

The Circumcision and Name of Jesus
St. Luke 2:21

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Dear Redeemed of God, God has a name! And it is that name by which you are saved.

Now, God had revealed His name once before. While the people of Israel were still in bondage in Egypt, it was to Moses that God appeared in a burning bush, telling him that he was going to free his people from Egypt. Moses complained, "The people aren't going to believe me if I tell them that 'the God of your Fathers' has sent me to you. Whom shall I say sent me?" God replied, "*Ehiya esher ehiya.*" From that is derived God's proper name used but seldom translated in the Old Testament: Yahweh—the Existing One, the One Who is.

People throughout the ages were given names that included this proper name of God: Elijah, meaning *my God is Yahweh*; Abijah, meaning *my father is Yahweh*; Jonathan, meaning *the gift of Yahweh*; Jeremiah, meaning *whom Yahweh has appointed*; Hezekiah, meaning *the might of Yahweh*; Obadiah, meaning *servant of Yahweh*; Zechariah, meaning *Yahweh remembers*; Zephaniah, meaning *hidden by Yahweh*. The funny thing is that, outside of an occasional sermon or Bible study, hardly anyone ever calls on God by this name, except in the names to which it is attached, especially this one: Joshua.

Joshua, or Y'shua in Hebrew, meaning *Yahweh is salvation*—*Iesos* in Greek, translated from Greek into many languages as Jesus or something similar. Yahweh saves, Yahweh is Savior!

You've heard over the last month that God-in-the-flesh would receive this name. Gabriel tells Mary that she will name her Son Jesus. (cf. Luke 1:30-31) An angel tells Joseph in a dream that he will name the Son of God Jesus. (cf. Matthew 1:20-21) And both times, the angel tells their hearer that He will save His people from their sins. This isn't just a nod to a future event, but an acknowledgment that Jesus will be the one—the only one—to do it.

This means that you do not save yourself. In Jesus, God saves, God is Savior. No one else is Savior, a fact that St. Peter made clear in one of his sermons:

Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, *for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:8-12, emphasis mine)

There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved, and there is only one Jesus who will do it—the one who is the Son of God and Son of Man. **He** will save His people from their sins, because no one else will, because no one else is able to. To think otherwise is a sin.

That's the back half of the message from the angel. "...from their sins." This Jesus, eight days old in the text, receives His name, for He will save His people from their sins. Jesus is Savior, but Savior from what? From His people's sins. No work of mere man—no work of your own—is sufficient for your salvation. Only the work of the God-man, Jesus Christ, is fully sufficient.

The problem is that people seldom realize it. Unless there is some major catastrophe, people tend to think that they are just alright. Compounding this is the thought that God could never reject that which He has created, so there's nothing to fear coming from Him, if He even exists. People tend to think that if they make a mistake (their "milder" word for sin) that there is something they can do to

make up for it. In short, if you think that you can work off your sin, that God receives you apart from salvation, or that you're too good for salvation, then you reject Jesus, the Son of God—you reject God—and that is a sin.

And as much as you might like to believe that because you know differently you don't fall into these errors, I'd say it's a much more difficult thing for you to avoid them. Yes, you believe in Jesus Christ, you trust in the salvation that He is, that He brought, that He wrought, but for you, the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh are at work harder in order to sway you from the Truth. And the work of this unholy triumvirate is more than you can stand against on your own. So, you have moments when you think you're alright, or at least better off than the next person because God loves you more for some reason. You have moments when you think that your faith in Christ is well enough, that you can do whatever you like while the sinner outside of the Church still has to pay for his sins. You have moments when you think that God has punished you for a particular sin, so you have to do something to amend for your error. These, too, dear hearers, are all a rejection of Jesus—they are all sin.

As circular as it may sound, it is because of this that Jesus was conceived and became flesh, that Jesus was born and came to man, that Jesus was given the name Jesus. Ever since the fall, when Adam and Eve took of the forbidden fruit and, against the command of God, ate it, their descendants have been transgressing the commands of God and refusing His grace.

Still, Jesus comes, and still, Jesus saves! God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19) So, while God was the lawgiver through Moses, through Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, He is the law-fulfiller. He has fulfilled the law for you, dear hearers. Jesus Christ is your Savior, whether you think Him to be or not. He has fulfilled the law for you by keeping every little precept in your place and also by being the ransom for your sins—the recompense to the Father in your place for your sins. He has reconciled you to Himself, imputing the sins against Himself.

And in today's text, you see Him keeping the law as He subjects Himself to the covenant of circumcision. You may recall from Christmas Day how it was mentioned that Jesus shared a biology like yours along every stage of life, from conception to birth, to childhood, to adulthood, to death. Included in this is the time when He was subjected to the law on His eighth day, and first shed His blood under the circumcision knife. He is a child of the covenant for you, and so in Him you are a child of the covenant, whether "Jew [or] Greek,...slave [or] free,...male [or] female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:28-29) And all of this is without any merit or worthiness in you—*gratis*, by grace, by God's grace to you in Christ.

"And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." All of this, for you, dear hearers. Into this—into Him—you are baptized. You are marked by Him, no longer in the circumcision of the flesh, but by His name on your forehead (cf. Revelation 14:1), placed there as you were washed in the water and the Word. There, at the font, you were traced with the cross upon forehead—where His name is written—and breast—the circumcision of the heart, which is the cutting away at the old flesh of Adam (cf. Romans 2:28-29)—marking you as one redeemed by Christ the circumcised—by Christ the crucified. You have put on Christ and in Him you are a new creation.

Jesus has come, He has shed His blood for you on the eighth day, and also later in life as He hung, bleeding and dying, on the cross outside of Jerusalem. There, Yahweh your Salvation died as your propitiation—as your sacrifice for sin, having suffered the full wrath for your sin and the sins of the world—to rise again on the third day from the grave. Jesus has saved His people from their sins—He has saved you from your sins, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.