

Luke 2:21 – “On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.”

Today we are gathered here for two specific reasons. The first is presented in our Gospel and stands as the focus for this festival – the naming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The historical circumstances and the promises God fulfilled make this day one of extreme joy and hope. We hear what happened in Jesus' life when he was only eight days old. The second reason we are here today is more secular. It is the passing of the year A.D. 2009. We have entered a new year, A.D. 2010. Today might be no different than yesterday or the day before, save for the removal of a calendar and a chance to relax in front of a football game or a good book. Yet, the fact that I called this year A.D. 2010 makes our perspective on the year different from many others in our world today. Most historians and intellectuals in our world would say I have labeled this year wrong. They would say I have the wrong name. It's not A.D., it's C.E. They have taken the “year of the Lord” out of the calendar numbering system. You may ask, “What's in a name?” and with regard to calendars we need not quibble. But with regard to the name of our Lord Jesus, we will still want to ask ourselves: What's in a name? **The Name “Jesus” alone is our Assurance for the New Year (1) in his circumcision, and (2) in his naming.**

**Assurance in his circumcision.**

“On the eighth day, ... it was time to circumcise him.” The covenant of circumcision was God's gift to Abraham and thus to all his descendants. But what was circumcision all about and why do you and I find assurance in Jesus' circumcision? Genesis 17 tells us that this ritual had a deep spiritual significance. On the eighth day of a baby boy's life, he was to be circumcised and the foreskin was to be cut off. This was given to Abraham as a sign and seal of the faith he already had in God's promise: “*You shall be my people and I shall be your God.*” No other people had this divinely appointed sign. The people of Israel and then later, the Jews, were distinct from all the peoples on the earth by this sign. Israel was chosen because Christ was to come from their ranks.

Circumcision, therefore, existed to strengthen Abraham's faith in the promise of a Savior. It was the promise God had given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As the clouds are a sign of coming snowy weather, so circumcision served Israel. It gave them the assurance: God is faithful! But circumcision also reminded God's people of their corruption and filthiness in God's sight. The simple fact that all male babies needed to have this piece of skin cut from their bodies testified that things were not right. They needed the removal and purification God demands. This outward ritual reminded God's people they needed to be holy just as God is holy. Whoever rejected circumcision and refused it was cut off and excluded from God's people. Because if a man rejected the outward sign, he certainly did not possess its inward spiritual meaning.

With all this deep meaning behind circumcision, let's look at the assurance we find in Jesus' circumcision. Jesus had no need for circumcision to strengthen his faith or keep him focused on God's promises throughout his life. He was the sinless Son of God from the moment of his conception. He underwent circumcision to save us. He willingly placed himself under the law of God and followed everything that law required. Circumcision was a requirement of the covenant people. Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's demands for us. The first blood shed for our salvation was shed at the circumcision of our Lord Jesus.

But there is more significance to the circumcision of Jesus and it gives us assurance for the New Year: circumcision marked God's people as the RECIPIENTS of his grace. Jesus'

circumcision marked him as the GIVER of grace. He was the one whom God the Father had sent. He has come full of grace and truth for us. He intimately unites himself to our human condition—as we see in his circumcision.

Whenever we consider Jesus' condescension, his coming down and becoming man for us, we also see his great compassion and love for us. He has not run from the task appointed for him since the creation of the world and the fall into sin. He has run to save us and he will continue to be with us in the coming year. He has shed his blood for us, not yet eight days old! By his wounds we are healed. Here is our assurance for the New Year. Jesus is for us, who can be against us?

### **Assurance in his naming**

If the name "Jesus" is to assure and comfort us in the New Year, then we must understand the meaning of this name and how he received it. This is his "naming", the process by which he received that name. How do parents normally choose a name for their child? More often than not we choose a name for our child based on its uniqueness or the way it sounds. It may be a name in the family or a person whom we know had the name. The name of our Lord Jesus did not originate in such a way.

Mary and Joseph had nothing to do with the name of the baby. The angel Gabriel told Mary: "You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus." And another angel appeared to Joseph and told him also: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Both parents miraculously received the name. Wouldn't that be nice for parents who struggle with names today? But divine revelation had a specific purpose: to give us assurance.

The name "Jesus" means "The Lord saves". In Hebrew the name is Jehoshua, in English we could say Joshua. Jesus is the Latin form brought into English. The baby Jesus was the only person in the world to actually carry out what that name means. Some babies, especially in the Hispanic community, are named Jesus. But the Lord Jesus is the only baby who actually fulfilled what the name means—he literally was the LORD WHO SAVES. Other people might be testifying to that truth that the Lord saves in the naming of their babies. Jesus' name and his whole naming process fulfilled the promises of God.

The "naming" of our Lord, as he was brought to the Temple by mom & dad, as he was circumcised for our salvation, as he was given the name that is above every name—this "naming" is our assurance in the coming year because God has given it. God has inscribed the Name of Jesus on our hearts. We will need his assurance and comfort in the coming year, as we have always needed him in the past. Apart from him our years are dreary and hopeless, but in him we have assurance. God is opening up for us a New Year of Grace, not a New Year of Wrath and Disappointment. He has inscribed the name "Jesus" on the days ahead in your life. We do have days of difficulty and tough decisions to make as a congregation/individuals. But we have hope and assurance in that Name which God has inscribed in HUGE GOLD letters upon the door of time. Will we read that name? Will we see our assurance in that name? Humbly, penitently, with believing hearts and hope-filled eyes, we will see what's in a name. We will see the assurance of God's love. Amen.

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