

1 Circumcision and Name of Jesus – Luke 2:21

This morning's Gospel lesson is the shortest Gospel lesson of the year. It's only one verse, taken from the second chapter of Luke's Gospel: "On the eighth day the time came to circumcise the Child, and He was called Jesus, the name the angel gave Him before He was conceived."

On this day of our Lord's circumcision and name, I would like to consider three things Jesus fulfills. First, he fulfills God's promise. Second, he fulfills God's law. Third he fulfills God's name.

Jesus fulfills God's promise. After Adam and his wife fell into sin, God promised them a Savior. He said that the Descendant of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. Another word for Descendant is Seed. This made God's promise unusual and mysterious right off the bat. Because a seed comes from a man. The woman bears his seed, but it's still the man's seed. Yet here God doesn't mention any man at all. He simply calls him the Seed of the woman. God's promise doesn't include the actions of man at all. His promise simply brings about faith, because there is nothing in man that can contribute to this salvation. The fact that God calls him the Seed of the woman shows that already in this first gospel promise he is talking about a virgin birth. As surely as man will make no contribution by his own works, he will make no contribution in the most basic natural act by which God creates life.

This Seed or Descendant is Christ. He was promised to Adam and Eve. And he remains the main Character throughout the Bible. After Cain killed Abel, God gave Seth in place of Abel. The Descendant promised to them would continue to sustain this lineage for generations to come. Many generations later, after God had destroyed the whole world by a flood, he called Abraham. He promised Abraham that in his Seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He promised that his Seed would be as many as the stars. Abraham believed this promise of God. He trusted in the Descendant who joined himself to his family tree. And God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness.

To confirm his promise to Abraham God gave him the sign of circumcision. On the eighth day of birth, the foreskin of every male was to be cut off. This sign of cutting off Abraham's foreskin again showed that God's promise was not going to be accomplished by men. This mark of circumcision reminded the men of Israel not only that they were set apart from the other nations but that they cannot be saved by the strength of their own flesh.

The sign of circumcision was a sign of God's promise. Jesus fulfilled this promise. As the Son of God, he was born of a virgin. And when he was circumcised, he was fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. He was coming to accomplish what no mere flesh and blood man can do. He came to destroy the power of the devil and reconcile fallen children of Adam back to God.

Jesus also came to fulfill God's law. Now, circumcision was a sign of the promise given to Abraham. It was the sign of faith, which Moses calls the circumcision of the heart. Circumcision was a mark, which was supposed to remind the children of Israel that they belong to God and that God was going to fulfill his promise to save them. But they often lost sight of God's promise. And when this is the case, then the signs of God's promise turn into laws. This happens with his Word and sacraments even today. God tells us to gather around his Word, to take the Lord's Supper together, united in a true confession of Christ. This is a great blessing. It is how God gives us his salvation. God inviting you to church is not a law making demands and accusations against you. No, it is his good news. It is his gospel promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. We gather around his Word to receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation through faith in Jesus. But for those who despise this gracious invitation, God's

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invitation to gather with his people around his Word and sacraments becomes a law. When faith does not respond to the promise, then all that is left is the law.

The same thing happens with the blessing of marriage. It is supposed to be a sign to point us to God's loving embrace of his church, joining himself to us by his grace. But because of the sin and unbelief of the heart, the sixth commandment was added: Do not commit adultery. Children are a blessing of God, which should remind us that God calls us to be his children through faith in his promise in Christ who would be born of a Virgin. But again, because of the uncircumcision of our hearts the Fourth Commandment stands against all disobedience: Honor your father and your mother.

This is exactly what happened with circumcision. The promise attached to it was despised. And all that was left was the accusation of God's law. Therefore, when people would get circumcised, they were obligated to keep all the law handed down by Moses. But they only proved to be sinful and unclean. They always fell short. So instead of circumcision being a sign of their faith, circumcision became a sign of their doom. And this is the purpose of the law. The purpose of the law is to reveal the unbelief of the heart. To put it another way, the law reveals that the heart is not circumcised, that we by nature do not trust God.

And this is why Jesus didn't fulfill God's promise without also fulfilling his law. It wasn't enough that he simply came in the flesh. He also submitted himself to his own law. He put himself under the law, which he himself gave on Mount Sinai. He stood under the charge that stood against our sinful hearts, and he fulfilled it perfectly. He was obedient in every way to every commandment. So the blood he bled when he was only eight days old was the beginning of his perfect obedience, which would be fulfilled on the cross where his blood would take away our sins. And here, by fulfilling the law, Jesus becomes the true circumcision. That is to say, he becomes the true sign and seal of God's promise. He becomes the true ground of our faith. Those who take refuge in him cannot be condemned by the law. Because Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise and the fulfillment of God's law. The law is fulfilled and satisfied in him.

And finally, Jesus fulfills God's name. Before God sent Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, Moses asked for his name. God gave him his name. He said, "I Am that I Am." He is the LORD who has come to save his people. And this is what he did. He saved his people out of Egypt. He would continue to deliver his people from their enemies for generations to come. Even after his people turned away from him and he sent tyrants to punish them, after they repented and cried out to God, he would rescue them. This is what the LORD always did. This was his main characteristic. And this is what it means to have a name. A name is more than just a label. It's a reputation. It describes what you say and what you do. The LORD SAVES. That is his name. That is what he does. That is who he is. But it wasn't only the people of Israel whom the LORD would save. As he promised to Abraham, through his Descendant all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He came to save all people.

This is why the angel gave him the name Jesus. Jesus means THE LORD SAVES. The name Jesus is not merely a label. It is the very Character of God. It is who God is. He saves his people from their sins. He saves all sinners from condemnation.

Jesus was given this name by the angel. This is part of his humble obedience to God. He became for a little while lower than the angels, even though he had created the angels. He takes on the form of a servant. And his name, Jesus, is looked at as only a common name. This is Jesus, people would say, the

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man from Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter. They despised and looked down on his name. But Jesus continued to do bear this precious name by being obedient to what his Father gave him to do. While the Eighth Commandment stood against us, condemning us for every time we hurt our neighbor's reputation, Jesus made himself of no reputation. He was despised and rejected by men, bruised for our iniquities, bearing on himself the punishment of us all. He became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

And after he fulfilled what the Father sent him to do, after he fulfilled what God's name is all about, after he saved sinners from condemnation by his own perfect obedience and death, what did the Father do? Paul says that because of Christ's perfect obedience unto death God has highly exalted him, and he has given him the name above every name. So at the name of Jesus every knee will bend, whether on the earth or under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Now, after Jesus has fulfilled our salvation, his name is given to him anew. This time it's not given to him only by an angel. But it is given to him by God himself. The Father declares the name Jesus as the name above every name. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. The name of Jesus is the name of God. It is who God is. He has saved us from our sins.

Jesus has fulfilled God's promise. Jesus has fulfilled God's law. Jesus has fulfilled God's name. He himself already possessed the blessing of his Father. He had this from eternity. But he came to become God's blessing for you. He himself already was righteous before the law. He is the one who gave the law to Moses after appearing to him in the burning bush. But he has fulfilled the law for you. His name has always been above every name. But now he bears this name for you and for your salvation. He has accomplished it all without any help of man.

This is why St. Paul calls baptism the circumcision made without hands. Because in your baptism you are joined to Jesus Christ himself. In him you are reborn by the Holy Spirit, according to God's promise. In him you are counted righteous, and the law cannot condemn you. And in him you are given a new name. Baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, you are baptized into the name of Jesus. His name is your name. This means that everything he did belongs to you. His life is yours. His death is yours. His resurrection is yours. His inheritance at the Father's right hand is yours. His reputation is yours forever. This is such wonderful news, which can only be grasped by faith.

So take comfort in it. Trust it. Find your rest and peace in the name of Jesus. Stand firmly on the LORD'S SALVATION. Jesus Christ is the everlasting pledge to you that God's promise to save you has been fulfilled. And though you still feel the pricks and accusations of the law, it is in the name of Jesus where you find God's perfect grace and favor toward you. Let us pray:

Your promise now fulfilled
To save us from our doom,
Upon this hope we build
On Christ who blessed the womb.
Once born of Virgin Mother,
You came to be our Brother.
The law for us fulfilling,
Your name on us instilling,
O Jesus grant, with heav'nly cheer,
To us a glad New Year! Amen.