

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.

Jesus' Circumcision and Name Gives Us Assurance for the New Year

1. His circumcision assures us of God's faithfulness to his word.
2. His name gives us assurance that he has reconciled us to God

On the first day, God used a word and brought forth the earth and light. On the second day, God's Word formed the sky. On the fifth day, God's words made the birds and fish. On the sixth day, the Word created people. On the seventh day, he rested. Do you ever wonder what he did on the eighth day? Luke remembered and recorded it for us.

Now I know that these two events talk about completely different times. Days 1-7 took place at the very beginning of the world and this eighth day was millinia later as God carried out his plan to recreate the world. This is not the eighth day of creation we are talking about. This is the eighth day of the incarnation of Jesus. Eight days, after Jesus was born, he was circumcised and named. Tomorrow will be that day, our New Year's Day. These days have a few similiarities.

When a new year begins, people will look back at what has happened during the past year. Just think of things that might be remembered that happened in 2013. China landed a rover on the moon. The US government shut down. Some song I knew heard of reached the top of Billboards Top 100. Huge tornados hit Oklahoma. The Red Sox won the World Series. Margaret Thatcher died. These wrap ups serve to close the book on the old year. The last respects to the year now almost past.

In a similar way, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple on the eighth day, God was closing the book on the old. He was paying the last respects to something that was done for about 1500 years. The circumcision part of this promised covenant with his faithful people.

Way back at the beginning of those years, God told Abraham, *"Look up at the heavens and count the stars if indeed you can count them."* Then he said to him, *"So shall your offspring be."* (Genesis 15:5). In connection to that promise God later commanded circumcision. *"This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring."* (Genesis 17:10-12). This rite was specifically identified as the sign of the covenant of grace between the Lord and Abraham. Every time Abraham and his descendants had a male child and every time Abraham or one of his male descendants looked down, God wanted them to be reminded that a Savior was coming through his offspring.

In this way, Jesus' circumcision was like New Year's Day. Jesus was getting rid of something that was old. He is the fulfillment of the promise of the Savior connected long before through the covenant of circumcision. Since Jesus fulfilled that covenant, it was no longer needed.

Jesus also completed a command when he was circumcised. Remember Jesus had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the Law. So on that eighth day the time had fully come. *God sent his Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* (Galatians 4:4).

Lastly, Jesus' circumcision was a stride towards redemption - buying back our souls. At his circumcision Jesus submitted his body to God's Law. This circumcision was marking the beginning of Jesus' plan, pointing ahead to the punishment that Jesus would take on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus was putting an end to God's wrath. No more sacrifices would be needed after Jesus had fulfilled this suffering on the cross.

To summarize: By his circumcision Jesus was physically marked as Abraham's offspring (Ro 9:5); he was shown to be the one who had come to bear the sin of the world—both the actual sins and the inherited sinfulness which underlies all sins; and by the shedding of his blood, it was shown that he would carry out that salvation by humbling himself and shedding his blood. We can celebrate the fact that Jesus got rid of all the commandments, by fulfilling them in our place. We no longer have to offer sacrifices. We don't have to resolve to improve so that God will allow us into heaven. God's wrath no longer hangs over our heads. Even though God demands that we obey his Ten Commandments perfectly, we know that Jesus already did this for us.

As we put aside the deeds done in the past year, and look forward to the new hope of the unspoiled year to come, so this eighth day brought new hope. Here's how: instead of living by promises of things to come, the people could live by realities, things that happened. Here's why: Jesus was given his name. When a new name is given, it means the beginning of something new. Abram was given a new name while he was given the covenant of circumcision. Now Jesus was given his name as he completed that covenant.

The name Jesus means, "the Lord saves." Notice it doesn't mean, "the Lord helps people save themselves." It means, "the LORD saves." Jesus would be the Savior of the world. Our salvation wouldn't have anything to do with what we would do. It would only depend on the Lord. Also notice that Jesus' name is an active verb. "The Lord SAVES." He would be the one who would actively obey the laws of the world. He would be the one who would die for the world. They didn't have to look forward to the coming of a Savior anymore. It was time for salvation to begin NOW.

This was what was predicted in Jeremiah 31, *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers. . . For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* That which God promised, the forgiveness of sins, would now be a reality. No longer would God hold any sins against us. They would all be forgiven and forgotten.

Through faith in Christ, we are now living in the reality of things just hoped for in previous ages. Therefore we have a new lease on life. Just as God gave Jesus His name, so He has given us new names. Instead of calling us filthy and damned sinners, names that we have earned, He now calls us "saints", a name that Jesus has earned for us. This is what we are now. He calls us a "holy people." Through faith in Jesus Christ, we take on a new name. We're called Christians, saints, and holy people. It gives us a fresh start. It's a present reality. It's like we have been broken free from the chains that were bound around our neck. The devil can no longer accuse us of sin. God's wrath can no longer touch us, for we know that God already punished Christ. We are now holy in God's sight.

This is what happens to us, now that we are set free from the law of God. God isn't going to bring out a scandal sheet of our past sins on Judgment Day and embarrass us with them. God says that when we are baptized, God applies the forgiveness of Christ to us. This is the way that God now circumcises our hearts, and cuts us off from our sinful nature. At our baptism, God washed our sins away by giving us faith in Christ. Now that we know our sins have been forgiven completely - that God remembers none of the things we have done, it gives us a new lease on life. Since we know that Jesus has obeyed all of God's laws as our substitute, and we know that we are going to heaven, we feel set free. We can resolve to live our lives according to God's law. That's what we now have the power to do, by the grace of God.

No matter what changes we have to face in 2014, we can face the new year with confidence and hope, all because of what happened on the eighth day. Things changed on that day. With the circumcision and naming of Jesus, God fulfilled the law for us. At our baptism, God circumcised our hearts and connected us to Christ - giving us His Name and reputation. That's what gives us hope and courage for the future - to face another year. This is why we celebrate the eighth day. It's like New Year's Day - giving us a new lease on life, a fresh start. Amen.