

Eve of the Name and Circumcision of Jesus, the Eighth Day of Christmas, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 2:21

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Do you even remember the resolutions you made last year? I'll give you a hint: they were eerily similar to the ones you made the year before that. Need another hint: they're equally similar to the ones you've made for tonight. Last year's resolutions were broken so long ago that they've almost entirely escaped your memory. Then again, they're so similar to the ones that you'll remake this year, they're hard to forget. You'd like to be a better person, a more devoted parent, a harder worker, a more caring neighbor. You'd like to exercise more, give up smoking or swearing, tidy up some of those dirty corners of your life and generally make yourself a better person. Doubtless, those resolutions will be broken as well. No matter how resolved you are now to accomplish them, you simply cannot make yourself a better person. If the Lord sees fit to give you another New Year's Eve a year from now, you'll have more resolutions then, too.

2 Every old year ends with a laundry list of broken resolutions: regrets, disappointments, ways you've failed others around you, and ways you've failed yourself. And 2010 will end the same way. Sure, it seems nice and new now. And the newness of the year makes you hope for better things. But as the writer of Ecclesiastes noted well before your day: there is nothing new under the sun. Even new years bring old sins.

3 Precisely because every old year ends with a list of sins from which you cannot free yourself, each new year begins with the celebration of the circumcision and the naming of Jesus. Every Jewish boy was circumcised and given his name when he was 8 days old. So, eight days after we celebrate our Lord's Nativity, His becoming flesh, we celebrate His circumcision and naming. Even if the second verse of *Away in a Manger* were true that this Divine Baby slept silently, no crying He makes, the serene manger scene eight days later was sliced by a razor-sharp flint knife and the shrill crying of a baby. As the foreskin of the infant Savior is sliced off, you better believe He cried. And now, the fictitious words of *Away in a Manger* are

replaced by the words of Sebastien Besnault's *The Ancient Law Departs*: "His infant body now/
Begins the cross to feel;/ Those precious drops of blood that flow/ For death the victim seal."

4 It's fitting that they gave Him His name at the same time He shed His blood. His name is Jesus because He will save His people from their sin. And He doesn't save His people by laying down His sweet head asleep on the hay, or by looking down from the sky, or staying by your cradle 'til morning is nigh. He saved His people by bleeding, even at His circumcision. He saved His people by taking on human flesh and being the sacrifice for the world's sin. His name and the blood He shed are inextricably woven together. He saves His people by His blood. He has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won you from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil not with gold or silver but with His precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

5 Even when only eight days old, He shed His blood for you. The writer of Hebrews explains it this way: "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." Every sacrifice recorded in the Old Testament, every drop of blood splattered on the altar in the temple, every drop of blood sprinkled on the Israelites on the Day of Atonement was because of sin. But no other blood took away sin. All the other blood, all the other sacrifices, only pointed to the Sacrifice of the One who was Himself without sin. Only the blood of this sinless Son of God could take away sin. He began to feel the sting of death even when only eight days old. But He felt it finally on the cross. Had He not shed His blood on the cross, there would be no forgiveness of sins; without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

6 Thus begins another new year: not with resolutions bound to fail but with the holy name of Jesus which He has placed upon you and His precious, redeeming blood which has already forgiven your sins and continues to forgive your sins. There's no forgiveness of sins without blood. So here, too, your Lord forgives your sins with His shed blood in His holy Supper.

7 The One born to save His people from their sins through the shedding of His precious blood and his innocent suffering and death makes all things new. He has given you new life in the waters of Holy Baptism. He gives you each new day, each new week, each new year. And by the forgiveness given to you through His blood, He makes you a new creation, as well. As a

new creation, continually renewed by forgiveness from the Lord, you are free from your old sins, sins of the old year, and free to do good works for your brother and for your neighbor. You're free to keep your resolutions to be a better person because your Lord is the only sinless Person, and He has made you a better person, an equally sinless person, having taken your sin as His own and clothed you in His righteousness.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

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