

# "The Blood of Christ"

Luke 2:21

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho  
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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God - the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In 1949, theologian and confessor of the faith, Dorothy Sayers, wrote the following: "At the risk of appearing quite insolently obvious, I shall say that if the Church is to make any impression on the modern mind She will have to preach Christ and the Cross. Of late years, the Church has not succeeded very well in preaching Christ: She has preached Jesus, which is not quite the same thing. I find that the ordinary man simply does not grasp at all the idea that Jesus Christ and God the Creator are held to be literally the same person" ("Creed or Chaos?", page 43)

Her claim is that, while there is a great deal of preaching about the man named Jesus, the proclamation of the Divine Christ is scant. The mystery writer's intent was not that the Church preach Christ to the exclusion of the proclamation of Jesus, nor to separate the one person of the Savior, but to include both - to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ promised in the Old Testament - to proclaim that the virgin's Son is the eternal Word - to confess that Jesus is Lord.

On this Minor Festival of the Circumcision of Our Lord, the task is to do just that - to address the question, "What Child is this?" by proclaiming, once again, that the Babe of Bethlehem is the Lord God Almighty. The text is the Gospel reading assigned for this festival day, Luke 2:21, and the theme is ...

... The Blood of Christ ...

"And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Eight days have passed since the Virgin Mary "brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). The multitude of the heavenly host which appeared in that nocturnal, pastoral scene and which hymned over the flocks by night has returned into heaven. After their hasty trip to behold the Lord's manifestation in a manger, the faithful shepherds returned to the sheep under their care. That was a week and a day ago. The Divine Infant is eight days old and at this fullness of time the Christ Child begins to accomplish the mission that

His Father had sent Him to do - to fulfill the Law in our place. "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under that Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

The Blood of Christ first flows on our behalf when Immanuel is eight days old. Did you catch that phrase? "The Blood of Christ" - the words are spoken so easily and they are heard so nonchalantly, that we tend to pass them by without thinking. Ponder, for a moment, what this means. A man is not God and God does not have blood. Rather, the Christ is God and a man has blood. But behold this eight day old infant. He is "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary" ("Small Catechism"). Here is the personal union of the human and the Divine natures. The attributes of each nature is communicated to the other, so that in this One Person the miracle of the ages has happened - that God has Blood and that this Baby is Jehovah!

Therefore, without reservation or condition, we believe, teach and confess that "on account of this personal union and communion of the natures, Mary, the most blessed virgin, did not conceive a mere, ordinary human being, but a human being who is truly the Son of the Most High God, as the angel testifies. He demonstrated His Divine majesty even in His mother's womb in that He was born of a virgin without violating her virginity. Therefore she is truly the mother of God and yet remained a virgin."

"On this basis, likewise, Christ performed all His miracles and manifested His Divine Majesty according to His good pleasure, when and how He wanted to. He did so not only after His Resurrection and Ascension but also in the state of His humiliation -- for example, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, again when He was twelve years old, among the teachers, again in the garden when with one word He struck His enemies to the ground, and again in death, when He died not just like another man but in such a way that by and in His death He conquered sin, death, the devil, hell, and eternal damnation. The human nature could not have accomplished this if it had not been personally united with the Divine nature and had communion with it. .... He had this majesty immediately at His conception even in His mother's womb" ("Formula of Concord," SD, Art. VII).

This truth takes our breath away as it inundates our minds and we are immersed in what we are not able fully to comprehend. It is stunning and marvelous! The Blood of Christ is first shed for the world in His obedience to the Law - first shed for you when the Son of God and the Son of Man is circumcised on the eighth day. When that first drop of the Blood of Christ pours forth this Divine Child is named - Jesus. His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. The name means savior "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

On the eighth day, when Jesus was circumcised, He commenced His obedience to the Law by being the Sin-bearer. The Savior would continue, both actively and passively, to fulfill the Law of God until the atonement for the sins of the world was completed at the ninth hour on that first Good Friday when God Incarnate died. According to the plan of God conceived from before the foundation of the world, the sharp Jewish knife began the flow of the Blood of Christ when He was eight days old and thirty-some years later, when the brutal Roman spear pierced the heart of God, the Blood of Christ poured forth to bear witness that the Sacrifice was complete and sufficient. At His circumcision the Divine Law-Giver placed Himself under His unforgiving Law in order to fulfill it perfectly for you and at His crucifixion, Jehovah Jesus took your place under the wrath of God and endured the assault of the Devil and suffered the abuse of man. He has paid the price for every one

of your sins and transgressions.

Note the Blood of Christ, dear people. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious 'Blood of Christ,' as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The Blood is Divine; it is God's Blood - far, far superior to the blood of man or beast.

"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own Blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the 'Blood of Christ,' Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God?" (Hebrews 9:12-14).

The blessings and benefits of this Eighth Day Blood became yours when you were baptized. No more shedding of blood is required or permitted in sacrifice for your sins. Thus, baptism has replaced circumcision. Listen to the Word: "In Him (Christ) you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in Baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12). Now, dear baptized, "now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the 'Blood of Christ'" (Ephesians 13).

The Blood of Christ was sprinkled over you in Holy Baptism. That may sound and seem strange but it is nonetheless true and it is pure Gospel. Because of this personal union of the human and the Divine, the Incarnate Son of God is present at Baptism not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His assumed human nature. This is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in Baptism and we are sprinkled and covered by the Blood of Christ which washes all our sins away. In Revelation, one of the elders asked John saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" (7:13). John received the heavenly answer, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God. That was the Gospel, missionary message throughout the book of Acts - that Jesus is the Christ. St. Peter sermonized to the Jews, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). When these were cut to the heart and asked what they should do, Peter told them the Good News of God's merciful, gracious gifts, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you ... for the remission of sins." In Damascus, following his baptism, Saul began "began proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). In Thessalonica the Apostle Paul explained and demonstrated "that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and" he said "'This Jesus Whom I preach to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:3-4). This is the Gospel, missionary message that Christendom is to proclaim throughout the world, beginning in the congregation.

Basically there are three reactions to this message. The first is by those who are outside the Church. They are offended at the Gospel and it makes no sense to them. That the Baby Jesus is the Lord God Almighty requires the Spirit-given gift of faith. The Incarnation of Jehovah, the Divine Majesty of the eight-day-old Jesus, the redemption wrought by the Blood of Christ - "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Christ circumcised and Christ crucified are foolishness - nevertheless, "we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The second reaction is, sad to say, often found within the congregations of Christendom. People who claim the name Christian are offended at the means whereby God had worked out our salvation. They ask, "This is foolish and crazy! Could not God find another part of the body but this one?" While they hear and rejoice that the name of Jesus was given on the eighth day, they shy away from the circumcision of the Son of God and the shedding of the first Blood of Christ. While they behold an empty cross they are offended at the sight of a crucifix with the Savior pinned to the wooden beam and the Blood of Christ flowing from the Holy Wounds of God. In other words, they gladly hear the preaching of Jesus but close their ears to the preaching of Christ.

This is no more dramatically demonstrated than in the human reaction to the Words of our Redeemer when He declares, "This is My Body - This is My Blood." And because of unbelief in these words and the necessity to catechize, we join with the Apostle Paul and ask the questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the Lord's Supper every communicant eats Body-bread and drinks Blood-wine. Thus, out of genuine Christian love and true pastoral care, children are to be instructed before they come to communion and those who do not acknowledge and believe in the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Communion are asked to wait. "For we do not intend to admit to the Sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come" (Large Catechism, Part V).

One truth that we learn is of utmost importance in this account of the circumcision of our Lord is this - when God wants to come to the aid of people, He does so according to His ways and means which are often, as far as human discernment and judgment are concerned, nothing less than offensive and ridiculous. Naaman the leper was offended at the promise of God attached to the water of the Jordan River. He had expected something more spectacular from God and a charismatic response from the prophet. Naaman received neither and would have wasted away in his leprosy had God not had mercy on this Gentile sinner and given him the gift of repentance and faith.

That brings us to the third response - that which hears the Word of the Gospel and believes it. This response beholds the eight-day-old Son of Mary, yea the eternal Christ of God being carried to the place where He sheds His Holy Precious Blood and receives the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb -- Jesus. This response says "thanks be to God" and this soul is comforted by the Blood of Christ. A church father named Ambrose confessed that "it is faith therefore that frees men through the Blood of Christ; for 'blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered' (Ps. 32:1)" (Apology of Augsburg Confession, Art. IV, Justification).

Therefore, dear baptized, look to the Blood of Christ for forgiveness, salvation and eternal life, and avoid the fiendish, cultural cries of tolerance, license and postmodern death. While you make the confession of your sin and hear the absolution announced, stay away from those relational counselors who entice you to deny your sin and who encourage you to look to yourself and to find comfort in your efforts to improve yourself. Flee such wolves who hide in shepherd's clothing. Indeed and instead, dearly beloved, I invite you to follow the liturgy of the Church that leads you to the Blood of Christ and avoid the agenda of the world that leads you to the reason of man.

In a chapter titled, "The Greatest Drama Ever Staged" Dorothy Sayers wrote:

"Official Christianity, of late years, has been having what is known as 'a bad press.' We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine - 'dull dogma,' as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man - and the dogma is the drama" (Creed or Chaos? p 3).

In that time when Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that all the world should be enrolled, and in that place where the eternal Son of God drew His first breath in Bethlehem, part of the drama swirling around this Author of Life and Main Character on history's stage is the dogma that this eight-day-old Ancient of Days was circumcised and named Jesus. On this day and in this place we hear one verse from St. Luke and we are privileged to behold the dogma concerning ... The Blood of Christ. Amen.