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The Circumcision and Name of Jesus
Luke 2:21
January 1st, 2017

Of course the council knew everything. They were the final authority. They had all the answers and all decisions ran through them. They also were very concerned about keeping the status quo. You know, they wanted nothing to upset the Romans and the Romans wanted nothing more than to keep those Jews quiet – let them do their thing at the Temple – Don't make a fuss – don't stir up the crowd – don't cause riots... and everything will be just fine and dandy. But the council, called the Sanhedrin, had a problem.

Now, the Sanhedrin had the job of keeping the status quo – no matter what. So they arrested two men who were stirring up the people in the temple. Those two men were Peter and John. You have to remember that this is the same court that condemned Jesus to death. This is the same court made up of the men with the highest status in the Jewish community. They are the most educated, they keep with the most dignified company. And yet, before them stood this Galilean fisherman named Peter... not so much to be judged by them. Rather, Peter would be their judge.

Peter would say, *“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

These common uneducated folk have a name by which they live. They speak well when they speak of Jesus. They know something about Him. They have courage enough to stand in front of the who's who of Jerusalem, arrested for stirring up the people, and tell them what for. It's all because of a name. That name is Jesus. And that name... Jesus... was given on the day we celebrate today.

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 Year’s Day? Today is a holiday, no less. Why all this “circumcision” and “feast day” talk when it’s 2017. This day has been a festival in the Church since ancient days. 2017 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 2017. 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.

And the name of Jesus... well that begins new for us as well. You see, just like those first Christians – like Peter and John who stood before the Sanhedrin and boldly proclaimed who Christ was – that they were CHRISTians, so, too, is your name given. Jesus received his name. And you received your name at Baptism. He placed His name on you – calling you His very own. Just like today. Adeline got her name today. Her name, that we will be calling her for the rest of her life... even after she has passed from this life to the next... (I still call those in heaven by their Christian name) was blessed to have their name combined with THE name of Jesus. “I baptize you in THE NAME of the FATHER and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. It’s not just a name – It’s THE NAME and its now ours. So, truly the name Christian is appropriate for Adeline today. Her name became CHRISTIAN just moments ago. That’s pretty important.

With a name like the one we are given also comes a great deal of responsibility. Our new name will show others that we will treat God’s Word as true. That the laws that are given in the Bible are for us to follow. They are not suggestions for us, but laws. And, we have not been the keeper of God’s law as He would expect. This year, I’m sure that you will make all sorts of resolutions to improve your living. Make the best kind of resolution. The one that includes living the Christian life the way God would expect. Let’s come right out and say it like that. Resolve to repent. Resolve to go and sin no more.

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 2017 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 2017 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.