

New Year's Day
The Circumcision and Name of Jesus
January 1, 1012

Luke 2:21

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.” (NIV)

Happy New Year! You have probably heard this greeting several times by now and most likely you will hear it again before this first week of 2012 is over. It is a nice thing to say and think about for our friends and family and others whom we wish to have a happy year. But do you know if 2012 will be a good one for them? What will this new year bring for us? We do not know what will happen to us this year for we do not even know what tomorrow might bring. At the close of every year we are reminded of this, aren't we? As we look back at 2011 we might think about the people whose lives on earth came to an end. We may even wonder about who the Lord will call in 2012. Could it be one of us? We look back at the unexpected trials and troubles and the people who have hurt and disappointed us. We might even recall some of the sicknesses, the natural disasters, the car wrecks, and close calls of this past year. And guess what? There is sure to be more of the same in 2012. Happy New Year, right?

I am not saying all this to put a damper on starting another year or to scare anyone, but am just recognizing life for what it is in this sin filled world. I also want all of us to acknowledge the truth that we don't know what this year has in store for us. But thankfully we put our trust in the One who does! While we do not know what the future holds this year, we have a Savior who says: *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?...Do not worry about tomorrow”* (Matthew 6). While we can't say for sure someone whom we trust and love won't hurt or disappoint us in this new year we can say this with certainty about our Lord who promises: *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13)*. On this first day of 2012 what a comfort it is to have a Lord who does not change. The same Lord who was with us in 2011 will be with us in 2012. Once again the best evidence of God's love and faithfulness to us is found in Jesus. As we look at these earliest days of Jesus life here on earth God gives us two more assurances of His faithfulness. Today, **See God's faithfulness 1) in the circumcision and 2) in the name of Jesus.**

If someone asks you what you celebrated at your church today and what your pastor preached on to start the new year you might find it pretty strange, even a bit repulsive, to have to tell them we celebrated the circumcision of Jesus. What does that have to do with anything people might ask? We too might wonder why we focus on this, why after the beautiful Christmas message we are all familiar with does Luke report: *“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him.”* This verse often falls in the shadow of the Christmas story and gets skipped over as we want to jump to Simeon holding the baby Jesus in his arms. But today let us not ignore these words or let this one verse get lost.

While we may think of circumcision as an unusual event to point to for assurance of God's faithfulness, we need to remember what it meant to Old Testament believers.

Circumcisions were done for more than health reasons. They were commanded by God. This specific rite was a covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. Therefore, circumcision had deep significance to the Israelites because it was an outward sign that they were children of God. Circumcisions on the males of each generation pointed to original sin that all inherit from Adam. By commanding eight-day-old boys be circumcised, God reminds them He is concerned about the sinful nature which is present from birth even before this sinful nature shows itself with actual sins. Not only did circumcision remind them of original sin, it was especially a covenant of grace connected with the promise of the Savior. This Savior would come from the seed of Abraham. For Abraham, God commanded circumcision to strengthen his faith in that promise. For Old Testament believers, they were to circumcise their boys and then, as they grew, teach them about that promise of a Savior. Circumcision was a type (in a way an Old Testament picture) of the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

But what did this mean for Jesus? For Jesus from birth was already the Son of God. Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, the baby Jesus had no sin to be removed. He was the promised Savior who made circumcision no longer necessary as a sign to point to His coming. So why was Jesus circumcised? Much like His baptism, which we will celebrate in a couple of weeks, Jesus' circumcision was part of His work as our substitute. Paul reminds us: ***“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law” (Galatians 4).*** Jesus puts Himself in the place of sinners to make atonement for them. Sometimes we confine Jesus' suffering for us to the last hours of Jesus' life. But already here on the eighth day Jesus was ***“taking up our infirmities and carrying our sorrows” (Isaiah 53).*** Already on the eighth day, the baby Jesus felt pain for us. Already on this eighth day, Jesus first shed His blood for us. Do we see why this is an assurance of God's faithfulness? By shedding His blood as a little baby, we see God willingness to have Jesus carry out our salvation. For Jesus humbled Himself so that one day He could shed His blood on a cross for us.

We see such faithfulness tied also to His name. This too was important to an Old Testament believer as on the eighth day the child was given a name. We read on the eighth day when He was circumcised: ***“he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.”*** Mary and Joseph did have any problem deciding on a name for this Child. The name was given to them. The angel told them that He was to be given the name Jesus. This name has wonderful significance. The name Jesus is the equivalent of the Old Testament name Joshua. The word really comes from two Hebrew words. One is the LORD (Jehovah) and the other is from a verb that means *“to save or bestow salvation.”* So this name literally means *“the Lord saves.”* How fitting this name is for Jesus! He is the Lord. He is true God. Yet, Jesus is fully human so by His life, death and resurrection He could save His people from their sins as the angel promised Joseph. Therefore Jesus is the Name above all names. It is a Name that causes us to sing: *‘Oh Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth.’* It is a Name that brings us comfort, a Name we worship and adore, a Name through which all our prayers are heard and answered. This is the only Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. This Name gives us assurance of God's faithfulness to save us.

These might seem like unlikely places to find comfort for a new year – in a circumcision – in a name. But in this one simple verse we have two more examples of

God's faithfulness. He kept His Word. He always keeps his Word. Here again we see God's love for sinners. We see God who had no sin put Himself under the law and a Savior who is ready to carry upon Himself the burden of our sins. We see a God who humbles Himself to suffer pain already on the eighth day of His earthly life. We hear again the name that we have come to love – the name of our Savior. This name reminds us that the Lord saves. He has saved us. Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, in this new year will change this! In this unpredictable, sometimes ugly and awful world of sin, what an assurance it is to have this name we can always count on. While we don't know what this new year has in store or everything about our future what a comfort to know that: ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13).*** Have a happy New Year. Our faithful God assures us of it! In the name of Jesus, Amen!