

The Circumcision of Christ

January 1, 2021

The Collect

ALmighty God, who made your blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey your blessed will; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Epistle—Romans 4:8-14

“**B**LESSED is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

The Gospel—Luke 2:15-21

WHEN the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.²¹ 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.

OUR secular New Year is the Christian festival of the circumcision of our Lord and Messiah Jesus. While the world is busy waking with a hangover from their last bender of 2020, with another New Year’s resolution to do better in 2021, the beauty of the historic Christian calendar is that we’re brought back again and again to our only resolution is “to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1). Amen?

The shepherds sought to know the Messiah. After the angels of heaven announce to the shepherds on earth the birth of Messiah, the shepherds “*go to see this thing...which the Lord has made known.*” What’s so fascinating is how they were the first to hear the good news. Why? Because shepherds lived in a perpetual state of ritual uncleanness under Jewish tradition. Yet they also were the first to respond in worshipping the newborn King. They *went with haste* and as they departed *made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.* They worshipped and they witnessed. Their witness led *all who heard it to wonder[...].* And while *returning* to their sheep in the fields they were *glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.*

Mary sought to know the Messiah as she *treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* As believing and hopeful Jews in the coming Messiah, they prepared his way by following God’s laws. We read the words that are the theme of this day: *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.* Why? As we’ve prayed, *Almighty God not only made his blessed Son to be circumcised,* but he did so that he’d be *obedient to the law for man.* He was “born under the law” (Gal. 4:4) of the Lord who gave it to his people Israel at Mount Sinai. Because “by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight” (Rom. 3:20), God the Son became a man to be *obedient to the law for man.* Because our sinful minds are “hostile to God,” “does not submit to God’s law,” “cannot” do so, and therefore “cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7, 8), the Son of God prophesied his coming saying, “Behold, I have come...I delight to do your will, O my God” (Ps. 40:7, 8).

To know this Messiah Jesus who became *obedient to the law for man*—for you—is to be counted among the *blessed.* To be *blessed* is to be justified. When David prayed, *against whom the Lord will not count his sin,* he was saying more than just that blessedness is forgiveness; the opposite of not having your sins counted against you is to be counted righteous. Whose righteousness? The Messiah’s *obedience to the law for us.* *This blessing is not only for the circumcised,* meaning, Jews, but *also for the uncircumcised,* meaning, Gentiles or non-Jews. It’s for the world! Paul’s proof is that *faith*—not obedience to the law—*was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* When? *Before or after he had been circumcised* according to the Lord’s command? *It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* This means that when *he received the sign of circumcision* it was *as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.* *The purpose of this timing of circumcision after faith was to make Abraham the father of all who believe without being circumcised (Gentiles), so that righteousness would be counted to them (to the world, to you, to me!) as well.* Abraham is our father, too! Paul concludes by saying *the promise to Abraham and his offspring...did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.* In fact, *if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.*

Another year is upon us. Let’s resolve to know Christ. Let’s resolve to rely on him and his *obedience to the law for us.* And being among the *blessed* who share his righteousness by faith, let’s resolve to pray in faith daily that our heavenly Father would *grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit.* With this circumcision of Jesus, let us resolve *that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey our God’s blessed will* in love for him who came to obey for us, our Lord Jesus. Amen.