

Jesu Juva

“A Reason to Celebrate”

Text: Luke 2:21 (Galatians 3:23-29)

Tonight we heard again the shortest Gospel reading in the whole church year: a single verse. That on the eighth day after His birth, as divinely mandated in the Old Testament, the baby born to Mary is circumcised and given His name; the name assigned by the angel before His birth: *Jesus*. A name which means: *the Lord is salvation*.

*So what?* Should we even care that Jesus was circumcised?

Well, yes. Because with His circumcision, Jesus is beginning to fulfill His name. He is beginning His work as our Saviour. For part of His work as Saviour was to fulfill the Law perfectly on our behalf. *All* the Law, perfectly, in order to be the perfect Lamb of God and the sacrifice for our sins on the cross. And part of that Law was a circumcision on the eighth day.

This is the reason Jesus was born as a baby with a real human nature and didn't just come to earth as a full grown man, or in the appearance of a man - He came to take our place in every stage and circumstance of life, and to live in every stage and circumstance *perfectly*. For us, every stage and circumstance is tainted by sin; but for Him, it would all be done perfectly. He is our substitute not only with His death on the cross, but with His whole life. He is conceived without sin and born without sin. He lives without sin, fulfilling every jot and tittle of God's Word, and He dies with no sin of His own - a spotless, sinless sacrifice bearing the sin of the world. Bearing your sin and mine. The One who does not deserve to die, dies, in order that we who deserve to die, might live.

And so with Jesus' circumcision, we already receive a glimpse of the cross, not only in Jesus' fulfilling of the Law, but in the blood that is shed in His circumcision, which foreshadows the blood He will shed on the cross. The blood of God that will wash away the sin of the world.

That washing is what so many are looking for this night - this last night of the Year of our Lord 2010. Tonight people want to wash away the mistakes and troubles and sadnesses of this past year. The words we blurted out but wish we could take back. The actions we did that seemed to make sense at the time, but looking back seem so foolish and hurtful. The time and opportunities wasted. All the shouldas,

wouldas, and couldas. Sadly, many will try to wash all that away at the bottom of a bottle tonight.

But the circumcision of Jesus helps us see that all those sins and regrets, the stubbornness and mistakes, have already been washed away. With Jesus, *out with the old and in with the new* is the reality we celebrate not just once at the end of one year and the beginning of the next, but each and every day of our lives. For that is really what the washing of our baptism by Jesus is: *out with the old and in with the new*. Our old, sinful man is taken up into Jesus' death and resurrection, and a new man is raised with Him to live a new life.

For as St. Paul was explaining to the Galatian Christians, once Christ came, everything changed. With Christ, the old has come to an end and the new has come. Jesus is the fulfillment of the old and the beginning of the new. The beginning of a new life, no longer having to look back in fear and dread, but now able to look forward in hope and faith. Knowing that our Lord who was born for us and died for us, is now risen for us and has a glorious future awaiting for us. And not just in heaven, but already here and now, in the Year of our Lord 2011 that is about to begin.

For this coming year, as this past year, will be a year filled with His grace and blessing. That doesn't mean there won't be hardship and sadness - there most certainly will be, as sin and evil rears its ugly head in the world and in you and me. But as we enter the new year, we do so not in uncertainty, but trusting His promises of *protection* and *forgiveness*. Protection from the sin without, and forgiveness for the sin within. For washed in baptism and clothed with Christ, you live now under the protection of your heavenly Father and in the grace of His forgiveness. And that changes everything. For your baptism means that you can enter each day and each year no longer haunted by the past or worried about the future, but secure and confident in Christ, in His love, forgiveness, and life. And this is true no matter who you are: Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female - this promise is for all. This promise is for you.

Did Mary and Joseph realize all this when they brought Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day? Probably not. They were just being parents and doing what good, believing parents did. But isn't that how God usually works? God using us in our vocations to bless others with His grace and care. Doing the extraordinary in things that look ordinary.

*Like circumcision.* It's a rather ordinary looking thing; quite silly, even. And yet through circumcision, God created and sustained a people in the promise of the coming Seed, the coming Saviour, until Christ came. And when Christ came and fulfilled this sign, another equally ordinary and silly-looking one took its place:

baptism. And yet through this water, God is creating and sustaining a people in the promise of Christ - the promise of His forgiveness, of His life, and in the end, of His salvation.

And that truly gives us a reason to celebrate tonight. Not just that we made it to the end of another year, but that in Christ, we have entered a life that will never end. For He entered our life, with all its trials and troubles, that we may enter His. And so He is circumcised. A little thing, in a little Gospel, but oh, how big for you and me.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.