

Sermon Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus
New Years Eve 2015
Trinity Lutheran Church
Pastor James Preus
Luke 2:21

And at the completion of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Tonight is New Years Eve. Yet, we remember the eve of a much more important day than the ringing in of a new year. Tomorrow is the eighth day of Christmas; the eighth day after the birth of Jesus Christ. God said to Abraham, "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations," (Gen. 17:12). So, tomorrow marks the anniversary of the first time Jesus Christ shed his blood for us sinners. He was circumcised in the foreskin of his flesh. And in so doing, Jesus placed himself under the Law *for you*.

Jesus didn't need to be circumcised. God established circumcision to mark the covenant between God and Abraham, that God would bring forth an offspring from Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Every time the knife cut and blood was shed, this covenant was reinforced among the Jews. God would, from the flesh of the Jews, bring forth a Savior.

Circumcision was a sign of faith. By having himself circumcised, Abraham demonstrated that he believed God's promise. By having their sons circumcised, every Jewish family showed their faith in the coming Christ. Circumcision also was a sign that the Jews were a chosen people, set apart by God. It was a sign that they were under the Law, God put in place to guard them and preserve them as his people.

Jesus did not need to be circumcised. First of all, Jesus is God. He is above the Law. The Law has no authority over him. Circumcision is a sign that the Savior, the

promised offspring will come through Abraham. Jesus is the promised Offspring, promised by God to crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Jesus has no need for his own flesh to be circumcised. And yet, his flesh is cut. His blood is shed. The infant Jesus is humiliated and caused pain. Already, the baby Jesus suffers *for you*.

Jesus' circumcision is so important to us, because *we* are naturally born under the Law! Yet, Christ is the eternal only-begotten Son of the Father. He is not naturally under the Law. Yet, he *places* himself under the Law for our sake. Saint Paul writes, "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law." (Galatians 5:3) Jesus, by being circumcised, obligated *himself* to keep the whole Law. He fulfilled what Saint Paul writes in the same Epistle, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (4:4-5)

It was not enough for God to become man to save us. God needed to be humiliated like us and be subjected to the Law like us. By enduring such humiliation and subjection, he perfected what we have soiled. You and I are born in humiliation and subject to the Law, yet our sinful nature tries to exalt us. We try to lift our own heads by our own merits. We are subject to the Law, but we do not perfect the Law. Instead, the Law must constantly accuse us and condemn us, and eventually, kill us. Jesus, however, endures the humiliation and subordination under the Law unjustly. Whereas the Law is perfectly just to condemn us, to cause us to bleed, and our blood remains on our own hands; the Law becomes guilty of subjecting Christ. Its condemnation is unjust. By shedding Jesus' blood, the Law stains its own hands scarlet with the sinless blood of the God-man.

The tradition arose that boys would be named at their circumcisions. So Jesus received the name given to him by the angel before his conception in his virgin mother's womb, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." It is fitting that the Christ should be given this name publicly before men, when he first publicly shed his blood. Jesus is the Savior of the world. The shedding of blood in circumcision marked that the Christ would make atonement for the sins of the world through the shedding of blood. The blood of each Jewish boy, which could not take away sins, foretold the blood of that eternally chosen Jewish boy, which could. The shedding of Jesus blood at eight days foreshadowed the shedding of blood he would eventually endure, that would make atonement for all sins. Even as an infant, Jesus teaches that his blood will flow freely for his people, and by his stripes he will heal us.

Perhaps this message wasn't on your mind when you got in your car to go to church this evening. Instead, you were probably thinking of tonight's New Year's celebration. 2015 has finally kicked the bucket, and 2016 is fresh and new. It is common at this time for people to make New Year's resolutions: diet, exercise, work harder, spend more time with wife and children, stop wasting time on the computer, TV, or cell phone, be wiser with money, dedicate more time to devotion and prayer. And, for many, burdened with guilt, the New Year gives the hope that they can kick bad habits, transform their lives, and finally quit those recurring sins.

And yet, even if you do keep your resolutions, reform your life, and quite breaking those commandments you have so freely broken in the past, that doesn't take away your guilt. The Law will still condemn you. Just as the credit card companies don't forgive the excessive spending from the Christmas season when the clock strikes

midnight on January first, so neither does the Law forgive the mountain of debt incurred by your sins from the previous year. No amount of penance or resolutions, no matter how noble, will be able to erase that debt.

And yet, there is still hope in this New Year. You do not have to carry your sins of 2015 into the next year, because Jesus already took them. When Jesus permitted his sinless flesh to be cut, he placed his whole body under the Law. And he completed it. Jesus lived 2015 perfectly for you and he has done the same for 2016. More than that, Jesus took the mountain of transgressions you have built over this past year and placed them on his flesh, to be drowned in his blood on the cross. Because of what Jesus did for you, even at eight days old, by submitting himself under the Law, you enter into 2016 with better than a clean slate. You begin 2016 with the confidence that Jesus has perfected this year for you too, through his obedience even unto death.

It is only through faith in Christ Jesus that you can enter the New Year with a clean slate. And it is only through faith in the shedding of Christ's blood that you can endure this coming year without fear. Because by faith, God has circumcised your heart in the Spirit, removing the record of debt that stood against you by the Law's demands and nailing those sins to the cross of Christ. You do not enter into 2016 as one under the Law. You enter the New Year as one baptized into Christ, buried with him into his death, from which you will rise every morning a forgiven child of God. And even if this year be your last, God has already joined you to Christ's resurrection.

You are forgiven. And God will continue to forgive you through this next year, a forgiveness that can only be received through faith in Christ. Christ has already fulfilled the requirements of the Law for you for 2016. He has atoned for your sins. You have no

mountain of debt. And you have a Savior for 2016. And may that same Savior send his Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith through the coming year and give you power over temptation and sin.

In Jesus Name.

Amen.