

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

January 1, 2017

Text: Luke 2:21

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus...Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all!

A very important and timely Biblical teaching is the doctrine of the two kingdoms. In short, this teaching reminds us that we are citizens of this earthly kingdom – this world, this cultural at this moment in time in the United States – and at the same time we are citizens of the God's heavenly kingdom now and for all eternity. The Lord Jesus rules and reigns over them both but in different ways.

In the earthly kingdom, King Jesus rules by means of Law, government, legitimate authorities, etc. in order to establish justice, goodness, and harmony. This is why we always pray for our political leaders. Not because we agree with them or disagree with them. The prayers of the Church are non-partisan from beginning to end. We recognize through Holy Scripture that our Lord uses legitimate authorities to promote and accomplish His will during this earthly time. And we mustn't forget that we have His command to pray for all in authority (I Timothy 2:1–4). They are God's servants for our good, says St. Paul in Romans 13.

In the heavenly kingdom, King Jesus rules by means of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins, the Sacraments, and eternal promises of life in time and in eternity. This is why we always pray for the Christian Church and her spiritual leaders. We recognize through Holy Scripture that all legitimate spiritual authority is established by God and has His command and blessing. Our Lord Jesus works through spiritual authority to establish His eternal kingdom against which not even the gates of hell shall prevail. And we mustn't forget that we have Christ's command, promise, and example of praying for both earthly and spiritual authority in the Lord's Prayer.

This quick review of the two kingdoms is very timely because today, January 1<sup>st</sup>, reminds us of our dual citizenship. New Year's Day is about as secular and worldly a holiday as you can get. That doesn't make it bad, by the way. New Year's Day signals a number of changes for our earthly citizenship; such as, the tax year begins anew

along with medical deductibles. New political leaders will soon begin their tenure as public servants. These kinds of things are all for the good.

But we are also reminded of our citizenship in God's eternal kingdom because today is the 8<sup>th</sup> day since the celebration of Jesus' birth, otherwise known as the Circumcision and Name of Jesus. The Church, Christ's spiritual kingdom, calls her children together on this Lord's Day to remember and celebrate the circumcision and naming of an 8-day old Jewish boy some 2,000 year ago in Israel! Now that might raise an eyebrow or two. If you go out to lunch or to the store and someone asks you what you did today and you tell them that you celebrated and praised God in Church for the circumcision and naming of Jesus, you might get a polite "Oh, that's nice." And then they move on or politely change the subject.

The OT Law (Lev. 12:3) required that all 8-day old Jewish boys be circumcised. The mark in the foreskin of their flesh was a promise that God adopted them into His covenant people and that He forgives their sins. The Lord Jesus, however, was conceived of the Holy Spirit. With this Child, there is no sin to forgive. He is holy, the very Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity. The Infant Jesus is being circumcised not for Himself, but for us and our salvation.

The Lord Jesus would take no shortcuts when it comes to fulfilling the Law for His holy people. The establishment of His eternal kingdom demanded that He do everything that we could not do for ourselves. The Lord's active obedience whereby He fulfilled the Law for our salvation began very early, at 8 days old.

And we must also point out that the Lord Jesus is beginning His passive obedience to save the world. At 8 days old, His blood is shed and His holy flesh torn to atone for the sins of the world. Today, we celebrate what the infant Jesus did to make us His own so that we could serve Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

The Child, whose birth we celebrated just last weekend with great rejoicing and fanfare, is the same Child subjected to pain and bloodshed for us and for our salvation. In this work of circumcision, God is displaying His love for us. The Father is saving and loving you and all His people through the infant Jesus!!

The OT Law required that all Jewish boys be circumcised when 8 days old. But the Law did not require that they be named on the same day. Jewish custom placed the

two together; first the boy was circumcised and then given his name officially. Luke 2:21, today's gospel reading, declares that Joseph and Mary followed that custom. After Jesus was circumcised, Joseph, the Child's step-father, fulfills the command given to him by the angel of the Lord. Joseph was to name the Child Jesus because Jesus would save His people from their sins (1:21).

This, in part, is why we Christian cannot be content to simply talk about God. We have been given the name, the saving name, that is above all names. Jesus is our Lord and Savior; His name is the one we call upon in every trouble, pray, pray, praise and give thanks. Have you ever noticed that people often seem quite at ease to talk about God. But as soon as you mention Jesus, the conversation takes on a much more determined and, sometimes, a more intense tone.

Therefore, the name [Jesus] can give us both comfort and anxiety. For some people, it heals the hearts' wounds. In other hearts, it awakens anxiety and wrath. It is whispered by dying lips with endless thankfulness and tenderness. Other lips blaspheme and curse it. It's the most loved and the most despised of all names. The same is true for discussion about the cross. For some people it is foolishness and offensive, but for those who believe, it is God's power to save.

We encounter this name again on the first day of the new year. We can begin the new year in Jesus' name. His name is inscribed on every one of these days. First and foremost, on the Sundays. In the Bible, Sunday is called "the Lord's Day." It is Jesus' day, the day He rose from the dead. Each and every new Sunday ... calls us to Him... The same is true for weekdays. Before each and every one of them, the name Jesus is inscribed. "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus," the apostle says in Colossians 3:17. This is foundational for a Christian life. In Jesus' name, we begin our day with prayer and devotion. In Jesus' name, we go the table, thankful for His gifts, remembering that He is our invisible guest. In Jesus' name, we go to sleep in the evening. And what we do in our work, we do from the heart, so we serve the Lord Jesus and not men. Then we are faithful in what seems to be insignificant. Then we can forgive grave injustice. We can bear immense grief because we do not bear it alone, but in the name of Jesus, with a silent and steadfast friend by our side. (Bo Giertz cited in *To Live with Christ*, p. 802-803).

Circumcision and name. Both merge together beautifully in Holy Baptism. Listen to St. Paul's teaching in Colossians 2:11-12 about baptism and circumcision given to the NT church:

In (Jesus) also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

In baptism, the circumcision of Christ made without hands, we not only receive God's holy name but we are also born again into Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection. Through baptism in Christ's name, we receive everything Jesus did for the salvation of the world from the moment of His conception in Mary's virgin womb, to His circumcision and naming on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, to His miracles and teachings, to His bitter sufferings and death, to His resurrection from the dead, to His ascension to the Father's right hand, and to His ultimate return in glory.

Dear baptized saints, I'd like to conclude today with a word of encouragement from one of our fathers in the faith, that great 19<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran theologian C.F.W. Walther. As you begin this new year living in both kingdoms, remember, above all, that the previous name of Jesus, given in your baptism, is your highest treasure.

Now then, all of you who believe in God's Word, let your watchword for entering the new year be this: "I am baptized!" Although the world may laugh at this comfort...nevertheless, abandon any other dearly held pledges and speak only throughout the entire year to come, in all terrors of conscience and necessity through sin and death: "I am baptized! I am baptized! Hallelujah!" And you shall prevail! In every time of need, you will find comfort in your Baptism; in account of it Satan will flee from your faith and confession; and in death you will see heaven opened and will finally come into the joy of your Lord to celebrate a great year of jubilee, a year of praise, with all the angels forever and ever. Amen! (C.F.W. Walther cited in *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, p. 1078).

A Merry Christmas to you all and a very happy and Blessed New Year!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.