

1st January 2006 Naming and Circumcision of Jesus

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Readings:

- Numbers 6:22-27
- Psalm 8, page 229
- Galatians 4:4-7
- Luke 2:15-21

text is available at <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/lectionary/BChristmas/bHolyName.htm>

Sunday 1st January 2006
CHRISTMAS I

The Christmas season **begins** on Christmas day (Dec 25th) and runs until January 6th, Epiphany, when the story of the Wise Men is told.

Just as we continue to celebrate the birth of a child for days, weeks and months, these twelve days of Christmas give us the opportunity to celebrate the childhood and early life of Jesus, to remember his earthly family Mary and Joseph, and to recall the events which shaped his life and growth.

Normally the first Sunday after Christmas is entitled "Holy Family" but because this year the first Sunday is the 1st of January, we observe the naming and circumcision of the Lord — For all Jewish male children their naming and circumcision was on the "eighth day" — and each year the first of January is set aside to remember that Jesus was born and raised a member of God's covenant people — the Jews! Appearance? (New Scientist had a go at trying to work out what Jesus looked like a few years back... the starting point was that he looked Jewish!)

Yes, it is also New Year's Day — a great day to reflect on new beginnings:

- for Jesus
- (for Phoebe)
- for All of us!

In the gospel story, after the angels leave, we have the shepherds. It is notable that they should appear because they were a despised group in society. They were unable to undertake all the meticulous hand washing and other rules, and they were prevented by their lifestyle from attending to the many religious duties.

And after all the drama, the scene returns to describe a very normal family — Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

The shepherds describe their experience and we hear again of Mary who "treasured these words and pondered them in her heart".

The shepherds depart (exit stage left) and we hear how on the eighth day Jesus was given the name at the traditional Jewish ceremony of circumcision — *his name* Jesus; 'Iesous; Greek for Joshua Jeshua... God's Salvation

The ceremony has links back to Moses and indicates that Jesus is going to be raised in the tradition of Jewish Law and Practice.

It was an initiation into the Covenant People of God an indication of purity and the celebration was marked with great joy!

We find however, that the Christian community about seventy years after Jesus' departure to the Father, decided it should not be enforced (in Acts 15 at The Council of Jerusalem.)

The same gathering did nothing about encouraging baptism however. They did try to emphasize the Grace of the Lord Jesus but mentioned nothing about baptism.

Baptism however became quickly part of Christian

tradition passing from John the Baptist to Jesus and the apostles.

Jesus referred to regeneration — born from above "by water and the Spirit— (John 3)

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that it requires **faith** and **repentance**

St Paul tells us that it effects our "**union with Christ**" we are **cleansed of our sins** and incorporated **into the Body of Christ**.

The use of the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in baptism is unlikely to have begun with Jesus but developed as the appreciation of the Holy Trinity grew.

Infant baptism appears to have grown up from the early days of the Church and I think reflects some of the aspects of what was expected by the Jews at circumcision.

1. The child is brought by the family
2. And is in the ritual of washing (that's what baptism means) incorporated into the Christian people of God.
3. And her (his) name is used as an affirmation of individuality and special character and personality.
4. Promises are made on her/his behalf
5. And we pledge our part as God's people to raise her in a tradition of
 - living
 - teaching
 - prayer
 - worship

As it was for Jesus, so it is for all the baptised (and for Phoebe today).

Affirmed as a special creation, an individual in her own right;

Raised in the context of a family;

And also within the context of the Body of Christ

— the wider people of God;

in the tradition of Christian life, teaching, prayer and worship.