

# The LORD Delivers

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*The Circumcision and Name of Jesus (1 January 2012)*  
*Saint Luke 2:21*

Dearly beloved, as you look back over the past twelve months, what lessons have you learned? What mistakes have you made? For what sins do you need forgiveness? As you begin this new year in Christ's name, it is good, right, and salutary to return to the Lord with the same plea with which you filled His ears all throughout this past year: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Despite your unworthiness, God continues to fill your ears with the same words He loves to speak: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." All so that you may learn daily to crucify your sinful flesh, be raised up in newness of life, and live from every word that proceeds from His mouth.

Today is the eighth day of Christmas, the day the one holy Christian and apostolic Church celebrates the holy name of Jesus, the name first given to Mary by the angel Gabriel, and later given to Joseph by an angel in a dream. Today's Holy Gospel is short and sweet and filled with good news: **"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."**

"Jesus" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name "Joshua." It means "the LORD delivers." Joshua, the successor of Moses, was God's Old Testament instrument of deliverance. He delivered God's people from their forty years of wandering in the desert, led them across the Jordan River into the promised land, and helped them win victory over their enemies. But as wonderful as that deliverance was, Joshua could not deliver God's people from what truly plagued them. He could not save them from their sin. That's why God had to send a new and better Joshua. When the fullness of time had come, God kept His Word and sent the Christ-child, the God-man, the Immanuel, and named Him Jesus. Unlike the first Joshua, this second Joshua was born to deliver His people from their spiritual enemies—the devil, the world, and their own sinful nature.

In Jesus, you find God turning the tables on sinful man. Back in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve strove to become like God and therein brought sin and darkness and death in the world. But in Bethlehem, you have God becoming man to bring forgiveness and light and life back into the world. That full and free

forgiveness, that true light which scatters the darkness of sins, that true and abundant and eternal life, is found only in Jesus.

Don't short change Him, though, by molding Him into something other than a Savior.

Though He taught, do not reduce Him to a teacher.

Though He healed, do not reduce Him to a physician.

Though He worked miracles, do not reduce Him to a show of power and might.

Though He has promised to work all things for your eternal good, do not reduce Him to a problem solver.

Though He always followed the will of His Father, do not reduce Him to a role model.

Though no greater love has anyone for you than Him, do not reduce Him to a buddy or a pal.

His name is a constant reminder of who He is and why He came. He is Savior. And He came to **“save His people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21).

We see a portion of that saving work today, as eight-day-old Jesus is circumcised according to the Law of Moses. But why circumcision? Why this strange ritual? Why the cutting away of part of man's procreative organ?

The command to circumcise takes us back to the covenant God made with Abraham—namely, that in his Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. That Seed, of course, **“is Christ”** (Galatians 3:16). As a perpetual sign of this covenant, every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. The reason God chose the procreative organ, I believe, is twofold. First, God puts the sign of His covenant where He does as a vivid reminder that man inherits his sinful nature, his Old Adam, from his father. And second, God puts the sign of His covenant where He does as a vivid reminder that mankind's only hope is in the promised Seed of the woman, the Messiah.

It's no coincidence that circumcision was accompanied by the shedding of the blood. On the one hand, original sin leads to actual sin and both lead to death. On

the other hand, it is only through the shedding of blood that the promised Seed of the woman will win the victory and save His people from their sins. Though Jesus has no sin of His own, He undergoes the same circumcision sinners undergo so that He might fulfill the Law and redeem sinners. The shedding of His blood here at the hand of his earthly father points us forward to the ultimate shedding of His blood on the cross, in obedience to His heavenly Father, for the sin of the world.

And to incorporate you into His new covenant, God also circumcises you. Not outwardly, but inwardly. By cutting away that which is sinful and unclean in your heart in Holy Baptism. Paul writes: **“In Him ... 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”** (Colossians 2:11-12).

God’s people of old were circumcised on the eighth day. Baptism is your eighth day, the day God cuts away the sinfulness of your heart and puts His name on you and blesses you. Take a close look at the baptismal font and the floor beneath it when you come forward to receive Christ’s body and blood in a few minutes. Each has eight sides as a visual reminder that Christ rose from the dead on the beginning of a new week, on the eighth day, to share with you His victory over sin and death, the victory He gave to you when you were baptized into His name.

As you can see, there is a lot of good news wrapped up in today’s Holy Gospel. First, there’s the holy name of Jesus. The holy name that takes away your sin. The holy name you call upon in the day of trouble. The holy name you bless in thanksgiving to the Father. The holy name at which every knee will bow, in heaven and one earth and under the earth, when He returns again in glory. And second, the shedding of His blood for the very first time here on the eighth day of His life. Fulfilling the Law for you. Redeeming you from the curse of the Law. Looking forward to the cross and the ultimate sacrifice of love. For you!

No wonder Paul writes: **“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 4:12). Jesus. Jesus. Only Jesus!

How fitting, then, that we begin this new year in His name. And not only today, but each and every day, as Saint Paul reminds us: **“Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus”** (Colossians 3:17). In the

holy name of Jesus, the LORD delivers you. All so that you may live as people washed in His blood and named with His name.

To that end, come forward and receive the benefits of the new covenant that God has made with you in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Do this often, and do it faithfully, in remembrance of Him, and you are sure to have a blessed new year. God grant you this for Jesus' sake!

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

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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