

Today is a special feast day. This is only the second time it has fallen on a Sunday since I've been ordained. And it's one of the few feast days that takes precedence over a Sunday. It is the Feast of the Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, also known as the Feast of the Circumcision.

Here we are, exactly 8 days after Christmas. We heard in our Gospel reading from Luke about the events of the eighth day of Christmas. Nothing about 8 maids a milking. Rather, Luke tells us, in v2:21:

"After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

Naming was done at the circumcision ceremony. A chapter earlier in Luke a big deal was made about John the Baptist receiving his name at his circumcision.

Jesus also receives his name at his circumcision. Luke says the name is "given by the angel." In Luke 1, Mary is told by Gabriel to name her child Jesus. And as a parallel in Matthew 1, Joseph is also told to name him Jesus.

The fact that they name him Jesus means that they are both obedient to the messages they received from God.

As Dcn. Becky said two weeks ago, they both said, "Yes," to God. Both in going through with the birth of the child. But also in naming him Jesus.

And not only are they obedient to God's more recent commands from 9 months earlier. They are not just following the instructions of the Archangel Gabriel.

They are also obedient to God's ancient commands from 1,200, or even 2,000 years earlier. By circumcising Jesus, they are making him part of the Jewish people. He is obedient to the Law which was given 1,200 years earlier to Moses. He is part of the covenant that dates back 2,000 years earlier to Abraham.

The story of Jesus doesn't begin with his birth. God's love and care for his people date back millennia earlier. The birth of Jesus is not chapter one of the story of God and his people.

But it is the beginning of a new part of that story. The new part is so radically different that we bracket it off from the story of the Old Covenant, the Old Testament. We say that something new is happening.

Thus Jesus is born in chapter 1 of Matthew, and in chapter 2 of Luke. His birth begins a new era in the story. The new era is so significant that we organize our own calendars around his birth. BC--Before Christ. AD--Anno Domini, the Year of the Lord.

Today, 2012 AD, is the two-thousand twelfth year of a new era, the 2,012th our Lord.

Actually, because of a clerical error, it's really the 2,016th year, or the 2018th year after Jesus birth. The early monks who devised the calendar were probably off by 4 to 6 years. They couldn't Google the data. They had to hunt through what dusty Roman scrolls they could find. That there were even in the ballpark is somewhat impressive.

Yes, that means that Jesus Christ was probably born 4 to 6 BC. Yes, that means that Jesus Christ was born "Before Christ" as the calendar states it. But that's quibbling with the details. As we often say at Christmas time, it's the thought that counts.

And the thought is that the birth of Jesus is such a watershed moment in the history of the world that we organize time around the day of his first coming.

There's before Jesus. And there's since Jesus. And nothing else is of equal importance.

At his circumcision, Jesus becomes part of the old, old story. But he also is part of a new era, a new chapter in God's work in the world.

And the name given to him at his circumcision tells us about him.

Jesus.

Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name, Joshua, or Yeshua. It means the Lord helps, or the Lord saves. Not only does his circumcision inaugurate a new era. The fact that Jesus receives the name Joshua/Yeshua/Jesus in his job description and mission in life. In Jesus, God saves. In fact, to say, "Jesus saves" is a bit redundant, because that's what his name already proclaims.

And while we're on the subject, Christ is not Jesus' last name. It's his title, his job description. He's not Jesus Christ, son of Joseph and Mary Christ. He is Jesus, the Christ.

It's like the old joke. What do Winnie the Pooh, Conan the Barbarian, Oscar the Grouch, and Attila the Hun have in common? They all have the same middle name: "The." Same with Jesus. Jesus, the Christ. That's the Greek form. In Hebrew it would be Yeshua the Messiah. In English, it would be Joshua the Anointed One.

Christ, Messiah, Anointed One. All the same term. All the same job description. Doing what God sent him to do. Carrying out God's will as his chosen one.

Jesus saves. And he saves by being the Christ, God's Messiah, God' agent in the world doing his work.

On this feast of the Holy Name, we celebrate the circumcision, the fact that Jesus is part of the long line of God's plan.

We celebrate his name, that he is our savior.

And we celebrate the fact that he is the Christ. God's anointed. The Messiah. The one sent down from heaven to open up a new chapter in the history of God's redemptive work.

O come, let us adore him, Jesus Christ, the Lord.