

Feast of the Holy Name Service

(The Rev. Larry Doyle)
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you our Lord and our redeemer.
Amen

Good morning! This morning we celebrate the Feast Day of the Circumcision of our Lord and His Holy Name.

Everything the Lord does has meaning and purpose. So also does everything in Holy Scripture. Sometimes the lectionary text provides us with the main theme to discuss in our sermon. Today there is little help there. However, the last verse of today's Gospel, Luke 2:21, gives us all we need. "And at the end of eight days when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." In this short verse, there are several meaningful statements that we can explore.

- 1) "He was circumcised"
- 2) "He was called Jesus"
- 3) "the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb"

"At the end of eight days when he was circumcised"

Jewish current and ancient practice is to circumcise boys on the eighth day after their birth in a ceremony called a "Bris" spelled BRIT. At this time the rabbi will gather with the family, usually in the family's home, and perform the circumcision, give prayers over the baby and the family, and name the child. Circumcision was commanded by God to Abram and recorded for us in the Book of Genesis.

"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. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Genesis 17:10-14

Jesus' earthly parents were faithful obedient people. It was their pleasure to do the Lord's will. In spite of their lack of monetary resources, they observed all of the practices that the Law of Moses commanded them to keep. Therefore, on the eighth day, Jesus was circumcised in accordance with the law. This does raise a question, however. Why did Jesus, the Son of God need to be circumcised? Good question. There is no question about Jesus' covenant with God. Jesus said in John 14:11, "Believe me that 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me.'" Jesus was, and is, and will always be One with the Father. So why, when Mary and Joseph knew that Jesus was the Son of God, why did they go through with the circumcision? We can never know all of the reasons but Genesis 17:14 gives us a clue. "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." God's word tells us that not receiving

circumcision for a believing Jewish person was breaking God's covenant. Mary and Joseph were committed to raising Jesus within the Law. Jesus fulfilled every element of prophecy and followed the Law. He said, as recorded in Mt 5:17-19, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, Jesus needed to be circumcised to fulfill every element of the Law. Even the greatest legal scholars of His time could not refute that Jesus followed the Law. When we hear Jesus's own words, when speaking to John the Baptist, he stated that he must be baptized "for the sake of all righteousness." The same applies to his circumcision.

First, we looked at Jesus' circumcision. Next, from Luke 2:21, let's look at

"He was called Jesus"

During Advent, we saw how Zecharia received the message from the angel that his wife was to become pregnant in her old age and that they would have a son, whom they would be called John. God chose John's name before he was conceived. God had something in mind when he gave them the gift of a son. John was to be a vital part of God's salvation of mankind. Likewise, God gave both Joseph and Mary the message that the baby Mary would bear would be called "Jesus."

With a little help from GodAnswers.org here is some background on Jesus' name.

If ever a name was packed with significance, it is the name, Jesus. Scripture says Jesus has been given "the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:9–10, CSB). Why is our Lord's name so powerful? What does the name Jesus mean?

The name Jesus, announced to Joseph and Mary through the angels (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31), means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation." Transliterated from Hebrew and Aramaic, the name is Yeshua. The English spelling of the Hebrew Yeshua is Joshua. Joshua becomes Jesus. Thus, Yeshua, Joshua, and Jesus mean "Yahweh saves" or "the Lord is salvation."

The name Jesus was quite popular in first-century Judea. For this reason, our Lord was often called "Jesus of Nazareth," distinguishing Him by His childhood home, the town of Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 21:11; Mark 1:24; Luke 18:37; John 1:45; John 19:19; Acts 2:22). Despite its commonness, the name Jesus is remarkably significant. Jesus was sent by God for a particular purpose, and His personal name bears witness to that mission. Just as the Yeshua/Joshua in the Old Testament led his people to victory over the Canaanites, the Yeshua/Jesus in the New Testament led His people to victory over sin and their spiritual enemies.

Galatians 4:4–5 says, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." God sent Jesus to save us (John 3:17). The meaning of Jesus' name—"Yahweh saves"—reveals His mission (to save and deliver) and His identity as Savior of the world. At the same time, the commonness of Jesus' name underscores His humanity and humility. The Son of God emptied Himself of His glory to become a humble man (Philippians 2:6–8). The name of Jesus is important because of its meaning and because of whom it represents. There are power and authority in the person of Christ Jesus, and, of course, the person is designated by the name. More so than with

other names, we associate the name of Jesus with His distinctive character, quality, and work. Salvation is in the name of Jesus alone: Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

When parents find out that they are to have a child, they often pour over baby name books looking for just the right name. Sometimes there is a relative that they especially loved and the child is named after them. Sometimes it is a friend after whom they name the baby. Parents in Jesus’ time on earth did the same thing. A name was chosen that would embody the desires of the parents for the fulfillment of a dream or a mission that they envision for their child. There are instances in the Bible that God changes the name of someone as he commissions them for additional responsibilities and/or a new mission.

Several examples are Abram and Sarai who became Abraham and Sarah according to Genesis 17. God also changed Jacob’s name to Israel to reflect that he would be the father of the 12 tribes, who would go on to form the Nation of Israel.

God chose Jesus’ name just as carefully and made sure that the angel conveyed that directly to the parents. Mary and Joseph received that word and complied. That name was formally given to Jesus on the eighth day at his circumcision and naming. That is what we celebrate today on this Holy Feast Day.

We’ve looked at
“He was circumcised..”
“He was called Jesus”

Now let’s look at the third point made in Luke 2:21 “...the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” As with John the Baptist, Jesus’ name was selected and communicated to Mary early, before he was conceived in the womb, and to Joseph soon after. With Jesus’ birth, God’s plan for salvation for the whole world is being realized. From these passages, we can see that God knew both John the Baptist and Jesus before they were conceived in their mothers’ wombs.

What about in our time? Do we have a similar ceremony to the Bris? Yes, we do. When we present a baby to be baptized the priest asks, “Name of the Child?”. Then the priest uses the name when he says, “Name, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” They are then sealed with the sign of the cross to indicate that they are marked as Christ’s own forever. As God knew John and Jesus he said this about Jeremiah as recorded in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Likewise, God has known us before we were formed in our mothers’ womb.

The name of Jesus, Our Lord, is the only name in whom we can be saved. Rev 22:3-4 says it plainly, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.” The name of Jesus will stand in eternity and we will be adorned with his name as a witness to the one whose we are!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. AMEN