

Luke 2:21
Circumcision and Name of Jesus
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
January 1, 2024

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 Christ,

The Gospel text for today, January 1st, the Circumcision and name of Jesus, is the shortest Gospel text in the lectionary. Yet there's so much packed into that one little verse—so many promises fulfilled and so many promises for the future. This one little verse also divides perfectly into an outline for presenting the Gospel. First, we have the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day and what that means for our life and salvation. Second, we have the name “Jesus,” and what that means for our life and salvation.

Circumcision is an ancient custom still around today. To state it simply, circumcision is cutting off the foreskin of the penis. Many people are foggy on what this means because it's taboo to speak about. I encourage you to simply search wikipedia if you're unclear on what circumcision actually is. In the United States at least, circumcision became widely popular in the middle of the 20th century. Periodically, European countries discuss banning the practice because it could be considered bodily harm. With Paul we must say: “neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19).

In the Old Testament, circumcision was commanded for the people of God. It was a sign of God's covenant promises with His people. In Genesis 17, God changes Abram's name to Abraham and promises that Abraham's descendants will be many and that they will occupy the promised land. And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and

your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. . . . So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:9–13).

As the offspring of Abraham, as a good Jewish boy, Jesus was brought to the Temple to be circumcised on the eighth day. There our Lord’s blood of the covenant was shed for the first time, the same blood He would shed on the cross, the blood He gives for you. Our LORD fulfilled the Law to the letter from the very beginning. He was brought into the covenant people that you, too, as Gentile sinners, might be brought into the covenant of God’s people.

And why on the eighth day? The number eight has deep symbolic significance for the people of God. Everybody knows the number seven. Lucky number 7. In six days the LORD created all things and then rested on the seventh day, setting apart the seventh day as holy. This seven day week from the very beginning is how we reckon all time. There’s evening and morning which comprise the day, and then seven days make up the week, and that cycle continues over and over again throughout the months and years from the beginning of creation until the LORD returns. Seven is the number of creation in its perfection, exactly as God intended it to be. The number eight, then, is the start of that cycle again. It’s the next octave up on the scale, the entrance into eternity. You see this in the early church fathers when they emphasize the eighth day, the day not of creation but of new creation, of redeemed creation. Our LORD Jesus Christ was crucified on the sixth day, rested in the tomb on the seventh day, and then rose from the dead on the eighth day, the eternal day. Sunday takes on new meaning for Christians not as the first day of the week repeated in perpetuity, but as the eight and eternal day

lasting from now until forever. This is what the number eight in circumcision is referring to. It is entrance into the eternal covenant of God.

It's no wonder, then, that most baptismal fonts and baptistries in church architecture throughout history are designed with eight sides. Eight represents eternity, the step just beyond creation. And Baptism is the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant of circumcision. That's what the Apostle Paul says in Collosians 2:11: "In Him [in Jesus] 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." The circumcision of the flesh in the Old Covenant, the entrance into the people of God, foreshadowed the New Covenant, entered into by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Circumcision is the picture. Baptism is the real thing. And it is in Baptism that new Christians are born again until Christ returns in glory.

It used to be the case that a baby's name was not announced publicly until the Baptism. Circumcision was practiced in a similar way. Jesus received His name at circumcision on the eighth day, the name announced to the angels. Jesus. Ihsous. Joshua. The name Jesus means: "YHWH saves." "The LORD saves." In the Bible, a name says a lot about a person. Choosing a name was never as trivial as looking in a baby name book or scouring the internet for the most unique name available. In the Old Testament, your name is your destiny. That's why God changes so many names. Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, Jacob becomes Israel. A change in circumstance led to a change of name. There were other Joshuas before Jesus and there were plenty of Joshuas afterwards. But Jesus most perfectly bears that name. He is the LORD who saves. That's not just a general announcement. It's the entire reason God became

man. The LORD took on our flesh to redeem it, to lay down His life for our sins and to take it up again. In the name of Jesus, the LORD saves you.

But the name of Jesus is more than just a name. It's a name with power and authority behind it because of the one who bears that name. In Philippians 2:9–11, we are told that God has highly exalted Jesus, “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.” Not everyone named Joshua or Jesus is to worshiped and bowed down to. Every knee will bow at the name of Jesus because of the holy, divine name Jesus shares with the Triune God—YHWH, the LORD. Jesus shares in the divine name because He shares in the divine nature.

And it is into this name that you are baptized. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The name of Jesus has power because the man who bears that name is also God. In Baptism, you are given God's name as a family name. God the Father sees you as a little Christ, as a Christian. You bear the name of Jesus. In Baptism, you are His brother, a member of God's family. Here you see how the circumcision and name of Jesus come full circle for you in Holy Baptism. You enter not only the eternal covenant, but also the household of faith. In Baptism, the circumcision made without hands, you also receive a new name. You become a Christian, a brother of Jesus and therefore a son of God. And so you will live in your Father's house for eternity. 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.