

The Shedding of Blood and the Name of Jesus

Circumcision & Name of Jesus – 01/01/23

Text: Luke 2:21 Pastor Keith Besel - Mt. Calvary Luth.

v. 21 “**And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus...**”.

Introduction

- ✘ Our Gospel Reading today is the shortest of all the Gospel Readings in the Church Year. And because it is so short and seems so matter of fact – like all that it’s doing is setting the stage or providing a transition for what is about to come next in the story, it’s one of those verses in Scripture that is most commonly glossed over. Another reason for this might be because it speaks of an action that frankly, makes most men cringe and most women blush
 - ➔ Yet, despite its brevity and content, this one verse happens to be one of the most profound and most important verses in all of Holy Scripture.

I. Jesus’ Circumcision: The First & The New Creation

- ✘ It begins with a simple statement of time, “at the end of eight days”. This is not just an arbitrary time. It is no happenstance, but an appointed time with an appointed meaning.
- ✘ Many of you know that God had decreed to His people in days of old that every baby boy that was to be included among the people of Israel by birth was required by God’s law to be circumcised on the eighth day.
 - ➔ So why was the eighth day so important? Why not some other number? There are actually a couple of suggested reasons for this. One is that the eighth day is the best day for circumcision, because it’s then that baby boys produce the highest percentage of vitamin K and prothrombin, which are necessary for coagulating blood (<https://evidence-for-the-bible.com/scientific-evidence-for-the-bible/scientific-evidence-for-circumcision-on-the-eighth-day/>). Since you wouldn’t want all of those baby boys bleeding to death or suffering secondary problems from the procedure, do you suppose God built that into the physiology of the male body? After all He knew He was going to establish the law of circumcision.
 - ➔ But beyond the mere physical benefits of the eighth day, there’s a more significant theological reason. When God gives the decree to circumcise, He does so because He is in the process of making good on His promises to deliver and save His people. And of course the deliverance of which God ultimately speaks is not merely freedom from slavery to the Egyptians, or that of conquering the Canaanites; it is gaining freedom from our slavery to this sinful world – the end of which is going to be the New Heavens and the New Earth.
- ✘ So consider, for a moment these two facts. On the one hand, when God first creates the universe, He does so in six days and then rests on the seventh. This is the first creation, the creation that we continue to live in and experience to this day – although it’s now in a fallen and broken state.
 - ➔ But we Christians take comfort in knowing, on the other hand, that there is a New Creation on the horizon. We are not bound to living in this world forever. As 2 Peter 3:10-13 tells us, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ... But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”.
- ✘ God will once again perform His creating work. And this work really began when Jesus rose from the dead. It’s only by the power of His resurrection that you and I are able to be resurrected to eternal life; where we will put away the old and put on the new once and for all.

→ And you see, it is not just by chance that Jesus rose from the dead on the day after the Sabbath rest. Remember, Jesus died on Friday, then Saturday – the seventh day; the completion of the creation – was the Jewish Sabbath.

→ And then Jesus rose on Sunday, which, not only on our calendars but also in the Biblical view of things, is actually the first day of the week. That means Sunday is the eighth day; the day after the seventh and last day of the previous week. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 tells us that Jesus “has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ... so...in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ.”

→ And with Jesus comes a New Creation. This first day, which is also the eighth day, is the beginning of a new creation. Among most theologians this is described as an eighth-day theology. It’s for this reason that many Early Church baptismal pools and fonts had eight sides, to remind us that, in Baptism, something new is being brought forth. Our baptismal font here has six sides, which reminds us that on the sixth day of Holy Week; on Good Friday, Jesus died to pay for our sin. Some baptismal fonts, like the one at our Seminary Chapel in St. Louis have a six-sided base with an eight-sided bowl consistent with Paul’s teaching in Romans, chapter six that in baptism we die to sin with Jesus on the cross (on the sixth day), and rise with Him on the eighth day as a New Creation in Christ.

✘ With all of this in mind, it makes sense why God would have His son circumcised then on the eighth day. It is a foreshadowing of being made new, being added to the kingdom of God, in which we will ultimately rise together in the resurrection of all flesh and inherit the new creation prepared for us in Christ Jesus.

→ It is also why, when Jesus came in human flesh and was circumcised on the eighth day that circumcision was no longer necessary for the true spiritual Israel, because the One to whom it looked forward had finally come! Because Jesus now shed His blood, there was no need for the sons of Israel to shed their blood in anticipation of the coming Christ – for His time had now come.

II. Jesus’ Circumcision Fulfills the Promises

✘ So, here in our text today the fulfillment of all things in Christ really does begin to take place “when He was circumcised”; “at the end of eight days”.

→ I know, for some this topic may be a bit uncomfortable to talk about, but if we don’t address it, then we leave out a crucial understanding of God’s plan and glory in our salvation. Admittedly circumcision is a strange event, because you have this beautiful baby who is fine one moment and then, in the next, he is really, really angry. Why? because the procedure hurts a lot. Those newborn cries are cries of pain, because a portion of His flesh is cut away and begins to die.

→ I’m sure there are activists out there who would harangue those who still support this practice today, but for the Ancient Church it made a lot of sense in its relation to Christ. Those Israelites were waiting for a Savior to come who would die for them; who would shed His own blood as the price of their sin.

✘ So there’s good reason that this is the first event that we hear about in the life of Jesus, after His birth. First, He is born into the world. And that’s a rather painful and bloody experience in itself, as you moms can testify. Then the Savior has His own blood shed in His circumcision. All of this pain and agony takes place as the result of sin.

→ And when the blood of the infant Christ Child is first spilled at His circumcision, it points us all directly to His purpose; to the reason He took on His human life. He came as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed; to shed His blood for all.

III. The Name “Jesus” Means Salvation from the Fall

- ⌘ This is why our text says that “He was called Jesus,” because, as I have already mentioned a number of times in this Advent and Christmas season, the name “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves”. And for Jesus to save us, it meant that He would be required by God to shed His own blood. Hebrews 9:22 says, “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”.
 - ➔ Jesus came to pay for the debt of our sin, which was the price of one’s life. Ezekiel 18:20 is clear, “The soul who sins shall die”. And Jesus came to earth in human flesh, as the only soul ever to have this flesh and yet never sin even once, so that He could take our soul’s place and pay our sinful-soul’s penalty of death.
- ⌘ And now, on the eighth day, the Christ Child is already beginning to fulfill His final purpose for coming. He’s already beginning to spill His blood for the whole world.
 - ➔ That pain and agony that Jesus felt, like all those baby boys before Him, would only be the beginning of what He must undergo for the redemption of mankind. It was already pre-ordained that the life of the promised Christ would be one of suffering. He would submit Himself to His Father’s plan and lay down His own flesh. He would spill His own blood for the lives of fallen mankind. This was God’s plan ever since the time of the fall, when He promised in Genesis 3:15 that the “offspring” of “the woman” would have His heel “bruised” by Satan, the evil serpent. And certainly the devil had to think that he had finally won when he led the Romans and Jews to pierce Jesus’ flesh by nailing Him to the cross.
- ⌘ Yet this is why our one-verse text concludes by saying, “Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb”. The Son of God made in human flesh and blood, is not just some afterthought of the Lord. His presence among us in the world is the precise plan and purpose of God Himself; the plan that He worked out from before time began and expressed to Eve at the fall; that the promised child would crush the devil’s head (Gen. 3:15), that is his power and hold over human flesh.
 - ➔ From that day, God continued to work throughout all of history to bring this moment into being. God knew from the time that Eve took that first bite of the forbidden fruit that He would send His angel to announce this child’s name. And just as the eighth day and circumcision both have great meaning, so does the name assigned to Mary’s child; a name that sums up the importance of the eighth day and the blood that was shed on it.
- ⌘ Jesus came to save us; to stand under the wrathful judgment of God as if it were His own blood that was guilty of sinning against the Lord. And save us He did when He took our guilt upon Himself and willingly offered His own flesh and blood so that we do not have to now die eternally in our guilt.
 - ➔ As a man, Jesus endured severe bleeding and scourging even before He was pierced through and nailed to a tree. He endured perhaps the most horrible, helpless and scornful way to die. His suffering was real – as real as the pain He surely felt as a newborn that day that He first shed His blood. Yes, our God knows what it’s like to suffer and to die – not simply because He is God and knows all things, but because, as God, He became man and He endured death here on earth; in human history; in His very own body.
- ⌘ All of this, Jesus did, because He loves you and me. And He wants more than anything else to win us back from the grave that we all deserve in our sin. Yes, Jesus is fully worthy of His name, because only He is both Yahweh and the One who saves – by shedding His blood, first on the eighth day to fulfill God’s Law for us, and then on the sixth day to die our death, so that He could then rise to new life and a new beginning for us all on the eighth day.

Conclusion

✘ I hope you now see why I said that today's Gospel is one of the most amazing readings in the Church Year. It brings everything together; the curse of the fall, the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament, and their fulfillment in the New Testament. It even points us forward to Jesus' return in glory, when He will make all things new in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

➔ It's all there in the circumcision of Jesus – the Curse, the Promises, the Old and New Creations. Yes, it's all there in the name of Jesus. Amen.