

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

Luke 2.21

Friday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas, 1 January 2021

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Gloria in excelsis deo +

Beloved in the Lord, grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you done the math?

We now stand 8 days after Christmas—or at least 8 days as the Jews counted time. They used what's known as "inclusive counting" to reckon time.

If you've ever been curious how Jesus' less-than-48-hour rest in the tomb is a three-day rest, all you need to do is think about inclusive counting. He was placed in the tomb on Good Friday, before the Sabbath began. Day 1. He remained in the tomb Friday night and Saturday day. The Sabbath. Day 2. Sometime on Sunday morning, probably in the very wee hours, He arose from the grave. Day 3. Inclusive counting. In Jewish reckoning that adds up to a three-day rest, and Christ's resurrection was three days after His burial.

Well, as we count time, we stand only 7 days away from Christmas—we just celebrated it last Friday. Today's the next Friday. But in Jewish reckoning it's the 8<sup>th</sup> day. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Count them up. 8 days. *The 8<sup>th</sup> day.*

And it's this day after his birth that according to the Law of Moses every baby boy in Israel was to be circumcised, even if it fell on the Sabbath when no work could be done. And with that, every baby boy in Israel was placed under the Law.

That's what Paul says in Galatians of Christ, "born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law."

His first birth is from His mother's womb; His second birth—His birth under the Law—is today. This day when He receives the covenant of circumcision.

Marking Him in His flesh forever that He, who subjected all to His Law is Himself made subject to that Law.

That He now makes Himself responsible for the perfection under the Law that He demands of all.

So that in this perfection under the Law He might offer Himself up,

a fragrant sacrifice to God,

the Perfect for the imperfect,

the Holy for those who had profaned themselves, the Pure for the polluted,

the Sinless for sinners.

That's Christ's "second birth." Born of a woman. Born under Law. To redeem those under Law.

And that's why this day is so important—so important that it's marked by a standing festival in the church year. For on this day Christ enters into His active obedience. Not for Himself. But for you. And in the shedding of His blood this day He foreshows the once-for-all shedding of His blood on the Holy Cross for the sins of the world. Two births.

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You, too, have two births. God provided your first birth when He gave our first parents His command: be fruitful and multiply. But unlike Christ's first birth—the only *birth* in the history of the world that brought forth innocent, holy life—*your* first birth was sullied by what you inherited from Adam. Entirely corrupt. Like a broken dish, and nothing's to be done but throw it away. That's why sinners die. That's why you die. And that's why God gave the covenant of circumcision: to show by this first blood drawn from every male child in Israel that the wages of sin is death.

But that's also why the Lord Christ subjected Himself to it. This shedding of every infant male Israelite's blood portended certain death for sin. But in His own circumcision Christ, though sinless, made that death for sin His own. And by it He created a new second birth, a different kind of second birth.

A second birth not in *your* blood, but in *His*.

A second birth that portends not death, but life, and eternal life.

A second birth not made by the will of man—of a sinful mohel placing the irreversible mark of a sinner on the body of a sinner—

but a birth by the will of God,

bearing the invisible sign of Christ's holy cross upon forehead and breast,

the mark not of a slave to sin, but of one redeemed from all sins.

Your Baptism.

Your second birth.

A birth from above.

A holy birth for one made holy by Christ.

A birth not in blood, but in water.

For Jesus' second birth under the scalpel of the mohel placed Him under the covenant of the Law—so that you might be placed under the covenant of the Gospel.

God's Son's second birth came with the shedding of His blood for sin He didn't have, that your second birth might free you from the blood required for your sin.

His Son was born anew under the curse of the Law—death—so that your second birth might free you from the Law's curse and give you eternal life.

That's what we commemorate this day.

But it's not like it's this day only.

For every time you make the sign of the Holy Cross over yourself you commemorate this day because you commemorate your own second birth. Every time you do it, you lay claim through faith to what

Christ this day has done for you. Every time you do it, you assert that you are an 8<sup>th</sup>-day creature, born anew. A child of God. Freed from the curse of the Law. Redeemed from all sins. And infused with a life entirely unlike this earthly life, which ends in death, but with a new, never-ending life in heaven. Because on this day the One born of a woman was also born under the Law—to redeem those under the Law. To redeem *you*!

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

jsb  
sdg