

Warning: getimagesize(images/preghiera/vangelo/16_avvento/16_12_31_circoncisione.jpg): failed to open stream:
No such file or directory in /home/monast59/public_html/plugins/content/multithumb/multithumb.php on line
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The Blessing on Humanity

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1 January 2008

Circumcision; Holy Name of Jesus; Mary, Mother of God

“When the eight days prescribed for the circumcision were up, he was given the name of Jesus, as he had been called by the angel before being conceived in his mother’s womb” (Lk 2:21). In this verse, which is also the pericope of the Gospel proclaimed on this feast, are contained the three bases of the solemnity that also marks the beginning of the civil year in western lands.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but we could say that eight days later is celebrated his identity, hence his belonging: Jesus is circumcised, with the act that renders him as belonging to the people of the covenant; Jesus receives his name, the name that symbolizes his personal and unique vocation, from Mary and Joseph, within a definite family in which he was born and now “comes to the world”; Jesus, born of the Holy Spirit and Mary, has a mother, yet only God could give him to men. We will try to enter more deeply into the contemplation of this triple mystery.

Jesus, as it was prescribed in the law, is circumcised in order to enter thus into the “holy covenant” stipulated with Abraham (cf. Gen 17:10–11). In Jesus’ flesh that wound, that removal which will remain for always, indicates that he is a son of Abraham, in definitive and perennial covenant with his God: we could say that that sign incised on Jesus’ body narrates his being a Jew, and a Jew always. Luke records this example because it is decisive as regards Jesus’ identity and belonging, because it is a sign of the promise made to the fathers and now fulfilled (cf. Lk 1:72–73), even if it is a sign that will be transcended by the New Covenant, for which appears as necessary the circumcision not made by human hand (cf. Col 2:11), a circumcision of the heart already preached by the prophets (cf. Jer 4:4).

In that case it is important and decisive to recall Jesus' circumcision in order to affirm that it is not the mark of a rebel people — as unfortunately some church fathers have sometimes viewed it! — but rather the sign of participation in the covenant sanctioned with God by the sons of Abraham's descent, yesterday and today, hence is the way to reaffirm that God's promise for them is unfailing: they remain the people of God in which was born the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

The circumcision, however, is also the occasion on which the child was given a name, and this also happened in Jesus' case: Joseph and Mary call him Yeshoua, an abbreviated form of Yehoshoua, "the Lord saves". And that name — which refers to the unpronounceable name of God, YHWH, and to the action of saving — was given by God himself, not by man. Jesus is a child who is born by the decision, will, and action of God, hence it is up to God to give the name, a name that indicates who Jesus is: it is an invocation of salvation — "Lord, save!" — but is also the action of salvation — "the Lord saves". This name and its powerful significance that Jesus incarnates will enable Jesus himself to be called by the Christian community that believes in him "Son of God and Lord" (cf. Lk 1:32–33).

This is the holy Name in which men will be saved, the Name through which signs will be worked, the Name thanks to which the reign of God will be extended and Satan driven out. And all of Christian history tells of the power, the holiness, and the grace of this Name when it is invoked with one's whole heart in joy or in sorrow, at the beginning of life or on the threshold of death: "Jesus, sweet memory", sings an ancient hymn.

Finally, Jesus, born under the law — hence circumcised, called by a proper name that expresses the vocation and the mission confided to him by God — was born of a woman (cf. Gal 4:4.), and that woman is Mary, the virgin of Nazareth chosen by God. It is through the operation of the Holy Spirit that Mary became pregnant, it is by God's will that she gave birth to him whom only God could give to mankind. The Most High made himself the Most Low, the infinite became finite, the eternal became temporal, the powerful became weak, the immortal became mortal, and the Spirit became flesh: and this happened in Mary's womb. Yes, the Holy Spirit assumed Mary's capacity to be mother and transformed her maternity into divine maternity: the blessed fruit of this woman's womb is Jesus, God's blessing promised to Abraham and now made flesh, made man so that all peoples may be blessed. In Mary "earth has given its fruit, God, our God, has blessed us" (Ps 67:7). That blessing repeated by priests many times — "may the Lord show his face" — is finally fulfilled: there is now the face of Jesus, who belongs to Israel, Mary's son!

At the beginning of the civil year, which actually has become the beginning of the year according to which we mark the succession of events of our life, this feast gives us a highly significant message: God's blessing on mankind — that is, Jesus, born of Mary, symbol of the entire human race — is on us daily. It is the blessing of the espousals between God and humanity.