

Today is the first day of the new year, but it's also the eighth day of Christmas. Because the Christmas carol, which we all know, starts counting on Christmas Day, and so today would be the eighth. But the eighth day is also an important day in the life of Christ, because today is the day on which he was circumcised. On this day, Jesus was circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses. And while it may seem a little bit odd, and maybe a little bit uncomfortable, to talk about our Lord in this way, it is something worth paying attention to, and it is something worth celebrating. Because the circumcision of our Lord on the eighth day is connected with our salvation.

Why? we might ask. To understand why it's connected with our salvation, we have to understand why it had to happen in the first place. Because circumcision is an important part of the Old Testament, going all the way back to the days of Abraham. Because in Genesis chapter 17, God commanded Abraham to be circumcised, together with all of his sons and all of his descendants. In fact, God says in verse 10: "This is my covenant which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: every male among you shall be circumcised." And God had promised in that covenant that Abraham would become the father of a multitude of nations. God had promised Abraham that kings would come from him, that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan. That was the promise that God had made to Abraham. But Abraham, for his part, had to be circumcised. It was to show that the promise belonged to him and also to his offspring. It showed that every male would be a part of Israel in this way, just as God had promised.

And so every male was to be circumcised, even those who weren't related to Israel by blood. Because God goes on to say, verses 12 and 13: "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 was born in your house and he who was bought with your money shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant." So the son, the stranger, the slave, whoever was connected to Israel in any way was supposed to be circumcised. And they were to be circumcised when they were eight days old, and in that way they would be made a part of the covenant. They'd be made part of Israel. And it wasn't an optional thing either. It's not that someone could just choose to not be circumcised if they didn't feel like it. And it wasn't something they could put off, like to do on the ninth day or on the twelfth day, or even to do earlier, on the sixth or the seventh. No, this had to happen just as God said, or else: "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." So no circumcision meant no covenant, no if's and's or but's about it. If they were not circumcised, they were not part of Israel.

So Jesus had to be circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with the Law. And on that day, he was also given his name. That was the day on which they gave the name to the child, not on their birthday, but on the day of their circumcision. The name which had been given to him by the angel while he was still in the womb. All of this had to happen in accordance with the law.

But circumcision was not just something physical, although there were certainly people who treated it that way in Israel. Circumcision was also part of what it meant for Israel to be righteous. Because walking after God in the Old Testament also included being circumcised as he had commanded. Moses shows this in the book of Deuteronomy when he says to Israel:

"Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn." So Moses compares, then, the foreskin to stubbornness and to sin. To resist God, to not listen to him, was to be uncircumcised in the heart. It was to be unrighteous. But to listen to God and to follow after him was to be circumcised in the heart. It was to be righteous. So Israel was called to turn away from their sins, to turn towards God, to be circumcised in the heart in this way. Because it was part of what it meant for them to be righteous.

But Israel was also made righteous in this way. God made them to be his people in this way. Moses again shows this in the book of Deuteronomy. He says: "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God was going to do this. God would circumcise their hearts. God would make them righteous. So circumcision was not just a requirement. It was also how God made Israel righteous in the Old Testament. If there was no circumcision, there could be no righteousness. But through circumcision, they had become God's people.

So Jesus, then, needed to be circumcised, not because he needed to be made righteous. After all, he never sinned, so he was always righteous. But Jesus, being righteous, needed to be circumcised, because that's what the Law said. He was the righteous one, and for that reason, he did all that the law required.

So what does this have to do with us? we might ask. What does this have to do with our salvation? Sure, it's good to know that Jesus never sinned. It's good to know that he did all the right things. But Jesus did a lot of things that the Law required of him, things that aren't even written down in the Bible. Why did Luke think it was so important for us to know this that he included it in his Gospel? Why are we talking about this today?

To answer that question, Jesus shows us at another important moment in his life why, and that's at his Baptism. Because when Jesus went to be baptized, John the Baptist tried to stop him. He said, "What are you doing here, Jesus? I need to be baptized by you! Why are you coming to me? You have nothing to repent of. You have no sins that need to be forgiven. Why are you coming to be baptized?" Listen to what Jesus says, Matthew chapter 3: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Pay attention to that word "fulfill." Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus came to complete righteousness. He came to do it all. He is the righteous one. There is no part of the law that Jesus did not do. There is no part of the law that Jesus did not keep. We, on the other hand, have often failed. We have not done what God wants us to do. We have not kept the law perfectly. In fact, we cannot. And that is why we are sinners, Christians. And being sinners, we deserve condemnation. Being sinners, we deserve hell.

But Jesus kept every part of the Law, including circumcision. Jesus was righteous when we were not. And through all of these things, God the Father makes us righteous as well. Because just as Paul says in Romans chapter 8: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Jesus became one of us in order to condemn sin. Jesus was born so that the Law would also be fulfilled in us by faith. By giving us his Spirit, by giving us the Holy Spirit, his righteousness has now become ours. By giving us the Holy

Spirit, we have become like God. If Jesus was not circumcised, that he could not be righteous. And if he was not righteous, we would never be. But Jesus was circumcised to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus was circumcised so that we would be saved.

Now, we, of course, are no longer circumcised. That is part of the Old Testament which came to an end in Jesus. But now we can see why it had to happen. Now we can understand why the circumcision of Christ is connected to our salvation. Jesus was circumcised to fulfill the requirements of the Law, the Law which we could not keep. Jesus was circumcised to show that he is righteous, the one who has done all that the Father commanded him to do. Jesus was circumcised so that we would become righteous through him. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day to save us from our sins. So let us give thanks to him on this day and on every day to come for all that he has done to save us.

Let us pray. Merciful Father, who sent Your Son in our likeness to fulfill the requirements of the Law, lead us in the way of righteousness, so that we may be shaped into the image of Your Son and glorify You forever; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.