

“You Have Been Made New”

Luke 2:21

Today, as it is January 1st, we have a couple options for the Scripture readings. This is the first Sunday after Christmas and there was the option of the Gospel reading from Matthew with Mary and Joseph fleeing the anger of Herod as he plans to shed the blood of all the young boys in Bethlehem. However, there is this alternate, special feast or festival appointed for January 1 called the “Circumcision and Name of Jesus.”

As circumcision under the old covenant had a strong correlation to Baptism under the new covenant, and since throughout the season of Advent, and then on Christmas Eve at the Candlelight service, our focus repeatedly has kept going back to our Baptism, I thought it would be appropriate to use these alternate texts. Besides that, I have never preached on this before and who knows how many more opportunities I may have to do so.

The faith created in Baptism fundamentally changed who you are. Years ago, you were born a child of Adam. Your Old Adam was born under the judgment of death. In your Baptism, your Old Adam was crucified and buried with Christ. You have been made new. You have risen to a new life in Christ.

Today is January 1, New Year’s Day, so it is appropriate that we talk about things being new. This is also the 8th day after the celebration of the birth of our Lord. For Jesus, the child of Mary and Joseph, this was

fundamental day, as it was for all of the Jewish boys. On the 8th day, even if that was the Sabbath day, you were to be circumcised. God had made His covenant with Abraham. If a man was not circumcised, he was to be kicked out of the community. That was a burden God placed upon the men of Israel.

As I said, there are a number of correlations between circumcision and Baptism. In the early church, there was even at least one bishop in the 3rd Century who suggested that Baptism be delayed until the 8th day of life so as to more closely tie New Testament Christians to Old Testament Israel and God's covenant with Abraham.

So we hear in Luke's Gospel that Mary and Joseph, being faithful children of Abraham, on the 8th day, brought their Son Jesus to be circumcised. Throughout His life, Jesus kept the Law of God, and when the time came, He fulfilled the Law of God.

On the 8th day, Jesus, through the faithfulness of His earthly parents Joseph and Mary, He keeps the Law of God and is demonstrated to be of the faith and lineage of Abraham. And in keeping this covenant God made with Abraham, in circumcision, the first of Jesus' blood is shed.

When the time comes for Jesus to fulfill the whole Law of God and usher in God's new and better covenant, He will shed much more blood. The new covenant comes with Jesus' blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

In addition to Jesus being circumcised on that 8th day, much like we do when we baptize an infant, we publicly declare the name of the child. The angel Gabriel had told Mary that His name would be Jesus. Gabriel tells Joseph the same thing when he informs him that the child is of the Holy Spirit. His name was Jesus, or in Hebrew "Yeshua." Or in English,

Joshua. Jesus is the transliteration of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Yeshua, which means “The Lord saves.” So all of your friends and relatives named Joshua actually have the same name as the Son of God.

He is given this name which comes with a promise: The Lord saves. In your Baptism, even if your name is not Joshua, you have been given a name that has meaning. You were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Lord saves, and, as Peter says in his first epistle, “Baptism now saves you.”

It is like what we hear in our Old Testament reading where The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

So on this day when we focus our attention on things being “new,” we began our time together with the reminder of our Baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” as Christians of all ages have done. We participate in the new and better covenant in Christ’s blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins just as all Christians have done for 2000 years.

And we will conclude with the words “The Lord bless you and keep you”; words which God instructed Moses and Aaron to use. These are words that King David and Isaiah and Jesus Himself would have heard spoken to Him as the people were dismissed from worship. The Lord has put His name upon you His people. And even though some of these words of the Lord may be old, through them He has made you new. Amen.