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Luke 2:21-24¹
The circumcision &
presentation of our LORD.
Sunday after Christmas
New Year's Day
Supplementary Lectionary Series "B,"
Gospels, adapted

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
10:00 a.m. New Year's Day
Sunday, January 1, 2012

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.

²² When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the LORD ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the LORD, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the LORD") (cf. Exodus 13:2&12), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the LORD: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (Leviticus 12:8).

JESUS FULFILLS PERFECTLY THE LAW OF THE LORD

I. BY HIS CIRCUMCISION

II. BY HIS PRESENTATION

In the Name of Jesus, who fulfills perfectly the Law of the LORD for us, in our place, and as our substitute, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Eight days ago yesterday, we celebrated Christmas Eve. Eight days ago today, we celebrated Christmas Day. On the eighth day of a male child's birth, Old Testament Law required that the child be circumcised – the foreskin of the child's penis was cut off. This placed the child under Old Testament Law – under Old Testament rules and regulations. It made the male child a member of the Jewish community. In addition, after the fortieth day of the male child's birth, when mother and child were ceremonially clean, the mother and child were to go to the Temple where the firstborn male child was "presented" to the LORD. We see these Old Testament Laws fulfilled in our Savior Jesus. For, JESUS FULFILLS PERFECTLY THE LAW OF THE LORD ... I. BY HIS CIRCUMCISION; and, II. BY HIS PRESENTATION.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

JESUS FULFILLS PERFECTLY THE LAW OF THE LORD

I. BY HIS CIRCUMCISION

As noted previously, on the eighth day following the birth of a male child, that child was to be circumcised. On that day also, the child was to be named (cf. Luke 1:59). The child of the virgin Mary was already named, for when the Angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior, the Angel told her “to give him the Name Jesus” (Luke 1:31b). In addition, in a dream, an angel of the LORD told Joseph, who was engaged to be married to the virgin Mary, “You are to give him the Name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21b). Thus, the angel told Joseph the meaning of this child’s Name – Savior – “he will save his people from their sins.”

The Name, “Jesus,” is taken from the Old Testament name, Joshua, which means “the LORD saves” or “the LORD is salvation.” Jesus would save people from their sins, and his being circumcised on the eighth day was an aspect of this saving work of Jesus.

The LORD demanded that his Law be kept perfectly. Every aspect of his Law was to be kept perfectly. We see Jesus keeping that Law perfectly as he is circumcised on the eighth day following his birth. Jesus keeps even the smallest aspect of God’s Law perfectly. Jesus does this as our substitute.

APPROPRIATION

Jesus kept the Law perfectly so that you would not have to keep the Law. Thus, the Old Testament requirement that a male child be circumcised is no longer in force. (Some parents may want to have their male children circumcised for health reasons, but circumcision to keep Old testament Law is no longer required.) The Apostle Paul testifies to this fact, when he writes to the Colossians,

¹¹ In him [Christ Jesus] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11,12).

The “circumcision done by the hands of men” is a reference to the Old Testament Law that required that males be circumcised. St. Paul does, however, refer to a “circumcision done by Christ,” and he connects that circumcision with Holy Baptism, which connects a believer to Christ. Moreover, St. Paul speaks of the significance for the believer in Jesus of “the circumcision done by Christ,” when he says further,

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:13,14).

St. Paul speaks of an “uncircumcision of [the] sinful nature” or the sinful flesh. The “circumcision” under which you have been placed is a spiritual circumcision – a circumcision of your sinful nature. Later, in this Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul explains this circumcision of your sinful nature.

St. Paul writes,

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:5-10).

Just as the circumcision of the flesh meant a cutting off, so also spiritual circumcision is a cutting off – a cutting off of the sinful nature and its outbreaks in actual sins. St. Paul mentions some of these: “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed Anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language.” These are to be cut off and cut out of your life. But here is the problem, is it not?

Too often, rather than cutting out and cutting off these sinful outbreaks in your life, you are prone to indulge your sinful nature in your life. You are prone, by your sinful nature – by your sinful flesh – to leave these sinful outbreaks in your life. How, then, can you cut them out of your life? Go back to what St. Paul said.

St. Paul said,

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:13,14).

God made you alive with Christ by forgiving your sins. God cancelled the “written code of the Law” by taking it away through the cross of Christ Jesus. Here, then, is the motivation for your daily living in spiritual circumcision – that is, putting off and cutting off your sinful and wicked desires, words and actions. The cross of Jesus has given you forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Jesus kept the Law perfectly in your place, as your substitute. This is your motivation for putting away and cutting off the outbreaks of your sinful nature.

Jesus kept the Law perfectly in your place and as your substitute. This is seen also in his presentation in the Temple.

JESUS FULFILLS PERFECTLY THE LAW OF THE LORD II. BY HIS PRESENTATION

After the fortieth day of a male child's birth, the mother was ceremonially clean. She was then required to present herself and the male child to the LORD. This is what we see Mary and Joseph doing with Jesus.

²² When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the LORD ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the LORD, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the LORD") (cf. Exodus 13:2&12), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the LORD: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (Leviticus 12:8).

Firstborn males were to be offered to the LORD. This was a reminder to Israel of what had happened on the night the Angel of the LORD "passed over" Egypt, when the Israelites were finally led out of slavery.

The Angel of the LORD "passed over" the land. On every house where that Angel did not see the blood of the sacrificial Passover lamb, the Angel slaughtered the firstborn both human and animal of that house. In remembrance of this, Old Testament Law required that the firstborn male, whether of the Jews or their livestock, be offered to the LORD.

The firstborn male was to be offered to the LORD. It was either to be sacrificed (slaughtered) or "redeemed." Our text tells us the redemption price that Joseph and Mary paid: "two young pigeons." (This fact also tells us of Joseph's and Mary's poverty at this time, for the Magi or Wisemen had not yet visited them, offering to their Savior their gifts of gold, incense and myrrh.) So, Jesus is again placed under the Law by his presentation in the Temple.

Although pure and holy and above the Law, Jesus is placed under the Law. St. Paul reminds us in his Epistle to the Galatians,

⁴ But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Galatians 4:4-7).

Jesus was born under the law, of which his presentation in the Temple is a part, in order to redeem those under law – that is all people, for all are under God's Law and accountable to him. Moreover, the sacrifice of those "two young pigeons" pointed ahead to the perfect sacrifice that Jesus would make of himself on the cross. The writer to the Hebrews states this more clearly.

The writer to the Hebrews states, first of all, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The blood of bulls, goats, turtle doves, pigeons, and whatever other Old Testament blood sacrifices there might be, did not take away even one sin. Rather, those sacrifices pointed ahead to the perfect sacrifice that Jesus himself would make.

Again the writer to the Hebrews states about Jesus' sacrifice,

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

***"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;***

**⁶ *with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.***

**⁷ *Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me
in the scroll—***

I have come to do your will, O God'" (cf. Psalm 40:6-8,
LXX).

⁸ *First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the Law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10:5-10)

Jesus came to do the will of God perfectly. Jesus accomplished that by his perfect and sinless life, for "he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22; cf. Isaiah 53:9). Then, since sins had to be punished, Jesus offered himself as "the sacrifice of atonement ... for the sins of the whole world" (cf. 1 John 2:1b,2; cf. John 1:29b,36b). Moreover, the presentation of Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem, testifies to another aspect of Jesus' sacrifice and substitution for all.

The presentation of a male child to the LORD meant that child was totally dedicated to the LORD. So also we see in Jesus that he is totally dedicated and committed to the LORD and to the will of the LORD. For the objective of the LORD in sending his Son into the world was to take away the sins of the world, so that all who believed in his Son, Jesus, would have eternal life in heaven. That means that Jesus is your substitute.

APPROPRIATION

Through Jesus, you are presented to the LORD. Through Jesus, you are presented to the LORD, not as you are – a sinful, human creature – but presented to the LORD redeemed, restored, forgiven, by Christ the crucified. Remember that Old Testament sacrifices were about substitution. “A pair of doves or two young pigeons” (2:24) were substituted for the firstborn male child. The blood of bulls, goats, sheep and lambs, were substituted for the people of Israel who had sinned. But, none of those sacrifices took away sins (cf. Hebrews 10:4). Those sacrifices only pointed ahead to Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world – for your sins.

Jesus’ perfect sacrifice is for you. Jesus substituted himself for you. Thus, through Jesus, God is at peace with you. Without Jesus, you have no peace; for, without Jesus, God is still angry with sinners – with all humankind. But, through Jesus, God looks at you as being pure and holy in his sight. You have the benefit of this peace with God only by faith in Jesus.

This faith in Jesus comes to you through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. In Holy Baptism – which is a kind of replacement for Old Testament circumcision – you are made a child of God and a member of God’s family. Through Holy Communion – which is a kind of replacement for the Old Testament Passover – you are assured that the blood of Jesus has cleansed you from all sin (cf. 1 John 1:7b). Through God’s Word, again and again, you hear Jesus say to you: “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven” (cf. Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; 7:48). Through this Gospel or Good News, faith in Jesus is created and sustained in your heart, so that you possess for you own the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation – all by faith alone in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Even at a young age – eight days old, forty days old – we see Jesus perfectly fulfilling the Law of the LORD. Jesus is completely pleasing to the LORD, for Jesus perfectly fulfills the will of the LORD – his Father in heaven (cf. Matthew 3:17b; 17:5b; John 6:38; 17:4). Jesus does this, not for himself but for all – Jesus does this for you.

You have the benefit of Jesus’ perfect fulfilling the Law of the LORD and the will of the LORD by faith alone in him as your Savior. Therefore, continue in this Gospel, which brings you to faith and keeps you in faith in Jesus. Amen.