

December 31, 2014
Sermon for New Year's Eve
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 2:1- 21

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 2:1–21 (ESV)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. ²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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

Amen.

Our God always works through means. That is to say, the God who made everything there is, who still sustains everything, and always works through everything of His making for your good.

He attached His creative Word to the fruit of two trees in the garden, to Aaron's staff, and to Moses' serpent of bronze. He attached His creative Word to the Passover, the tabernacle, and the altar of burnt offering, the ark of the covenant, and the Most Holy Place in the temple. And

GOD ATTACHED HIS CREATIVE WORD TO CIRCUMCISION, THAT IT MIGHT BE ATTACHED TO US IN HOLY BAPTISM.

Bet you never thought of it that way, but in a sense, He did.

God attached His creative Word to circumcision, saying to Abraham in the Old Testament, *"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you"* (Gen 17:7).

There is something unique, particular, and personal about circumcision.

In other Old Testament eventss, God attached His Word to external, inanimate objects.

In circumcision, however, God attached His creative Word of promise to mankind's flesh, literally.

In circumcision, God's benediction was not spoken *over* you by a priest, *but into your own flesh*.

In circumcision, there was no ambiguity in God's Word, "*This covenant is for you,*" for it was crystal clear who the "you" was.

You carried it in your own flesh. Though it was possible to be circumcised and be an unbeliever, it was impossible to be a believer and still reject circumcision and the promises God attached to it.

Nevertheless, circumcision itself did not remove sin, original or actual; it was God's promise that He would look upon you in grace and mercy and not in wrath against your sin.

Circumcision was God's work, in your flesh. Faith in His promise was a necessity that men had the freedom to reject, but the sign was irrevocable, for God would not go back on His promise, even mankind did.

The permanence of the sign in the flesh itself made that clear. Though only males were circumcised and bore the sacramental sign of God's covenant, the promise was for all of the offspring that man would bear.

This was not some sort of patriarchal prejudice, but it got directly at the root of man's problem, sin.

As we are conceived and born in sin, God's covenant promise was attached to the very source and beginning of human life.

For no one was, is, or ever will be conceived and born without a human father—that is, *except the One*, Jesus.

Yet, circumcision was but a sacramental sign pointing ahead to a future fulfillment. That fulfillment came in the circumcision of Jesus, eight days after His birth in Bethlehem.

Just those few days after angels and shepherds and oxen and the scene we celebrate so vividly in our minds and in our pageants,

Joseph and Mary quietly, without fanfare, carried out the command of the Law. On the eighth day, every Hebrew boy since Abraham was to be circumcised.

So also with God's own Son.

Jesus had no human father; therefore, He bore not the corruption of original sin. Nevertheless, He submitted himself to circumcision in His innocent flesh, with the shedding of the first drops of His precious blood, in order that His heavenly Father's covenant promise might be given to His offspring by faith.

Jesus' holy submission to the Law put Himself in our place.

Jesus willingly took our place under the Law so that He could keep it for us, for us who fall so sinfully short.

And it was this same willing submission to the place of sinful humanity that thirty years later would bring the Father's word of benediction down upon Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan River:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

Therefore, in the circumcision of Jesus, all people are circumcised once and for all, because He represents all humanity, as St. Paul writes to the Colossians: *"In [Jesus Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ"* (Col 2:11).

Because of Jesus' circumcision in the flesh, you are God's child today.

This is not by the shedding of your blood, but by faith in God's creative Word of promise made flesh, Jesus Christ.

He submitted to circumcision in your stead and became obedient under the Law and fulfilled it, dying in your place and rising from death. By this death and resurrection, then, He gives new and eternal life to all who are born again with Him by Baptism and faith.

St. Paul writes, *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"* (Rom 6:3–4).

That new life began on the eighth day, the day of our Lord's resurrection, reinforcing the connection between circumcision on the eighth day and Holy Baptism.

In the Church, the numeral 8 is symbolic of the fulfillment of God's work of re-creating his sin-broken and fallen world and humanity. The new life begun in Jesus' resurrection on the eighth day will never end. The eighth day is literally the day on which the sun will never set (Rev 22:5). That is the day and the new life into which you are baptized. Therefore, to be baptized is literally to be born again, to a new life that will never die. That is why baptismal fonts, like this one, as well as pulpits and lecterns and other church furnishings, are often eight-sided—they are symbolic reminders of God's covenant and promise kept and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As the world celebrates the beginning of a new year this day and remembers the passing of the old,

so the Church celebrates the new life and the new name that she has been given in the innocent shed blood of Jesus Christ.

In Holy Baptism and faith, you are sealed in God's benediction, "*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace*" (Num 6:24–26).

His name is not only proclaimed to you, but it is placed on you, marking you as His offspring, His child, His heir, with and in Jesus Christ, His Son, with whom He is well pleased.

Go into this new year assured of your kinship with Christ as a forgiven child of God.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory