

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

Text: St. Luke 2:21

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Oftentimes, I have been asked whether I will celebrate a special service to bring in the new calendar year. I know my negative response to this question often disappoints, but I cannot bring myself to celebrate a secular holiday within the precincts of Heaven. Worship, after all, is not about us, but about God and His gift of life which He graciously grants unto us through faith in the death and resurrection of His only-begotten Son, JESUS CHRIST. Christian worship is about repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and salvation in God's SON. It is Gottesdienst, God's service.

The Church has never associated the first of January with anything other than what it is; a celebration which finds its roots in pagan Rome. So it is, that celebrating, within the context of Christian worship, a secular holiday, set upon an arbitrary date, based entirely on the cycle of the moon without any connection to our God or His Church, but rather pagan debauchery, seems to be riding on the very edge of paganism itself. Besides, as Christians have we not already celebrated the dawning of the new year with angels, archangels, and all the company of Heaven on the first Sunday in Advent?

After all, what is meant when one wishes another a "*Happy New Year*"? Is this meant as a spiritual God-pleasing blessing? Is that truly what comes to one's mind? Or is it rather a wish that one is blessed, and therefore "*happy*" with worldly goods and success in worldly endeavors? Maybe one hopes for protection from misfortune, or that any misfortune is replaced with good luck.

But we Christians do not believe in luck, rather, we believe in God's providence and blessing, and worldly things, while not necessarily evil, can only bring happiness in this life, if they can bring any happiness at all.

So, no, I do not celebrate a secular holiday within the precincts of Heaven, for what we receive here, in this place, transcends all time and space. Indeed, within these hallowed walls, Heaven comes down to touch the earth and we meet with our God who bestows upon us His gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

Still, while the Church does not celebrate the "*New Year*" with the world, we do, this day, have a feast day to celebrate and in which we receive great joy and blessing.

For on this day, the eighth day, the Infant LORD was brought to His FATHER's House to begin the work set out before Him by His FATHER. It is on the eighth day that our LORD's destiny of atonement through His precious Blood was revealed to creation—an atonement through which we live, JESUS died, and the meaning of His Name thus fulfilled.

For the Name, JESUS, means SAVIOR, and for that reason, the angel of the LORD declared unto St. Joseph, our LORD's earthly father, *"...you shall call His Name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."* It is, therefore, for this very reason that the Church has set this day aside as a feast day, a day of joy and celebration.

In this Name, the Name JESUS, as we are told by St. John the Divine, is the Light and Life of all mankind—a Light to shatter the darkness and a Life unto eternity. In this Name, the Name JESUS, is your victory over sin, Satan, and the grave. For God saves, and He saves through His only-begotten SON, the One named, JESUS. For this purpose, God deigned to become man, to take on the flesh of His creation and die so that creation can be saved.

Therefore, we see JESUS with His earthly father and His blessed Virgin Mother who brought Him, according to the Law, to His Heavenly FATHER's House, to be about the business of His FATHER. For the business of His FATHER is the salvation of His people by grace through faith, and on this day the Grace of God was witnessed as the infant JESUS' suffered for the life of the world with the first shedding of His innocent Blood in circumcision.

The first drop of JESUS' Blood is a down payment for the price that was to be paid for your sin; a price to be paid in full with His innocent, bitter, suffering, and death by crucifixion; a penalty He gladly paid for the price of your immortal soul. The first drop of JESUS' innocent Blood was but a token that foretells of CHRIST's suffering atonement upon the Cross as your Savior.

Thus, it is written by St. Paul of Jesus in his letter to the Colossians, *"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. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses."*

So it is, that in Baptism, you are circumcised of heart rather than of flesh, and there, you are marked with the Name above every name, on earth below and in Heaven above; the Name, of God—a Name given you by the FATHER through the HOLY SPIRIT; a

Name at whose utterance every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is LORD.

With the bestowing of this Name, you are made an adopted child of the FATHER and a member of His Holy Family. With this adoption, you receive as an heir of the King of kings, all the rights, privileges, and treasures of Heaven. You are a full heir to all that is good and holy. In Heaven, you will be kings and queens, and as members of an eternal priesthood, you will be seated on thrones and vested in righteous garments more brilliant than the sun. All this in a Name—God’s Name—JESUS.

Thus, you emerge from the Baptismal Font with two given names—one, by which you are called, given by your parents who have been appointed over you to love and cherish you by raising you in the one true faith, the other, indelibly imprinted upon your forehead and given by God Himself to His elect, that they may enter into eternal life with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. Such name-giving is God’s sole prerogative, for only He converts the sinful hearts of men and women when and where it pleases Him, and only He can bestow His Name.

So this Child, born *“very God of very God, begotten, not made,”* became Man, that we no more shall die. This Bread of Life came down from the glory of Heaven to be born in the meanness of an animal stall in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, and eight days later, the Bread of Life begins the long journey of suffering for your salvation. His death, His resurrection, and His circumcision took place for your sake.

Thus, do Christians pray: *“JESUS, for Thy Name’s sake, do for me that which Thy Name proclaims. Pardon my sin which offends Thee. Look upon this unhappy one that invokes Thy sweet Name; Name of Delight, Name of Light and Life, Name of Comfort to sinners like me, Name of Blessed Hope. For what does Thy Name mean JESUS, but SAVIOR? Therefore, for Thy Name’s sake be to me, my JESUS, be to me, my Merciful SAVIOR.”*

For this JESUS, is He *“Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies....”* He is JESUS. He is your SAVIOR who *“will save His people from their sins.”* This is He in whom we place our hope and trust, and no other. This is JESUS, our SAVIOR, our IMMANUEL—He is *“God with us.”*

All this in a Name; the Name JESUS—by whom and in whom you are saved. Who came to pour out His Life-Blood that through it life may be poured into you. Who came to say, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*** SOLI DEO GLORIA ***

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