

The Festival of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus  
January 1, Anno Domini 2023  
Luke 2:21

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

Saints of God,

The Son became a slave so that we slaves might be adopted as sons. The Son humbled Himself and took the form of a servant so that the servants might be glorified as heirs of the kingdom. Already, at the tender age of eight days, Jesus was stepping into our shoes and shedding His blood for our benefit, submitting Himself to every demand of the Law that was laid upon us. From the very moment of our conception we are transgressors. We are the ones whose hearts are filled with selfishness and idolatry. We are the ones who should be cut off from God because of our sin. We are the ones who need to be circumcised, not only in the flesh but in our very hearts, and yet there is the infant priest, Jesus, allowing the Law's scalpel to literally cut into His spotless flesh so that He might do for us all things in accordance with the Law, because He is the Savior of all, even eight-day-old babies.

What was this circumcision? Circumcision was given to our father Abraham as a sign of the covenant God made to deliver Abraham, to make Abraham the father of many nations, and to bless all nations through Abraham. Circumcision was the sign that God would be Abraham's redeemer and save him, that God counted Abraham's faith in God's promises as righteousness. As God Himself says to Abraham in Genesis 17 "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant." St. Paul teaches us how to rightly understand circumcision in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans. There he writes, inspired by the Holy Spirit, "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." (Rom. 2:28-29) Circumcision marked those who held in faith with Abraham that we are lost and condemned creatures for whom God would send the promised Messiah who would spill His blood for all nations and by His Blood make satisfaction for the sins of all nations.

Circumcision is a confession of a deeper reality that is true of all people - the reality that we are obligated to the Law, to keep it in all its demands perfectly, the reality that we are to cut off all the sinful desires of our sinful flesh and walk at all

times according to the Ten Commandments in heart, soul, body, and mind. The outward act of circumcision was a very outward reminder that we are sinners and the price for sin is blood, death. But the outward reminder could be of no benefit without the faith which trusted such Word of God in the cutting. Thus God said to Israel in Deuteronomy 10 “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” In other words “Stop imagining that you are so holy and good that you don’t need the forgiveness and mercy that only I can give to you and that as a free gift. Stop deluding yourself into thinking that the mere outward performance of works is good. Stop trusting in yourself and your own goodness to save you. Your works are idols. They don’t save. They are the things that condemn you.” In no way was circumcision disconnected from faith. Circumcision alone could not make you righteous. Faith long preceded circumcision. The promise came long before the command.

And in Jesus, the offspring of Abraham was fulfilling His promise, being circumcised into the faith of Abraham and placing Himself squarely under the demands and judgements of the Law on our behalf. Though He was the author of the Law, He submitted Himself to it in order to redeem those under the Law. And He alone has acted in perfect accord with the Law in every way, never diverging from it, never encouraging others to deviate from it, always keeping it in joyful obedience. All of this He did solely for our benefit so that we might not remain eternally damned. He did what our Old Adam stubbornly refuses to do.

Now, in Christ, you are children of Abraham by faith. Circumcision has been fulfilled in and by Christ and is no longer anything. It is neither commanded nor forbidden. Rather, a different sign has been given. But this sign isn’t just an outward sign. By it you are actually saved. It actually bestows the gifts of which it is a sign. Holy Baptism circumcises both the inward and the outward man, drowning your Old Adam at God’s command and raising you to new and eternal life where all earthly distinctions give way to the Blood of the Lamb. The water may be long gone, perhaps even the font and the building where you were baptized have disappeared. But God still clearly sees that you have been joined to Christ. And thus joined to Christ you have been given a new name, a divine Name - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For in Baptism the Name of the Holy Trinity was placed upon you and by that Name you have been made a full recipient of all the blessings of God’s Kingdom.

And every day that you take the time to remember that you are baptized, that you have been rescued out of a life lived under the condemnation of the Law, you remember that you are God’s child, that God’s only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,

endured the searing pain of the Law's eternal judgment so that you would be set free, so that the price of your salvation might be paid in full. You are baptized. You are Christ's and because you are Christ's, you are sons of God, through faith.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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