

NAME OF JESUS (NEW YEAR'S EVE)

Luke 2:21

When God called the Jews to be His chosen Old Testament people, He marked them as such. God told Abraham, ***“You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.”*** (Genesis 17:11). This was obviously an intimate mark upon a man’s body. Even more, it was a reminder. It was a reminder that the Savior would come through their line, be one of their descendants, Abraham’s Offspring.

Jewish children were circumcised on the eighth day after birth. As a tiny baby they were marked as God’s children, as children of God’s covenant, as little ones to be redeemed through the coming Christ. They were not circumcised as teenagers or as adults, so that they could make a profession of faith or a decision for God. No, already as children, they were marked as those that had already been chosen, those for whom God had already decided to be their heavenly Father.

St. Paul tells us that Holy Baptism has replaced and superseded circumcision. He writes to the Colossians, ***“In [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”*** (2:11,12). And so it is good and right that we like the Jews mark our children with God’s promise, with the sign of the cross and water joined with the Word. God has decided in Christ to be their heavenly Father, even as their parents decided to become their parents without consulting or asking them. And so we recently heard St. John tell us in the beginning of his Gospel, ***“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*** (1:11-13).

If you visit older and ancient churches, you’ll notice that the fonts usually have eight sides. Our own old font in the narthex has eight sides. Christians have biblically recognized the connection between circumcision and Baptism that St. Paul pointed out, and so those eight sides of the font reminded parents as they brought their children to the font that the promises of God were for these little ones as well, as St. Peter reminded the crowd on Pentecost. It was also a reminder to the parents to raise their children in those promises, so that their Baptism would not later be rejected, and salvation with it.

It was for His circumcision, then, to fulfill the law, just as He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, that Jesus was brought to the temple. It was customary to name the child at that time, and so the newborn King was officially named there. Why Jesus? It was the name that the angel had told Joseph to give the child. What does it mean? The angel told Joseph the Child was to be called Jesus ***“because He would save His people from their sins”*** (Matthew 1:21). His name means “Savior.” What a wonderful name! Every time we hear it we should be reminded of who our Lord is. He is the One who came to save. He is the One who has brought us forgiveness. He is the One who by His cross worked peace between us and His Father, whom we had offended by our sins and whose punishment we deserved. While the world and other religions might be fine with considering Him everything but—they are fine with considering Him a teacher, philosopher, or example—the first foremost thing our Jesus came to be and still remains is Jesus, Savior.

As we close 2010, we do so with a Jesus. As we examine ourselves after another year and consider our sins, we have a Jesus. As we prepare for a new year, one that we hope will be better, one in which we hope to be more obedient through faith, we have a Jesus. That is the comfort we need as we wrestle with the guilt of sins past. That is the encouragement we need as we resolve obedience future. That is the truth that we need as we live in the present. Our God is our Jesus. He has loved us, and He does love us. He has forgiven us, and He promises to walk with us as we learn to walk more rightly in Him. And His counsel, help, and aid is no small thing. No, He is Jesus, risen and ascended, as St. Paul reminds us in our second lesson. ***“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***

In this Jesus we press on into 2011, and in this Jesus we are ready for whatever it brings—Jesus, the promise of God in human flesh and still among us in Word and Sacrament. Amen.

**This sermon was produced from an outline. Please excuse any typos.