

THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD AND THE NAME OF JESUS
Sermon for New Year's Day 2021
Luke 2:21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today, Luke 2:21, is the shortest of all the Gospel Readings in the Church Year, and yet, despite its brevity, it also happens to be one of the most profound: **On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named "Jesus," the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

"On the eighth day." Just as John was circumcised and named on the eighth day, so it is with Jesus.

As many of you know, God had decreed to His people in days of old that all those baby boys who were to be included among the people of Israel by birth were to be circumcised on the eighth day.¹ But why is the *eighth day* so important? Why not some other number?

When God gives the decree to circumcise, He does so because He is in the process of making good on His promises to deliver His people. We must remember that the deliverance of which God ultimately speaks is not merely freedom from the Egyptians or conquering the Canaanites, but a triumphing over this sinful world - the end of which is going to be the new heavens and the new earth.²

When God first creates, He does so in six days and rests on the seventh. This is the first creation, the creation that we continue to experience to this day, albeit in a now fallen and broken state, but there is a new creation on the horizon. We are not going to live in this world forever. It will be destroyed and made new again. The Apostle Peter writes that *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, burning will destroy the elements and the earth,"* but he then goes on to encourage us that according to the Lord's promise, *"we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells"* (2 Peter 3:10, 13). God will once more take upon Himself the work of creating. Like the pre-fall creation in Genesis chapter 1, the new creation will be truly good, untainted by any evil. Yet it will be far more than a reproduction of the original pristine state. The prime resident in this new creation will be *"righteousness."* This is God's gift in Jesus Christ, by which we are justified. As our risen Lord will continue to bear the marks of His vicarious atonement throughout eternity, so also it seems that the new creation will be indelibly marked by the righteousness of Jesus that has *procured our salvation.* He is, after all, the reason for the resurrection unto eternal life, where we shall finally put away the old and don the new once and for all.

It is not a mistake, then, that Jesus rises from the dead the day after the Sabbath rest. Remember how Jesus had died on Friday, then Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, and Easter Sunday followed. The Sabbath is the end of the week, the seventh day, and remember, the seventh day was the day God rested from the completion of the creation. So now Jesus rises on Sunday, which, not only on our calendars but also in the biblical view of things, is actually the first day of the week. But that also makes it the eighth day, the day after the seventh and last day of the previous week. Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection, and with Him comes a new creation. This first day, which is also the *eighth day*, is the beginning of a new creation, and Christ is its firstfruits.

Sometimes you'll hear this described as an eighth-day theology. I know this idea can be taken too far by some, but it is not an idea beyond the bounds of Scripture. It's why the Early Church would shape their baptismal pools and fonts with eight sides - for in baptism, something new is being brought forth. It also reminds us of the eight souls who were saved in the ark during the global flood by which God's judgment destroyed the world.³

¹ Genesis 17:12

² Isaiah 65:17

³ Genesis 7:13

With all this in mind, it makes sense why God would have His Son circumcised on the eighth day in the days of old. It is a foreshadowing of being made new, being added to the kingdom of God, which will ultimately rise together in the resurrection and inherit the new creation prepared for it in Christ Jesus. It is also why, when the Christ comes and is circumcised on the eighth day, circumcision is no longer necessary for the true spiritual Israel, because that to which it looked forward *has finally come*. There is no need to shed the blood of the sons of Israel in anticipation of all things being fulfilled - for that time has now come. The fulfilment of all things in Christ really does begin to take place **“when the time came to circumcise”** Him.

Circumcision usually took place in the home of the parents. We don't know just where Mary and Joseph may have stayed while they remained in Bethlehem. Undoubtedly, they were able to find a more suitable shelter than where Jesus had been born after the rush of people had left Bethlehem following the census registration. Nevertheless, at His circumcision, in obedience to the Law, Jesus shed His blood for the first time. For the Ancient Church, it made a lot of sense when circumcision was viewed in relation to Christ. Those Israelites were awaiting a Saviour who would die for them, who would shed His own blood as the price of their sin. No wonder this is the first event in the life of Jesus that we hear about outside His birth. First, He is born into the world, and then the Saviour has His own blood shed in His circumcision. All this pain and agony He would have felt at His circumcision are the results of our sin, and Jesus' circumcision is a one-time event for all. The foreskin had represented sin and rebellion against God, as Paul once wrote, “...*you were dead in sins and in your uncircumcised flesh*” (Colossians 2:13a). While Jesus is without sin, He takes humanity's place under the Law as the sin-bearer, as also in His baptism. The benefits of Jesus' circumcision are received in Holy Baptism. In Luther's exposition of Genesis 17:9–11, that part of Scripture where God, speaking to Abraham institutes circumcision, he includes among the benefits of circumcision for Old Testament believers, the forgiveness of sins, justification, and incorporation into the people of God. These benefits accrued to those who received the sign of circumcision through their faith in God's promise, which is fulfilled in Christ. St. Paul speaks of holy baptism as a “*circumcision made without hands*” and as “*the circumcision done by Christ*” (Colossians 2:11). There was a fierce argument in the Early Church about whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised, but the issue is settled by a proper understanding of Jesus' fulfilment of the entire Old Testament on our behalf, for in the circumcision of the One who represents all humanity, all people are circumcised once and for all. Christ's circumcision points to the purpose of His life. ***He has come to shed His blood for all***.

This is why **“He was named “Jesus”** because, as many of us probably know, the name *Jesus* means “*the Lord saves*,” and Jesus is going to save us by the shedding of His own blood. He has come to pay for the debt of our sin, which comes at the price of life - it will come at the price of His own life. On the eighth day, the Christ Child is already beginning to fulfil the final purpose of His coming. He is beginning to spill His blood for the whole world.

That pain and that agony that Jesus felt like all those baby boys felt when being circumcised, will only be the beginning of what He must undergo for the redemption of mankind. The life of Christ will be one of *suffering*. It will be one where He submits Himself to the will of His heavenly Father and thereby lays down His own flesh and blood for the life of fallen mankind. This was, in fact, God's plan since the time of the Fall. This is why the conclusion to our one-verse text reads, **“Jesus,” the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.**” Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate in the flesh, is not some afterthought of the LORD. His presence in the world is the express plan and purpose of God Himself, which He has worked out, and when He first told Eve that the Child would crush the devil's head.⁴

From that day, God had continued to work in history itself to bring this moment into being. In fact, He already knew at the eating of the forbidden fruit that He would send the angel to announce this Child's name, and just as the eighth day has great meaning, and so does circumcision itself, so, too, does the name given to the Christ Child, for it sums together the foreshadowing of the eighth day and the shedding of blood on it.

Jesus has come to save us from our sins. He has come to stand under the wrathful judgment of God as if it were His own blood that was guilty of transgressing the LORD - even though it isn't. He takes upon Himself the guilt of our sins and is ready and willing to offer up His own flesh and blood - His very life in our place so that we do not have to

⁴ Genesis 3:15

die as those guilty before the Lord of lords.

And Jesus does die. He lets His body be put to death, bleeding and scourged as He hangs from a tree. It is a most horrible way to die, helpless before the world and the scorn of all, and His suffering was real - as real as the pain felt by any newborn child whose blood is shed. Our God knows what it's like to suffer and to die, and not simply because He is God and knows all things, but because as God He has become man and has in fact and in truth endured death itself in time in His own body.

All this He has done because He loves us and wants more than anything else to win us back from the just punishment of sin, which is everlasting death. This is what He has done, and worthy is He of the name *Jesus*, because He is the Lord and He is the One who saves - by coming in the flesh, by shedding His blood, and by rising again on the third, that is, the first, that is, the eighth day.

Our Gospel for today is one of the most amazing readings in the whole Church Year. It encapsulates the curse of the Fall, the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament, and their fulfilment in the New. It even points us forward to the return of our Lord in glory, who at that time will consummate all things and make them new in the new heaven and the new earth. It's all there in the circumcision of Jesus - the curse, the promises, the old creation, and the new. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY

Heavenly Father, God from everlasting to everlasting, to You a thousand years are like one day, like yesterday already gone, or a short watch in the night: We adore and bless You as our Creator, the Giver of every good gift, the Source of all help, and the God of our salvation.

Your gracious care has brought us to this day, and it is of Your mercy that we have not been destroyed. Year by year You have spared and blessed us. You have not punished us as we deserve, or repaid us for our sins and wrongs. You have continued to give us Your Word and blessed Sacraments; You have blessed us through the Church. You have filled our homes and hearts with good. We confess Your constant love every morning and Your faithfulness every night, and thank and praise Your holy name.

Make the new year, we pray, a year of salvation to us. We enter it in humble trust in Jesus' name, because He has come to save us from our sins. We know no other saving name; make it our daily shelter and only hiding-place. Grant that we may daily experience its gracious power; and that through it our prayers may rise like incense before You.

Bless Your Church, and let Your Word spread rapidly that Your kingdom may be extended to the ends of the earth. Look in mercy on our congregations, and preserve among us the pure preaching of Your Word and the right use of the holy Sacraments. Do not let Your Word fail to achieve Your purposes, but open the hearts of the hearers to receive it gladly and to obey it willingly.

Bless our country Australia and all its people in this new year. Give our leaders wisdom and power to administer justice and to work for the good of all. Maintain peace in our land and on all the earth. Give success to all work in town and countryside; provide us with our daily bread, and keep us from sickness and all other ills. Crown the year with Your goodness so that Your glory may continue among us.

Watch over our homes; bless them with peace and happiness, and grant that all parents may rule their households in true godliness, and bring up their children in reverence for You. Keep the privileged and prosperous from worldly pride, and the poor and needy from murmuring, envy, and discontent. Provide for widows and orphans and all who are lonely and afflicted, and have mercy on all who are sick. When the righteous cry, hear them, and rescue them from all their troubles.

As all our days have been written in Your book even from eternity, we commit ourselves into Your hands. Keep us from every evil of body and soul, and bless us with what You know is best. Help us in the new year to walk in newness of life, using every day to love and do Your will; so that, if this coming year should be our last on earth, we may at the appointed time end our earthly life in peace and begin the new year of eternity in Your perfect presence and to Your never-ending praise.

Hear us, eternal God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS (NEW YEAR'S DAY)

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The LORD told Moses, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is how you shall bless the people of Israel. Say to them: ²⁴ “May the LORD bless you and keep you! ²⁵ May the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you! ²⁶ May the LORD look on you with favour and give you peace!”

²⁷ ““In this way they will put My name on the people of Israel and I shall bless them.””

Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Before the faith came, we were being imprisoned by the Law, locked up until the faith came, which was about to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore, the Law was our guardian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ However, now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ For you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ because all of you who were baptised into Christ put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ Moreover, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise.

Luke 2: 21

²¹ On the eighth day, when the time came to circumcise the Baby, He was named “Jesus,” the name that the angel had given Him before He was conceived in the womb.