.

Dear Christian, Jesus shed his blood for you in his circumcision and in His death on the cross. He fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law on your behalf and gave you the name that He Himself received. In Baptism you have received something much greater than the circumcision of the Old Testament. In Baptism, God Himself has circumcised your heart. He has forgiven you your sins and created new desires within you. In Baptism, God has placed His name upon you and made you part of His family, now and for all eternity. Because of the faith God is working in you through your Baptism, you, too, are now offspring of Abraham and Sons of God, and so you will inherit eternal life with all the saints. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.