

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

What is the connection of circumcision and Jesus' name with the New Year? Why were these texts chosen? There's no connection that I know of. These texts are chosen because of Christ, because today is the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, because according to the Law of Moses, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after a birth, a Jewish boy was to be circumcised and given his name—and so Mary's son was and was given the name of Jesus. The theme, of course, for the New Year is often "*out with the old; in with the new.*" Can we make a connection? Well, I'm going to try.

"*Out with the old; in with the new*"—leaving behind the corrupt things of last year—some of which only God Himself knows, but many of them are thoughts words and deeds of which we are ashamed—this is the New Year theme. Leave them behind and start afresh in the New Year. You can probably see where this is going.

But such things are not necessarily so easily cast aside. "*Humans are hard-wired for defensiveness,*" wrote a psychologist in *Time* magazine as we approach the New Year—defensiveness with others and with God. We don't like to admit the wrong. Nevertheless, apart from admitting our faults, the sins we commit, the shame and guilt we feel, the hurt we caused, tend to haunt us into the New Year. We may try to leave them behind and forget our sins, but they do not forget us. They keep bugging us. We try to ignore the guilt and shame, but they keep weighing us down, and that makes us feel even worse—for often we have not dealt with them. We must "*learn to apologize*" this psychologist says—that's a good New Year's resolution, she says. We would say, "*Repent!*"

Isn't that in part why we come to church? On New Year's Day, like today, but every Sunday? And isn't that why it's appropriate that we celebrate the circumcision of our Lord on this 8<sup>th</sup> day, and remember the one named Jesus—the one who saves us from our sins? We are here every Sunday, including on this New Year's Day, to deal with our sins, to send them away from us, to be made new. That's the New Year's connection to circumcision.

God had given Abraham the sign of circumcision—a bloody sign of God's good favor toward His people—a sign of faith. It was a sign of a redemption in blood and a righteousness that comes through faith. God gave 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, a king reigning over an everlasting kingdom. And God sealed that covenant with the shedding of blood, not the blood of a heifer or a goat or a ram or a dove, but with the shedding of Abraham's own blood as an adult, and by the shedding of the blood of his 8-day old offspring.

Jesus is that offspring. St. Paul reminds us 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 the church—that is, Israel—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 in circumcision, no, not the circumcision of the flesh but of the heart. You men may or may not have been circumcised according to the flesh. St. Paul reminds us that doesn't really matter. What matters is being in Christ Jesus. He 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, “*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: the circumcision of the heart—by the Spirit. St. Paul again writes, *circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter*” (Rom. 2:29). And He 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. 3:9-10).

There it is again, the New Year connection—old self...new self—out with the old; in with the new. Of course, St. Paul is talking about repentance here, and that's the New Year connection. But more than just at New Year, or even every Sunday, may it be your daily connection with your Savior as you drown the old man in you, that the new man can come forth and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

That's Luther language but also St. Paul's. And they are talking about more than a single conversion experience. They're talking about a real change in a person—a change that comes about through baptism: a new creation, a rebirth, and a change that is manifested daily through contrition and repentance.

Repentance is connected up with Holy Baptism, and repentance is a way of life—baptismal life. Luther speaks of drowning the Old Adam daily as he explains the significance of baptism. Paul talks about being made new in the image of your creator, in Christ Jesus, “*the image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1:15). For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone; behold the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). And Jesus says, “*Behold, I am making all things new*” (Rev. 21:5).

And all this happens in Holy Baptism—it's the washing that recreates and renews you in the Holy Spirit. And in this baptism you are given your circumcision—not of the flesh but of the heart. Paul says, *“In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, 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”* (Col. 2:11-12).

Your baptism is your circumcision done by Christ Himself. And give thanks to God; this circumcision is not for Jews only, but for Gentiles, too. Rejoice, this circumcision is not just for males, but 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 ... Christ is all and in all”* (Col. 3:11). You are in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:29). You are one in Him; you are His. He has placed His name on you—His benediction. 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 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]

Repent! Not only on this day, or even this Sunday, but daily, putting off your old self and putting on the new. Put on 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; take in the new: forgiveness through Christ and in Christ.

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