

“Circumcised in Christ”

Colossians 2.11-15

New Year's Day/Circumcision of our Lord 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation this morning was written for our faith and life in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the 2nd chapter, verses 11-15 as read earlier.

Each New Year brings with it the hope and desire for a new beginning, a new start, and maybe even a new life with regard to habits, health, and holiness. Although we associate New Year's Day with the start of a New Year, New Year's Day is known on the Church Calendar as the Circumcision of the Lord. On the eighth day Jesus is circumcised to fulfill the covenant first made with Abraham and as its fulfillment. Here, on this day, Jesus who is a mere eight days old first shed His blood on our behalf, for the purpose of keeping the Law with all its requirements for our salvation.

In fact, by faith, St. Paul tells us we actually participate and reap the benefits of Jesus' circumcision in the flesh having been baptized into His holy name. The sins of our flesh, the Apostle states, were buried with Christ. We who were dead have been made alive. The requirements of the Law that condemned us to eternal damnation have been wiped out by His blood. All this – the new life, a new beginning by grace through faith in Jesus is ours since we have been circumcised in Christ.

This means, of course, that we ought to live out this new life that has been bestowed on us in our baptisms into the faith. We have been spiritually circumcised and included into the family of God under the New Covenant having been baptized in the name of the Triune God. The Old Man of sin has had his steely grip of influence cut off in our lives. Sin has been put away from us by the forgiveness of our sins given us in Baptism's holy waters. By virtue of our Christian baptisms we have a new life and relationship with God. We are now His people and under the covenant established in the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Hence, there is the expectation, and a fair one at that, that our lives will be lived in that newness of life given us through faith. The expectation of God towards Abraham and his descendants was the same. They were to live their lives differently than the idolatrous and immoral people in the land. Their lives were to be lived to God and not just for themselves. They were to show themselves to be those whom God called them to be – His covenant people.

Yet, though they were circumcised in the flesh, they were not many times in the heart. The descendants of Abraham began to believe that as long as they were circumcised and followed through with all the outward requirements of the Law and covenant, that they were fine with God, that the Lord could have no real complaint against them. Even though they were circumcised and performed the ceremonial requirements as God's people, they still broke the covenant.

For Abraham and especially his descendants followed after the lifestyles of the idolatrous and immoral peoples of the land. They began to worship idols and built images of gold and wood calling them god, even ascribing to them credit for their successes and prosperity. Who can forget, for instance, the golden calf and how they ascribed worship and glory to it for bringing them out of Egypt.

But along with such false worship there was the immorality that followed since few, if any, of the false religions of the land forbid sexual immorality and fornication. In fact, some of these were said to actually encourage such as a part of their communion with the divine. All in all, Abraham's descendants, though outwardly circumcised, were not circumcised in their hearts and they left the Lord breaking His covenant with them.

So what of you and I who are Abraham's descendants by faith, as those circumcised by our baptisms into the name of Jesus? Have we distinguished ourselves in the new lives God has given us in Christ and shown ourselves to be His people of the everlasting covenant established in the blood of Christ? Have we who have been made alive and are to be dead to sin remained dead to sin and avoided it like a toxic dump or have we, like the fleshly offspring of Abraham, dabbled and participated in the deeds of this age? Have we shown our gratitude for the salvation that is ours by faith in Jesus won for us by His nailing to the tree?

Truth be told, we are a lot like the physical descendants of Abraham. Oh, we know the commandments and the requirements of the Law. We do have to have been in confirmation class recently to be able to rattle off the will of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments. We know that since we have been redeemed and forgiven, washed and cleansed in the

waters of Holy Baptism, we are to walk in newness of life and not commit the sins we have done in the past.

After all, in some ways, our New Year's resolutions (should we make any) are often made with the intent of ridding ourselves of some bad, even sinful habits and the goal of instilling good and holy ones. But just as we often stumble and falter in keeping our resolutions, so do we fail and not make the grade, as it were, when it comes to keeping God's requirements for us who are circumcised in Christ.

For this, even if it be a little white lie, a tiny morsel of gossip, or a once-a-year bit of gluttony, we should be cut off from God's people. We ought to be cast away and consigned to the judgment and fury of Hell's punishment for our trespasses and violations of God's holy will. This should be our lot since we are incapable of fulfilling God's righteous requirements for even an hour, let alone a minute. This is why we are exhorted to constant vigilance in our spiritual lives, a vigilance that we do not demonstrate at all times in our lives even as those circumcised in Christ.

But this we have as our hope and confidence at the start of 2006 and for all this year and beyond. Christ Jesus our Savior was, in accordance with God's requirements and in fulfillment of the Father's will, circumcised on the eighth day. Christ Jesus our Lord, that Babe born in Bethlehem sheds His blood in anticipation of shedding His blood on the cross outside of Jerusalem where He would, with His fulfillment of the entire Law and covenant of God, wipe away its requirements toward us.

In Jesus, we, by virtue of our baptisms into the faith have been forgiven our every sin. In Jesus, through repentant faith and trust in His name, have the old man cut off daily. Day by day we are raised to the newness of life that is ours by faith in Jesus' name. For in Christ, by virtue of our baptism, our sins were crucified, nailed to the cross, and we were raised with Him in His resurrection.

For in His infant days to His dying moments upon the cross, our Lord Jesus was keeping every aspect of God's will and covenants with Abraham and Moses. Jesus kept the covenant that Abraham and his offspring could not keep. Jesus fulfilled the covenant that Moses and the people of Israel could not accomplish. Jesus

upheld every requirement of the commandments on every man, woman and child, including you and me, as He established the New Covenant in His blood, blood that forgives sins and assures us that God remembers them no more.

Not only are we forgiven our trespasses, but the Law demands of judgment and punishment have been put away from us, thrown out you might say, when Jesus stretched out His arms on Calvary's cross and atoned for our sins. For Jesus' crucifixion and death, the spilling of His blood on the mercy seat of Heaven, announces that the New Covenant, or the New Testament as we Lutherans call it, has been established and all who are baptized are a part of this New Covenant.

This New Covenant, established in the blood of Jesus and poured out on us in our Baptisms assures us that though we falter and fail, stumble and sin in these new lives we lead as God's people, we, since we are circumcised in His name, have had all our sins put away from us and the sentence has already been served by Him on our behalf. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, so were our sins and the judgment on them. Since Jesus suffered and died for us and our salvation, our sins have been wiped out when we were washed in the water and the Word of Holy Baptism.

That means that day by day, even hour by hour, we are granted a new beginning. We do not have to wait for a New Year to roll around to resolve by God's grace to live as children of the everlasting covenant established in the blood of Jesus. Whenever we repent and confess our sins, God forgives us for Jesus' sake and we start new once again no matter what time of the year or day it might be.

Then one day we who have been circumcised with the circumcision not done by hands will reach the city not built with hand but by the cross and blood of Jesus where we will have our part in the new heavens and the new earth and be alive to God forever. All that is our hope and confidence in Christ Jesus the Lord who was circumcised on the eighth day as our Savior, as our Sin-Substitute since we, having been baptized into His name, have been circumcised in Christ. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+