

The Eve of the Feast of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

31 December, Anno Domini 2021

Galatians 3:23-29

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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

St. Luke doesn't give us a whole lot of detail about the day when Jesus was circumcised and named, almost as though he just wants us to be sure that we know it happened. But if we rightly consider these two events we can understand how wonderfully simply the evangelist proclaimed our salvation in this one sentence. The Son of God was circumcised and was given the Name "Jesus" which means "The Lord saves".

It would be wrong for us to assume that salvation was found in the keeping of the Law before the Son of God took on human flesh and offered His life as a ransom for the world. That isn't what St. Paul is suggesting when he declared by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we were kept under guardians until faith came. Faith certainly existed as we know that our father Abraham believed the promise of God and the Lord credited that faith to him as righteousness. Adam and Eve had faith that God would do just exactly as He had promised and send a Savior to rescue them and their children from the plague of death that their rebellion had unleashed on the whole world.

What did come was the object of that faith - the infant boy conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God in human flesh who was named "Jesus" by His true Father. Jesus' name is exactly who He is and what He would do. Jesus is salvation because He bore in His own innocent flesh the guilt of all men. His innocent life in payment for ours. In Jesus, through Jesus, by Jesus God indeed saves. It is to this Messiah that the faithful of Israel constantly looked. They had faith in the Lord's promise that He would redeem them from sin and death and restore what had been lost in Eden.

But before there can be salvation there must be circumcision, there must be the cutting of the Law which draws blood. When He was only eight days old, the sinless son of God shed the first drops of His innocent Blood so that He might willingly subject Himself to the Law as we are, to be held accountable to it as we are - all of it. Paul writes in Galatians chapter five "I testify to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law." That is precisely what Jesus intended to do. He intended to subject Himself to every demand of the

Law so that He might redeem us who have been kept under the guardianship of the Law. He would do for us what we were incapable of doing for ourselves.

The Law is a prison master, holding us in the bondage of judgment and death. The Law demands perfection. In the eyes of the Divine Law there is no good enough. By the Law our unrighteousness is held up before us so that we are kept from becoming deluded into thinking that we are able to justify ourselves by our works. No one, no one can stand blameless before the holy and perfect will of God given in the Ten Commandments. No one can say with a shred of honesty "I have lived such a life." God's Word clearly testifies that not a single person is righteous on the basis of their works, that all are guilty. Experience agrees. No one can say that they have been free from anger or lust or greed or discontent or worry. No one can say that all their fear, all their love, and all their trust have been entirely directed at the true and only God who created them. None. The Law shuts down the vain notions that we are either worthy of eternal life already or are capable of earning the favor of God. Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female - all stand under Guardian Law so that all might know their need for salvation and so that all might hunger for the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Indeed, until the sinner hears the preaching of the Gospel, the good news that God has laid upon the Lord Jesus those very sins of which his conscience is terrified, all the sinner can imagine is that he will have to spend his entire life chasing after the impossible goal of tipping the scale in his favor. He will desperately search for some kind of evidence that he has done enough to pacify God and avoid punishment. But no such evidence is available because the moment you trust you've done enough the Law condemns you for trusting in yourself rather than in God. You can't ever escape the Law by means of the Law. It cannot be done.

But tonight, we behold again that the Son of Mary who subjected Himself to the whole Law is Jesus, God saves. This is the good news that all sinners need to hear. This is the good news that those who despair of their own righteousness can never hear enough of. The Lord saves. Jesus saves you. He subjected Himself to the demands of the Law so that He might obey as you and I are supposed to - to love God with all His heart and soul and mind and strength, to love his neighbor as Himself. Jesus took up your plight and your cause and made them His own. And most stunning of all is that He didn't simply do this to show you how it's supposed to be done. He is not simply a mirror of the Ten Commandments. What we are supposed to do is clear. But we can't. We don't. Our flesh is 100% unwilling because it wants to believe that it is subject to no one other than itself and its desires. Instead, Jesus came to make the impossible payment, to offer a

sacrifice sufficient to tip the scales in your favor - His holy and innocent flesh. Beginning under the knife of the priest, our great High Priest, poured out His Blood to make satisfaction for your wicked thoughts and words and deeds. He subjected Himself not only to God's Law but to God's wrath and judgment. Not only His foreskin but His entire life would be cut off and cast away from God in our place. In our stead He died so that in His stead and by His command your sins might be forgiven and you would be made sons of God.

Now, as you cling to the saving death of Jesus which was poured out to you in the waters of Holy Baptism, the Law is removed from its office as prison master. You are free. Your conscience is no longer bound by guilt. Death can no longer bind you. God is your Father who loves you and has redeemed you. You belong to Him and He has bestowed upon you His Name and His Spirit. He has laid claim to you and taken responsibility for you. He has promised to provide for you and protect you. You aren't like a son to God, you are a son of God because you have put on Christ. You are as much God's beloved child as the only-begotten Son. Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female you are an equal inheritor of the kingdom of your Father. And what an incredible thought that this is God's will. It was God's will to receive you, to save you, to bless you, to proclaim salvation to you, to absolve you, to bestow His Name upon you which He does each and every time we hear those words given to Aaron "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

May the Holy Spirit grant that each of you find joy again this night in the one whose very Name is salvation and who delights to bestow His Name upon you that you might belong to Him.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.