

*January 1, 2017*

*St. Luke 2:21: **“The Name of Jesus”***

- I. Gives Direction.*
- II. The Circumcision.*
- III. The Name.*

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St. Luke 2:21

Dear Friends in Christ,

New Year's Eve is over. This New Year's Day will quickly pass. 365 days from now, if we are still alive, we'll go through the routine of amazement as to how quickly this year has passed. And the question looms there: "What's going to happen in the days to come?" We walk a rather stressful treadmill, don't we? – from a human point-of-view.

One day back in November I reread the last official act of King George VI of England. It was an address he gave to the British people on the BBC. It was his last official act before he died. He said:

I said to the man who stands at the Gate of the Year, "Give me light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Step into the darkness, put your hand into the hand of God, and that will be to you better than a light and safer than a known way."

That's a good insight. But the comfort in his statement is found in a certain name. It is the Saving Name of God. It is, of course . . .

## THE NAME OF JESUS

### I. Gives Direction.

It's been over twenty years ago when I was given a copy of an essay written by one Pico Iyer entitled, "Death Be Not A Stranger." The fact is, I've made reference to it a couple of times and, at least for me, it stands as an example of man's helplessness without God's love in Christ. Here are some of Iyer's thoughts:

One of the reasons (for interest in death) is that death is the one great adventure of which there are no surviving accounts...Some of us try to take the sting out of mortality by talking of "passing away"...(while doctors, who have to deal with it daily, refer, even more coolly, to "coding" or "circling the drain")... There is nothing any of us can do about death, and there is no virtue in dwelling on it or trying to penetrate its mystery.

Do you see the problems here? Our Lord Jesus is ***the surviving account*** of death's ***adventure***. There is something that has been done about death. We are to consider it, since Scripture's say, "Set your minds on things that are above." (Col. 3:2a) God's word allows us ***to penetrate its mystery***. And that's exactly the direction of this one verse Gospel text for this morning:

### II. The Circumcision.

And at the end of the eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Well, allow me to get excessively basic with you. In the first place, we know that humans die because of sin. Sin is disobedience to God; missing the mark; defying God's Commandments. Scriptures say, "sin is lawlessness." (I Jn. 3:4) And, as a result, "The wages of sin is death...". (Rom. 6:23a) Very basic, isn't it? But...oh, man!...how we rationalize sin. I would remind us that, as must be noted repeatedly, all our first parents did was eat a piece of fruit and immediately were subject to death, the decay that preceded it, and eternal separation from God. A piece of fruit. But understand: the sin had already taken place in their thinking. The eating of the fruit was the outward evidence; rebellion against God's simple command.

In the second place, being sinful means that we can't keep the Law of God perfectly as God commands. Because of that, we are by nature law breakers. And because of that, as Scriptures say, "...we were enemies of God..." (Rom. 5:10)

Now here's the point: Christ was born a Jew and, consequently, subject to circumcision, and, thus, placed Himself alongside sinful humans. I have four quotes for you. I urge you to listen very carefully. First, R. C. H. Lenski notes:

The act of circumcision made Jesus a member of the covenant people and thereby placed him under the law... So Jesus was formally obligated to fulfill the divine law. No ordinary Jew could fulfill that obligation because he sinned often and thus required the sacrifices to remove his sin and to keep him in the covenant. But Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law perfectly, not for himself...but in order to redeem (buy free) us who are under the law and cannot fulfill it. (R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, pp. 139-140)

Secondly, the Holy Spirit had Paul write:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4-5)

Thirdly, P. E. Kretzmann notes:

For here (in Jesus' circumcision) He paid the first drop of blood as the price for our souls, the full payment being completed when He committed His soul into the hands of His heavenly Father on the cross. (P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I., p. 274*)

Finally, Victor H. Prange states from his commentary:

...his circumcision brings to an end the need for us New Testament Christians to practice circumcision as a religious rite in fulfillment of the Old Testament law. In this sense Christ is truly the end of the law. (Prange then cites Romans 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.") Victor H. Prange, *People's Bible Commentary, Luke*, p. 26)

And this brings us to the essence of our theme, The Name of Jesus...

### III. The Name.

Again, from our text: "...when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." **Before he was conceived in the womb**; that is, already determined before Jesus became one of us. Long before the angel announced to Joseph, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)

That's the very essence of His name: **Jesus-the One Who saves His people from their sin!** That's the meaning of His name: *The One Who Saves*. This is the greatness of the love of God in Christ found no-where else but in the very Scriptures that Christ gave His church on earth! He takes our sins and their consequences and turns them into our eternal advantage. I said **eternal** advantage because our sin and its consequences - our failures, struggles and tears - our sin and its consequences don't go away in this life!

Martin Luther expressed this in these powerful words; some which we have considered in the past:

It is the nature of God that he makes something out of nothing. Consequently, if someone is not nothing, God can make nothing out of him. Men make something into something else. But this is vain and useless work. Thus God accepts no one except the abandoned, makes no one healthy except the sick, gives no one sight except the blind, brings no one to life except the dead, makes no one pious except sinners, makes no one wise except the foolish, and in short, has mercy upon no one except the wretched, and gives no one grace except those who have not grace. Consequently, no proud person can become holy, wise or righteous, become the material with which God works, or have God's work in him, but he remains in his own works and makes a fabricated, false and simulated saint out of himself. THAT IS A HYPOCRITE.

Jesus knows that as much as we talk about life after death and look forward to be forever and ever in His perfect love, light and bliss - Jesus knows that every time we view the suffering and death of others it leaves a tight knot in our stomachs and forces us to think about our priorities of life and the fact that we will each face our final moment at an already set time and place.

Therefore, when we read about the fact that this most Wonderful Name was circumcised and willingly sacrificed for us - when we walk with Him to Calvary and realize that He is being killed there for us - well, the Name of Jesus immediately draws us to victory over this world, Satan, sin, death and hell.

"Chief of sinners though I be, Christ is all in all to me; All my wants to him are known, all my sorrows are his own. He sustains the hidden life Safe with him from earthly strife." His name is Jesus.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott