

# THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Sean Willman



## Luke 2:21 ESV

### Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Luke the Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 55. The detail concerning Jesus' circumcision is only recorded here by Luke.

<sup>21a</sup> “And at the end of eight days, when He [Jesus] was circumcised.”

- Circumcision was the physical sign God gave to His people to mark the covenant He made to be Abraham's God, and to bring forth a Savior for all the world from Abraham's descendants.
- A covenant is a promise made between two parties. As seen in Genesis 15, when the covenant was made, those making it would walk between animals that had been sacrificed and split in two. Only in the case of this covenant Abraham plays no part. Instead as he sleeps, the Lord passes between the animals alone, a reminder that He is faithful to keep His promises and bring about salvation without the help of and even in spite of man.
- “For just as contracts or testaments are first made with certificates in which all the articles of the agreement and testament are specified, and then as a guarantee are affixed with a seal, so also God willed to confirm His covenant with Abraham by circumcision as a seal.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Year of Christian Grace*, 48)
- As a mark of this covenant God required that all men, at eight days old have their foreskins removed. (Genesis 17:9ff) While this appears to be an odd way to mark His covenant, it would stand as a constant, visible reminder of the promise God made to save His people from their sins. It could not be undone, in the same way that Lord could revoke His promise of salvation.
- Circumcision required that blood be shed. This shedding of the blood of men was a foreshadowing of the blood of the Son of Man that would be shed upon the cross to finally fulfill the covenant and bring about the promised salvation.
- The circumcision of infants is a clear marker that God includes even the littlest in His covenant of salvation. These little ones make it clear that all receive this promise not by their work, reason, or understanding, but by His gracious gift. The Lord's promise of a savior was for them as much as it was for their parents.
- The eighth day is also significant. The Lord created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. The eighth day begins a new week, and represents new life for us. In the same way Jesus finished His work of salvation for us in His death on the cross on the sixth day of the week, rested in the tomb on the seventh, and rose to new life on the eighth. So on the eighth day of his life, a baby boy would receive the sign of the covenant of new life in God.
- St. Paul makes the connection between circumcision and baptism when he says, “In Him 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.” (Colossians 2:11-12) While we do not necessarily baptize on the eighth day, we do see this connection in that many baptismal fonts have eight sides, to remind us that in the waters of Holy Baptism our sinful flesh is put to death and we are raised to new life in Christ.

# THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Sean Willman



## Luke 2:21 ESV

### Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Luke the Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 55. The detail concerning Jesus' circumcision is only recorded here by Luke.

<sup>21a</sup> “And at the end of eight days, when He [Jesus] was circumcised.”

- Circumcision was the physical sign God gave to His people to mark the covenant He made to be Abraham's God, and to bring forth a Savior for all the world from Abraham's descendants.
- A covenant is a promise made between two parties. As seen in Genesis 15, when the covenant was made, those making it would walk between animals that had been sacrificed and split in two. Only in the case of this covenant Abraham plays no part. Instead as he sleeps, the Lord passes between the animals alone, a reminder that He is faithful to keep His promises and bring about salvation without the help of and even in spite of man.
- “For just as contracts or testaments are first made with certificates in which all the articles of the agreement and testament are specified, and then as a guarantee are affixed with a seal, so also God willed to confirm His covenant with Abraham by circumcision as a seal.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Year of Christian Grace*, 48)
- As a mark of this covenant God required that all men, at eight days old have their foreskins removed. (Genesis 17:9ff) While this appears to be an odd way to mark His covenant, it would stand as a constant, visible reminder of the promise God made to save His people from their sins. It could not be undone, in the same way that Lord could revoke His promise of salvation.
- Circumcision required that blood be shed. This shedding of the blood of men was a foreshadowing of the blood of the Son of Man that would be shed upon the cross to finally fulfill the covenant and bring about the promised salvation.
- The circumcision of infants is a clear marker that God includes even the littlest in His covenant of salvation. These little ones make it clear that all receive this promise not by their work, reason, or understanding, but by His gracious gift. The Lord's promise of a savior was for them as much as it was for their parents.
- The eighth day is also significant. The Lord created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. The eighth day begins a new week, and represents new life for us. In the same way Jesus finished His work of salvation for us in His death on the cross on the sixth day of the week, rested in the tomb on the seventh, and rose to new life on the eighth. So on the eighth day of his life, a baby boy would receive the sign of the covenant of new life in God.
- St. Paul makes the connection between circumcision and baptism when he says, “In Him 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.” (Colossians 2:11-12) While we do not necessarily baptize on the eighth day, we do see this connection in that many baptismal fonts have eight sides, to remind us that in the waters of Holy Baptism our sinful flesh is put to death and we are raised to new life in Christ.

<sup>21b</sup> “He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

- When announcing to Mary that she would conceive and bear a child by power of the Most High, the angel Gabriel told her that this child would be named Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, “The Lord saves.” This name tells us what the child will do: He will be the Savior of all the nations. He is the seed of Abraham that will fulfill the covenant made with Abraham, by the shedding of His own blood.
- That Jesus, the very God who made the covenant with Abraham, was brought to be circumcised, is a demonstration that Jesus is truly a son of Abraham, and thereby faithful to the law of God. We see in the shedding of Jesus’ innocent, infant blood, a very clear focus on His humanity. Jesus is no robot. He has flesh and blood. He is true man, born of woman, born under the law. Part of Jesus redeeming work is His perfect keeping of the law. He is the only man born under the law that actually fulfills all of the law’s demands. He begins to do so even as an eight-day-old baby as He is circumcised.
- Johann Spangenberg summarizes Jesus’ circumcision for us, “He wished to use it to show that He had come to earth, as St. Paul says in Galatians 3, to fulfill the Law for us, and to set us free from the curse and condemnation of the Law, and to give us His Spirit, that by the Same we might be renewed and do what God wants from us, no longer out of compulsion and necessity but out of heartfelt love. So just as Christ let Himself be circumcised not out of duty but out of love and as a consolation and example, we also should do the same, serving and being submissive to our neighbor in those things not contrary to conscience.” (Spangenberg, *The Year of Christian Grace*, 49)



[www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish](http://www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish)

<sup>21b</sup> “He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

- When announcing to Mary that she would conceive and bear a child by power of the Most High, the angel Gabriel told her that this child would be named Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, “The Lord saves.” This name tells us what the child will do: He will be the Savior of all the nations. He is the seed of Abraham that will fulfill the covenant made with Abraham, by the shedding of His own blood.
- That Jesus, the very God who made the covenant with Abraham, was brought to be circumcised, is a demonstration that Jesus is truly a son of Abraham, and thereby faithful to the law of God. We see in the shedding of Jesus’ innocent, infant blood, a very clear focus on His humanity. Jesus is no robot. He has flesh and blood. He is true man, born of woman, born under the law. Part of Jesus redeeming work is His perfect keeping of the law. He is the only man born under the law that actually fulfills all of the law’s demands. He begins to do so even as an eight-day-old baby as He is circumcised.
- Johann Spangenberg summarizes Jesus’ circumcision for us, “He wished to use it to show that He had come to earth, as St. Paul says in Galatians 3, to fulfill the Law for us, and to set us free from the curse and condemnation of the Law, and to give us His Spirit, that by the Same we might be renewed and do what God wants from us, no longer out of compulsion and necessity but out of heartfelt love. So just as Christ let Himself be circumcised not out of duty but out of love and as a consolation and example, we also should do the same, serving and being submissive to our neighbor in those things not contrary to conscience.” (Spangenberg, *The Year of Christian Grace*, 49)



[www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish](http://www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish)