

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today we heard of Jesus' circumcision. Circumcision for the sons of Abraham was a big deal; it was a sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, and the people were shown by it to be a part of God's covenant people. The LORD said to Abraham: *"This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised"* (Gen. 17:10-12). It was a big deal, for *"[a]ny uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant,"* the LORD declared.

Therefore, circumcision was a big deal for Jesus. If He was going to *"redeem Israel from all his iniquities"* (Ps. 130:8), He was going to have to become God's son Israel all wrapped up in His flesh. And so He shed His blood on the 8th day in the removal of his foreskin as a foreshadowing of His ultimate shedding of blood, not just for Jews but for Gentiles, too.

But this kind of circumcision has lost its significance for us. Christ by His cross *"has set us free"* (Gal. 5:1) from the requirement of circumcision. Yoking your hopes for salvation to circumcision is attempting to be justified by the law. But *"no one is justified before God by the law"*; rather, *"The righteous shall live by faith"* (Gal. 3:11).

Relying on circumcision means rejecting Christ ... rejecting His sacrifice for you, rejecting His grace. For righteousness and life come not by the demands of the law, but by the promise received by *"faith in Jesus Christ"* (Gal. 3:22). Therefore, Paul says, *"in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything"* (Gal. 5:6). What counts, he continues, is *"faith working through love"* (Gal. 5:6).

And indeed, that's how one becomes *"in Christ Jesus"* ... through faith. Again, St. Paul says, *"in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."* We are in Christ Jesus as we are *"baptized into Christ"* and become part of the Body of Christ. We are in Christ Jesus when by baptism we clothe ourselves with Christ.

And in Christ, there is a oneness; regardless of our external differences — ethnic origins, affluence, education, age, sex, etc. — there is one Body. Old Testament saints who looked forward to God's blessing through Abraham's offspring, and New Testament saints who rejoice at the coming of the promised Son, we are *"one in Christ Jesus."* We are all part of the covenant promise made to Abraham that was sealed with circumcision.

And so, we return to circumcision, but for us it's not a circumcision made with hands. The circumcision that all Christians receive is the one done by "*the LORD [our] God,*" that is by Christ Himself, a removal of the foreskin of our hearts (Deut. 10:16). Christ circumcises our hearts, so that we "*will love the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul, that [we] may live*" (Deut. 30:6). Our circumcision is a "*putting off the body of the flesh*" in Holy Baptism, where we die with Christ and are buried with Him, but where we are also raised with Him who rose again from death, who lives (Col. 2:11-12). And so, we also who are in Him partake of His life and live eternally.

Things have changed since the time when God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision. The Old Testament type has been fulfilled by that which it prefigured: by Holy Baptism. The big deal of circumcision has morphed into an even bigger deal for us Christians where "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mark 16:16). By baptism we become "*Abraham's offspring,*" "*sons of God,*" "*heirs according to promise.*"

With these promises ringing in our ears, let us ring in the New Year with faith in the Lord our God, with His blessing upon us, bearing His name, trusting His promises. Let us ring in the New Year tonight receiving another blessing given us that strengthens our connection in Christ, the blessing of His body and blood. Thus blessed, 2025 will have begun well, and we can look forward to another year of blessing in Christ Jesus. God grant it ...

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