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The Circumcision of Our Lord

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“Not What *Could* Be, but What *Will* Be”
Text: Luke 2:21; Galatians 3:23-29; Numbers 6:22-27

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There's something about the start of a new year, isn't there? Turning the page. A fresh start. Possibilities.

We just took down the calendar that hangs in our kitchen and put up a new one. The old one looks as you would expect - boxes filled in, things crossed out, a mishmash of the expected and the unexpected. Things noted for which I am grateful, and some things which I wish had been different.

And the new one looks as you would expect as well - row after row of empty boxes, gleaming white, wide open, waiting to be filled in . . . What will come this year? What will fill these boxes? What will be the same? What will be different? What joys await? What sadness will come?

So the truth is, the reality is, that all those gleaming white, wide open boxes are not empty at all - because they are filled with hope. *With the hope of what could be this year* . . . hopes and dreams.

Mary and Joseph had hopes and dreams the year Jesus was born as well. That year started with the hope and dream of a joyous marriage feast, and ended with a baby in a manger. And in those months in between, a lot took place. An angel visiting them both. The scandal of what the world thought was an illegitimate child. And the unexpected and what had to be the most uncomfortable trip to Bethlehem ever. So when Mary and Joseph took their calendar down at the end of the year, that had to be one for the ages.

But in the gleaming white, wide open box eight days after the birth of their son, an event was written that perhaps doesn't get as much notice as it should. The box read: *Jesus' circumcision*. It was an important appointment. For ever since the days of Abraham, it had been commanded by God for every male child in Israel to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. It was to be a mark of God's people and a sign of God's promise, that one of those people, a descendant of Abraham, would be the Messiah, the Saviour. And not just of Israel, but of the world. And so whenever a male child was born in Israel, with circumcision the people would remember that one of these sons . . . maybe

this son . . . would be the one. It was a day of faith and hope.

But for Mary and Joseph, it was even more than that - *it was a day of fulfillment*. Because they knew. Not *maybe* this son . . . but *YES*, this son! Because as the angel told Joseph: *You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).

And part of Jesus accomplishing that was His being circumcised.

That surprises some people, because usually when we think of Jesus as our Saviour, we think of the cross and the empty tomb. We think of the atonement and the forgiveness of our sins. And that's correct. But it's more than that, too. In fact, that's only half of it.

Because there are two parts to the Law. There are the things we are not to do - the *Thou Shalt Nots* - but also the things we are to do. And to be perfect, 100% perfect, we need both. We need to never do the things we shouldn't, and we need to always do the things we should. To fulfill the Law, it's not enough to just avoid the wrong. We need to also do the right.

And deep down, we know this. That's why at the start of every new year, resolutions are made *that include both* - to stop doing what is wrong, what is unhealthy, what is not good, AND to start doing what is right, what is better. But the fact is that our focus tends to be on stopping what is wrong. For, the thinking usually goes, that I need to cut out the bad, but any good I can do is extra. Bonus. Icing on the cake.

Our civil laws are like that as well. You can get a fine or go to jail for breaking the Law, so as long as I avoid that, I'm okay. As long as I don't break the Law, I am considered an upright citizen. And whatever good I am able to do above and beyond that is extra. Bonus. Icing on the cake. That person is not only an upright citizen, but deserving of society's honor, thanks, and praise.

But it's not like that with God. God says that we are to be perfect - which, again, means we must not only not do what is wrong and contrary to the Law, but that also we must do what is right and fulfill the law. So unless you have both, you are not perfect.

And so our salvation is not just the forgiveness of our sins and wrongs, as important as that is - it is also the giving to us, the crediting to our account, Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' perfection. It is all that we have done wrong washed away by the blood of His perfect, sinless sacrifice, AND all that we have failed to do credited to us as done. Because our Saviour, our substitute, *did both*. He died our death to atone for our sins and paid the awful price that was demanded, AND He lived a completely perfect and sinless life, filling your account with His perfect good.

That's what Paul was getting at when He wrote to the Galatians: *For as many of you as*

were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. That baptized into Christ, when the Father looks at you He doesn't see a sinner. He doesn't see a person who has done what is wrong and failed to do what is right. Instead, He sees His Son. He sees perfection. He sees all right and no wrong.

And part of that fulfilling the Law, fulfilling the right, fulfilling all that God had commanded, was Jesus being circumcised. It was done *for you*.

So that's what makes our New Year in the church different than our New Year in the world. **In the world, a New Year is filled with the hope of what could be. In the church, a New Year is filled with the confidence of what will be.**

For as Paul said, in Christ Jesus, baptized into Him, it doesn't matter what nationality you are, if you are *Jew or Greek*; it doesn't matter what your status or work are, if you are *slave or free*; and it doesn't matter what your gender is, if you are *male or female* - Jesus was born for you, circumcised for you, lived for you, and died for you. And so you have His promise of forgiveness, His promise of life, His promise of good, and that all things will work for your good. These are what **WILL BE**, no matter what else happens or doesn't happen this year.

Now, that doesn't mean that all those gleaming white, wide open boxes on our 2017 calendars will be filled with exactly what we want or plan or hope. Because we will sin and interfere with God's good. Because in our sin not everything we want or plan or hope is good for us. And because others will sin against us. As long as we live in this world, sin will be a reality in our lives. We will do wrong. We will fail to do right. And we will need to repent ourselves and forgive others.

The good news is that though that is true, Jesus signed His promise to us today in His blood. He begins fulfilling the Law for you today. Doing no wrong and every right, so that when He is offered on the cross as the Lamb of God, His name is fulfilled - He saves you. He gets your sin and atones for it, and baptized into Him, you get His forgiveness and good and live in it. And all is fulfilled. For you. Nothing more is needed for your salvation. You can add nothing more to what Jesus has perfectly fulfilled for you.

So when that year started for Mary and Joseph, they had no idea how it would end. But though unexpected and surprising and difficult in many ways, it was good. All good. And so it will be for you, too.

And also like Mary and Joseph, you may be a very different person at the end of 2017 than you are today. (And not just because you will be a year older!) Things will happen. All those gleaming white, wide open boxes will be filled, and you can be sure that some of them will be in ways unexpected, surprising, and difficult as well. But good. Always good for children of God.

So today we look back in gratitude and repentance, and we look forward in confidence and hope. For *on the eight day of Christmas my true love gave to you . . .* the circumcision of His Son. Who loves you and gives Himself *for* you, and give Himself *to* you now as you come to receive His very Body and Blood. The same Body circumcised on the eighth day, the same Blood shed that day. The gift that continues to fill you with His forgiveness and His good.

And then also we will be sent out from this place with the blessing of our God and His name placed upon us. To go and live as the child you are, dearly loved. Having every good and needing no more, and so able to do and give that good to others.

For in Jesus, *the Lord is blessing you and keeping you.*

In Jesus, *the Lord is making his face shine upon you and being gracious to you.*

In Jesus, *the Lord is lifting up his countenance upon you, and giving you peace.*

Which means that in Jesus, I don't know if it will be a Happy New Year for you or not, but I know this: that it will be a good one. His Good. For you.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.