

Circumcision?

Luke 2:21

The Circumcision of Our Lord, January 1, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I realize the Gospel reading is somewhat unusual.

Why read about the circumcision of Jesus and when we do read about the circumcision of Jesus, why read about only the circumcision of Jesus and nothing else?

Well, I don't know, but there are three important things that can be said about the circumcision.

The first has to do with the name. Jesus received His name when He was circumcised.

Naming has to do with authority.

When God created the light and the darkness, He separated the light from the darkness. He called the light, "day," and the darkness He called, "night." God had authority over the light and the darkness and so He had authority to give them their names. In this case He has authority over the day and the night. You do not have authority over the day and the night. You cannot change when the sun rises and when it sets, nor can you change the course of the moon. God does those things because He has authority over the day and the night. He has such authority because He created them. He exercises that authority by naming them.

The same thing is true when God puts the vault in between the waters above the vault and the waters beneath the vault. He creates the vault and then He names the vault "heaven." Some translations call it sky, but it amounts to the same thing. God has authority over heaven because He made heaven. God exercises that authority by naming heaven.

The same thing is true when God gathers the waters under the vault into one place and the dry land appears. God has authority over the gathered waters and over the land because He made them. God exercises that authority by naming them. He called the gathered waters, "seas," and the dry ground He called, "land." Some translations say, "earth," but it amounts to the same thing.

And so it goes. God has authority over His creation because He created His creation. He exercises that authority by naming the parts of creation. He calls Adam, "Adam." And since Adam means "man" God exercises His authority over all of humanity by giving us our name, "man," or if you prefer a modern translation God named us "humanity."

But then something interesting arises in the creation. Even before the rebellion of man against God, Adam names Eve. Up until then only God had given names because only God created and only God had the authority to name. Now in the perfection of paradise Adam gives Eve her names which means that he has authority over her since he exercises it in the purity of prefallen state.

You men of the congregation also have exercised authority over your wives. You have given them your name. Christy did not come with the name "Sharp" when I met her. I gave her that name when she got married. She now enjoys the benefits of that name even though they did not come by her earning them. They are simply hers. And unfortunately in a fallen world she has also inherited the sins associated with that name, but time enough for that later.

Parents exercise authority over their children by giving their children their names. And so it goes in the creation until a certain descendent of Adam named Joseph. In Matthew's Gospel Joseph encounters an angel of the Lord in a dream and in that dream the angel tells Joseph to call Mary's child, "Jesus," because He will save His people from their sins. In Luke's Gospel, the angel appears to Mary while she is wide awake and tells her among other things to name the child, "Jesus." There is a nice moment in the

movie *The Nativity Story* when Joseph is recounting his dream to Mary and he tells her that the angel told him to name the child Jesus and she realizes that was the same thing that the angel had told her and then she knows that Joseph is ok with what has happened and will take her as his wife.

Joseph and Mary exercise authority over Jesus because when He is circumcised they give Him the name, "Jesus." But that is not a name that they themselves selected. The angel selected it for them. And the angel did not select the name, "Jesus." The angel is only a messenger. God selected the name Jesus for Him because Jesus is God's son, not Joseph's. Mary and Joseph are privileged by God to give Jesus His name and therefore to exercise authority over him as his parents, but since God gave them the name to give to Him, God makes it clear that this child is His own Son.

And so Jesus is submissive to Mary and Joseph while He is growing up in spite of the fact that He is their maker and not the other way around, but then Jesus is ultimately submissive to His Father in heaven.

And that brings us to the second thing that can be said about the circumcision of our Lord. Jesus is obeying God from infancy.

Jesus is here to keep the Law. He is here to keep all of the parts of the Law. He is here to keep the big parts of the Law. He is here to keep the little parts of the Law. The big parts of the Law include things like justice and mercy. The little parts of the Law include things like circumcision and tithing. He will keep all of it.

Luke's Gospel is at pains to tell you how Jesus keeps all of it. Obviously when He is eight days old, His chosen parents are keeping it by making sure that He is circumcised. They will also keep the Law by making sure that the right sacrifice is offered for Mary's purification when that time comes. As Jesus grows up, He will take over the keeping of the Law Himself. Even when He is twelve the teachers of the Law in the temple are amazed at our Lord's understanding and His answers and questions. Our Lord has a capable understanding of the Law even when He is a child.

This is to remove your excuses. God is removing your excuses. You have been taught that keeping the Law is impossible. It is only impossible as a practical reality that no one has kept it. Jesus is here to show that it can be kept and that it should have been kept by you. You cannot use the excuse that you are a sinner and therefore the Law is impossible to keep. You cannot use that to excuse your lack of repentance. You cannot sit there and say, "There is nothing that I can do about my sins. I am a sinner anyway. I am just going to keep on sinning." You should have kept the Law. Jesus did.

He is as human as you are. He grew up like you did. He was circumcised like all the other Jewish boys were circumcised, etc. He was subject to temptation just like you were. You should have kept the Law in all of its parts, the big parts and the little parts, but you didn't. You are therefore responsible for how you have lived and failed to live. Jesus did it. Why didn't you?

The good news about our Lord's keeping of the Law is that He does it on your behalf. Since the Lord has kept the Law on your behalf, you do not have to keep it in order to be saved. He kept all of the Law on your behalf. He kept the big parts and the small parts. There was nothing that the Law commands that Jesus did not get done. He kept this Law on your behalf. That means that His obedience is your obedience. His circumcision is your circumcision. That is why the New Testament Church did not require circumcision of those who were not previously circumcised. The New Testament Church did not mind if you were circumcised. They did not mind if you got circumcised. What they minded was people going around saying that you had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Jesus kept the Law on your behalf. To say that you had to be circumcised in order to be saved was the same thing as saying Jesus did not keep the Law good enough for you. The same thing is true of all of the other requirements of the Law.

Jesus obeyed His parents on your behalf so that you do not have to obey your parents in order to be saved. Jesus kept Himself sexually pure on your behalf so that you do not have to avoid adultery or pornography in order to be saved. Jesus gave Himself totally to others on your behalf so that you would not be damned for your stinginess. Jesus always told the truth on your behalf so that you would not be condemned for your lies. Jesus kept all of the Law on your behalf so that you would not to keep any of it in order to be saved because if you had to keep any of it to be saved, you would not have done so. Your sinful flesh would not have allowed it. Even one small command like circumcision would have been too much for the likes of you. So in order to save you Jesus keeps the Law. He keeps all of the Law. He keeps the big parts of the Law and He keeps the little parts of the Law. He does it all for you so that you will be saved. In order to keep the big parts of the Law and the little parts of the Law He has Himself circumcised. He had Himself circumcised for you. He kept the Law for you.

He was circumcised on the eighth day.

He was circumcised on the eighth day because that is the covenant God made with Abraham. He is also circumcised on the eighth day because God commanded it in the Law and Jesus is keeping the Law. But why would God command it on the eighth day? Why not the sixth day or the seventh day or even the sixteenth day? Why the eighth?

Eighth days are very important to God. The first eighth day was the day on which the creation got going. God took six days to create the heavens and the earth. When He was done He rested on the seventh day. That means that on the eighth day things get going.

When the creation fell into sin and decay and death, a new creation was required. The old creation would have to be made anew in order for the creation to be saved at all. A new creation was required. Since a new creation cannot take place until after the old creation is completed and the old creation was completed on the seventh day, then the new creation can come forth as early as the eighth day. While we do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in paradise before their departure from God into sin, we do know how many days God took to create everything. Therefore new creations will begin on the eighth day at the earliest. Since God wastes no time in bringing about His new creations His new creations begin on the eighth day.

In the Old Testament you get hints of this. In the Old Testament no one may approach the presence of God without the mediation of a priest. The same is true in the New Testament, but there is a change in priesthood, but more on that another time. The priests of the Old Testament performed the necessary sacrifices in order for an average person to approach God for His mercy. When a new priest was ordained, it took seven days to ordain him. Therefore the priest began his work on the eighth day. Therefore the work that made it possible for people to approach God began on the eighth day. On the eighth day God was approachable.

In the New Testament the ultimate in new creation is resurrection from the dead. When someone rises from the dead and does not die again, that is the sign that the new creation has come. Without sin the old creation never would have been subject to death. Therefore as soon as there is someone who is not subject to death now, you know the new creation has come. Jesus therefore is the beginning of the new creation. He rose from the dead and did not die again. Death no longer has mastery over Him. And when did Jesus rise from the dead? On the Eighth Day! The new creation commences even as the old one did. Jesus rested in the tomb on the seventh day from all the work of the new creation which He had done and then on the eighth day the new creation gets going. On the eighth day the new creation begins. It begins with the first man to rise from the dead. The rest of the dead will rise in only a matter of time.

And so our Lord is circumcised on the eighth day. When Abraham was circumcised on the eighth day it was a small new creation for Abraham because the circumcision then was the promise that from Abraham's seed, would come the blessing for all of the nations. Jesus is circumcised in accord with that covenant not as one more sign that the blessing to all nations is coming, but as the blessing itself. It was a promise of a new creation to Abraham. It was the fulfillment of the promise for Jesus.

And so once again Jesus was circumcised for you. He was circumcised for you in the sign that the new creation had come. He began His work of the new creation on the eighth day. He completed it on the eighth day. Let us celebrate and be glad on the eighth day. And Oh! What do you know? That is today!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.