

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today is the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. We're going to feast shortly at the Lord's table, and then we'll party afterward in Bauer Hall. Today is a feast day in the church. Today we remember how Mary's son was circumcised and given the name of Jesus.

Now I have to admit it: circumcision is not my favorite topic in catechism class. I get a bit uncomfortable talking about it with the young people. Unlike most of you, most of them don't know what it is. I have to define it/describe it. It makes me uncomfortable. So, for those young people here today who are asking, "What is circumcision?", I say, ask when you get home. I'm not going to describe it here.

I will say, however, that circumcision was a big deal for God's covenant people. God had given Abraham the sign of circumcision — a bloody sign of God's good favor toward His people. It was a sign of promise, a sign of a redemption in blood and of a righteousness that comes through faith. You recall, God had given a promise to Abraham — to be with him and prosper him, to bring forth from him an offspring by which the world would be blessed. And God sealed his promise with the shedding of blood, not the blood of a heifer or a goat, a ram or a dove, but with the shedding of Abraham's own blood as a ninety-nine-year-old adult and Ishmael's blood, Abraham's thirteen-year-old son.

But Ishmael was not the promised offspring; not even Isaac was, who was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, although, the promise would be continued through him. No, Jesus is that offspring. St. Paul reminds us in the verses that precede our Epistle that "*the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ*" (Gal. 3:16).

And so today we hear how God in the 8-day-old Jesus has brought to fulfillment this promise. Jesus, the offspring of Abraham, here shed the first drop of His blood that would be poured out fully on a cross for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. Jesus, as a man, was brought into this Abrahamic covenant so that through Him all the nations of the world would be blessed, so that you might be blessed through the shedding of His blood.

This blessing comes to us also in circumcision ... but not in the circumcision of the flesh. It comes in the circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4:4). St. Paul reminds us that circumcision of the flesh is really nothing. Whether you yourself are circumcised in the flesh today really doesn't matter. What matters is being in Christ Jesus, Paul writes: "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love*" (Gal.

5:6). This is the true circumcision. Not the fleshly one. Again as St. Paul says, true “*circumcision [is not] outward and physical*” (Rom. 2:28).

The true circumcision is more than an outward removal of skin. The circumcision that matters is an inward one. St. Paul again writes, *circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter*” (Rom. 2:29). You have received this in your own circumcision as Paul says, “...*You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*” (Col. 3:10).

Of course, this all happens for us not by hands wielding a bloody knife. It happens by the “*circumcision of Christ*” (Col. 2:11) — not the circumcision He underwent, but the circumcision He effects in each of us in the here and now. It’s the circumcision of the heart done in Holy Baptism. The “*circumcision of Christ*” means being “*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*” (Col. 2:12). By this “*circumcision made without hands*” the “*uncircumcision of the flesh*” is cast off and nailed to the cross, while we are “*forgiven ... all our trespasses,*” and we “*who were dead in [our] trespasses*” are “*made alive together with [Christ]*” (Col. 2:13).

Of course, there is a New Year connection to this circumcision talk and baptism talk ... repentance. At the New Year we think of starting fresh. “Out with the old and in with the new,” the saying goes.

In the church this is a concrete thing, and not just annually, but daily. You remember your catechism: What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” And Luther supports this application with words of St. Paul from Romans 6, very similar to those from Colossians I’ve been referencing: “‘We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.’ (Rom. 6:4)” (Small Catechism, Baptism, Part 4).

Therefore, we give thanks to God, for this circumcision is not for Jews only. It’s for Gentiles, too. We rejoice, for this circumcision is not just for males. It’s for females, too. Indeed, in Christ Jesus “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female*” (Gal. 3:28) — in Christ Jesus there is neither “*circumcised and uncircumcised, ... [but] Christ is all and in all*” (Col. 3:11).

You are in Christ Jesus. You are one in Him; you are His. He has placed His name on you along with His blessing. The name given Him in His circumcision is now yours by the circumcision He has given you.

Therefore, on this New Year's Day, the 8<sup>th</sup> day when we remember Jesus' circumcision, let us also remember our own circumcision. In the words of the prophet, *"repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and [receive] a new heart and a new spirit"* (Ezek. 18:30-31). The Lord takes *"no pleasure in the death of anyone."* Therefore, He calls us to live lives of repentance and faith: *"turn, and live,"* He says (Ezek. 18:32).

Let us live in the promise of our baptism, not only on this day, or even only on Sundays, but daily, putting off our old self and putting on the new, which is Christ and His blood-soaked robe of righteousness. Walk in faith and live each day in this New Year, walking in the newness of His life. And for strength in this walk, come and receive of Christ's body given and His blood shed. Eat and drink with hearts circumcised by Christ, with sins, guilt, and shame cast away. Open your mouths. Spew out the old in repentance. Open your mouths. Eat and drink the New Testament in Christ's body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Happy New Year!

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.