

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Circumcision and Name of Jesus
Luke 2:21
January 1st, 2012

Some of us, perhaps, stayed up last night to bring in the New Year with celebration and fan-fair. Others went to bed early and then woke up in 2012. Today the calendar on our wall tells us that we begin a brand new year – a holiday for the world – New Year’s Day.

The calendar for the church shows us that we have been in the midst of the “New Year” for more than a month now. When we look at the calendar of the church, today is also a holiday. No, it’s not as popular as Christmas Day – but it is still Christmas. Today is called the Octave of Christmas – or the eighth day. According to the law, little boys in Israel were brought to the altar of the Lord to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. On this day the name of the child is also given to him – and you know that the child we are talking about today already had a “pre-determined” name. His name is to be Savior.

This strange feast we remember on New Year’s Day can be viewed from two viewpoints – and neither have anything to do with the holiday celebrated by the world today. The first is with reference to our Savior. The second is with reference to us.

Let’s take a look at what happened in reference to the Savior Jesus on the eighth day after birth. We only have one verse about the event. We have other places in the Bible, of course, that tell us about circumcision. For Jesus this was an act of obedience, carried out by Him through His beloved earthly parents. We call to mind that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He was born under the law and He kept the law. Circumcision was a part of the Law of Moses – given first to Abraham way back in the book of Genesis. This ceremonial act was a one-time event availing for all. The foreskin represents sin and rebellion against God and is literally “cut-off” from the rest of the body. While Jesus was without sin, He takes humanity’s place under the Law as the sin-bearer, as also in His baptism.

The circumcision has implications for us. As we could say at Christmas: Christ is born, we are born with Him, so we can say today: Christ was circumcised, we share His circumcision. The purpose of the redemption is to “cut off” the old man with his sinful impulses. Although today it’s Baptism for all of us, there is a need for us to be constantly circumcised – that is a “cutting off” the old man and putting on Christ in daily repentance and contrition. This is the “living in” Christ’s work for each of our days.

Listen to all of this... the octave of Christmas... the circumcision and naming of Jesus... the bringing of Jesus under the Law of Moses and into the lives we live... the cutting off of sin from our lives... This is a strange feast and it’s all enough to make our heads spin. And what about the fact that today is New Years Day? Today is a holiday, no less. Why all this “circumcision” and “feast day” talk when it’s 2012. This day has been a festival in the Church since ancient days. 2012 is brand new. It’s only hours old. We should talk about that. It’s always more exciting to talk about something new rather than something old.

Well, this day called the circumcision and naming of Jesus is nothing new... unlike 2012. But there is a first, something new, that happened to Jesus, the eight-day-old baby. On this day, for the first time, Jesus shed His blood for you. The mission of Christ begins on the eighth day – the first day of the new week of God’s new creation, which will also be the day of His resurrection. His obedience to the Law involves the shedding of His blood for the first time for you.

Now that the “new” year is here, we look forward to new things ahead of us. We are always hopeful that a new leaf will be turned... perhaps if 2011 was not so great... this year will

be the year we turn it all around. We have our New Year's resolutions in place and we plan on sticking to them this year. This year is going to be different. We have a chance to redeem ourselves. We have a chance to start over. I mean, that's sort of what this month even means. The word January is taken from the Latin *janua*, door or portal, from which one may look both ways, and from *Janus*, the Roman god of beginnings, who faced in both directions. As we stand at the threshold of the New Year and look back over the way we have come, we see our record of imperfect endeavors, our shortcomings and sins. We see all the "should of, would of, could of" moments and also think back to some regrets that hurt ourselves and the people we love. We can look back while standing in the threshold of a New Year and see all that went wrong, some our fault, some burdens placed upon us by the sins of others. All of our sins past and present are in need of a savior who was given that very name on this day which the blood of Christ must cover up.

But we also see a future bright with promise, like the bud of a rose that has not yet unfolded its petals. We see a future in a new-born baby... who is the Word made flesh for us here at Christmas... who was brought by His parents to be placed under the Law so that He might fulfill the law for all of us. This perfect child did not need to be "cut off" from His sins. He was sinless. But this blood spilt for us was the cutting off of our sins. This was the first blood that would lead to the second perfect sacrifice on the cross. That blood, the same blood as we talk about today, came from that same God/man who fulfilled all things for us.

And remember, that this day we celebrate not just the shedding of blood for us, but the naming of our Lord – a new name – a name that has meaning for the boy who received it and the people who receive what He so freely gives. His name is given this day and it's a name for us. St. Paul tells us in Philippians chapter two, *"Therefore God has highly exalted Him 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."*

This name of Jesus is for us – and for our New Year. It is the year of our Lord. Live as one who puts this year and this name of Jesus together. Live as one who belongs to the Lord, who have received the blood-spilt, and the name, "He Saves". Live for the people you love and the people that Jesus loves. Live your 2012 in Christ and pour Christ out in your daily activity.

A blessed New Year to all of you. You fought through the struggle of getting up early and made it to the Lord's House. What better place in all the world to begin this year than at His altar, with His precious children singing joyous hymns, in His live-giving Word and promise. Each day of our 2012 is a great day to be in the Lord. The beginning of life for Jesus as a circumcised, "named" child would get the world off on the right foot. For in Christ is all "new beginnings." In Christ is our new life, our light for this world, our salvation for the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.