

The Eve of the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

31 December, Anno Domini 2023

St. Luke 2:21

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

Beloved children of God,

The event seems so small and insignificant. St. Luke, usually full of details treats the circumcision and naming of Jesus so matter-of-factly. But sometimes simplicity is the best way to make your point.

The naming of a child is something parents often agonize over for months. They pour over books, websites, and family trees trying to pick the perfect name for their son or daughter. And why shouldn't they? A child's name stays with him all his life. It is how he is known and identified. And while we try to pick the most beautiful or meaningful name, we can never know if our child will live up to it.

When teaching the fourth commandment, especially to kids, I always make sure to emphasize that they are a reflection on their parents. Because they share at least a last name, the behaviors of a child, accurately or not, are viewed as running commentaries, living icons, of that child's parents.

This why the naming and circumcision of Israelite boys were so intimately linked. By naming the boy, as when Adam named the animals, a father and mother invoke their authority over, lay claim to, and take responsibility for their son. But in circumcision, another lays claim to and takes responsibility for the boy - the Lord God of heaven and earth. There, in the shedding of the blood, the God of Israel enters into covenant with another sinner - promising to be the God of that child and bestowing upon him all the blessings of His kingdom. There, God states in no uncertain terms "I will be your God and you will be my people." It was through the bloodied knife of circumcision, and in no other way, that you became an Israelite, a

true child of God.

To become an heir of your heavenly Father you first had to be taken out of the kingdom ruled by Satan through sin and death. Your old, sinful, rebellious nature had to be cut off. It isn't simply a matter of changing your behavior but who you are. This is the reason circumcision is what it is.

And this makes the circumcision of the infant Jesus so significant and worthy of our attention and devotion. He didn't need it! He had no sinful nature to remove, no heart full of unbelief, no hatred of God or malice toward His neighbor. Just the opposite. He was the true Son of the Father, which is why Joseph didn't name Him but was given the Name by which He would be called. He alone was worthy of the name bestowed upon Him, the Name that is above every name - Jesus, the Lord saves. He who knew no sin - who never lied, never maligned even the name of His most vicious enemies, never doubted the promises of God His Father, even as the thorns tore through His flesh and the searing pain of the nails rushed through every nerve in His Body - this Holy One became unholy, became sin FOR US! He willingly subjected Himself to the demands of the Law to set us free from the death of the Law's righteous condemnation of our sins. Indeed, His Name says it all - Jesus, the Lord saves. The Law could never save us because we could never keep it. No matter how many New Year's resolutions we make, no matter how many desperate promises of reform we offer up to God in the dark hopelessness of our guilt - we simply will never do enough to satisfy the absolute and unyielding demand of perfect love of God and neighbor set forth in the Law.

We have sullied and blasphemed the Holy Name of our Father with our lusting, our pride, our arrogance, and our anger. We are all faithless sons who ought to be cut off from God for all of eternity. But God Himself has done exactly what is demanded of us in the Law. He has loved you perfectly by willingly sacrificing His only-begotten to atone for your sin. He has been true to His Name and saved you not by your blood but by the shedding of His own. What began in the temple would be completed outside Jerusalem on Calvary's cross. There, His very life was cut off from God so that we would be restored to sonship. But He would not

remain cut off. He is risen victorious over death. The Blood that He shed as payment for your sin, the cause and source of your salvation, is now true drink to nourish you, to give fresh life and peace to wearied and burdened hearts.

It is by and in this Name, Jesus, that we are saved. Not through circumcision or uncircumcision, not through our decisions or good intentions, but through the waters of Holy Baptism, Jesus has placed His Name on you, calling you His own, taking from you what is rightfully yours - sin, death, eternal damnation - and giving you everything that is rightfully His - life, obedience, and salvation. It is by this Name - Jesus - that we are comforted as our guilt weighs on us, as the sorrows of sickness and death surround us, as fear of what we do not know paralyzes us from seeing the blessings that lie before us in Christ, as the regrets of the old year give way to the anxieties of the new. Rejoice! The Lord saves. The Lord has saved you. Jesus has offered Himself up for you and set you free to be children of God. There is no longer need for you to fear things either temporal or eternal. Your crosses are not judgment but the gentle instruction of your Heavenly Father. You have been baptized into Christ. You are sons of God, not by your works but by faith in Christ, whose Name you bear - sealed upon you in the font and held before you every time you receive and retrace the sign of it upon yourself. It is in His Name - Jesus - that this year draws to a close. And it is in His Name - Jesus - that this new year begins full of the promises of His mercy and His blessing to you, His beloved sons and daughters in Christ.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.