

1-1-2017

Festival of the Circumcision and Naming of Our Lord One and Three Year Series 2017

Phillip L. Brandt
Concordia University - Portland, pbrandt@cu-portland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brandt, Phillip L., "Festival of the Circumcision and Naming of Our Lord One and Three Year Series 2017" (2017). *Sunday's Sermon*. 77.
https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon/77

This Text Resources is brought to you for free and open access by the CUP University Archives at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunday's Sermon by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

The Circumcision and Name of Jesus - January 1, 2017

One and Three Year Lectionaries

Because of a peculiarity in the calendar, this year we observe no Sundays after Christmas. The only Sunday with falls within the 12 days of Christmas, the week after Christmas, falls on another holiday, the Festival which remembers the circumcision and naming of Jesus. Synodical resources list this festival for both lectionaries and the readings are the same. Hence, only one set of notes this week.

Luther

1. We call this day New Year's Day – in the old Roman fashion. As Christians, we actually start our new year on Christmas Day, as indicated by the way we count years, that is, in the year after Christ's birth, and so on. The Romans began the year on the first day of January, and that's the custom we Germans have followed. After all, we trace back to the Roman Empire, from which have inherited a lot of other things also. For example: our whole justice system, a large part of the papacy, our time system, or the names off our weekdays: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and so on. Now, however, we are not concerned with New Year's Day in the Roman sense, nor with any other traditions from that time.

2. Since New Year's Day has been set aside to celebrate our Lord's circumcision, it's entirely proper that we preach about that today. There are two circumcisions of our Lord Jesus Christ, quite different from each other. Even though both involved a physical circumcision of the flesh, there's nevertheless a world of difference between Christ's circumcision and the Jewish circumcision, the reason being that the persons involved are very unlike and different. The one circumcised on this day excels all the others. Those circumcised under Judaism are of this earth, but the person circumcised today shines like heaven itself, yes, rules over all the heavens!

6. One lesson we can learn from the old circumcision is this: when God wants to help his people, he sometimes does it in ways that are nothing less than ridiculous as far as human judgment is concerned! Here God established a covenant with a requirement so silly that it's hard to imagine anything more ridiculous! For arrogant Gentiles what could be more laughable than that God – the eternal wisdom! – would order an eight-day-old child and the ninety-nine-year old Abraham to be circumcised – together with all other in the future who might wish to adopt the Jewish faith? This became so offensive to the Gentiles that they responded with all sorts of spiteful and scoffing nicknames for the Jews!

7. But at the same time, here we also have an example of how God makes the world look foolish! What God proposes does not please the world, and what the world undertakes does not please God! That's how all the God's commandments fare: reason butts his head against them and takes offense.

(Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils Vol. 1. Baker Books, 1996. Pp. 177-179.)

Collect of the Day

Lord God, You made Your beloved Son, our Savior, subject to the Law and caused Him to shed His blood on our behalf. Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit that our hearts may be made pure from all sins; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God made his Son subject to the Law. That is pretty easy to breeze right through on Sunday morning, but the wise preacher and congregation might stop and pause there and consider just what it is that we are acknowledging in this prayer. God caused Jesus to be subject to the Law. He did not have to do that. Our culture does not acknowledge the rule-maker much anymore, but we sure know the rules. Most of the scientific disciplines are dedicated to the idea that basic rules of nature don't change. They are always constant. Light travels at a certain speed, radioactive isotopes decay at a regular rate, and for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Even something as mundane as a cookbook is possible only because someone has investigated the practical rules which govern cooking, baking, and otherwise preparing food. Cook that brisket at too high of a temperature and you will have shoe leather to chew on. It is just one of the rules.

As the rule maker, who wrote the laws like gravity, thermodynamics, and how heat affects proteins in that piece of meat, God is not subject to those rules. God is timeless, boundless, and almighty. He is not constrained by gravity or the speed of light. There is no judge who will condemn him for destroying the world or slaying its inhabitants. God is simply above the rules to which we are subject.

We would like to weasel out of this reality. We see Jesus do the miracles and wonder if he was really subject to the Law. It looks like he bent the rules with some regularity, walking on water, multiplying loaves and fishes, turning water into wine, etc. We must wait for yeast to act on the grape's juice to get wine, Jesus appears to have speeded up the process considerably, something I am sure the folks at wineries would like to be able to do sometimes.

But here we must be careful lest we split Jesus into two. For the very same Jesus who walked on water bore a cross up a hill, lashed onward by the cruel prodding of Roman soldiers who impelled him to his execution. The Gospel writers will not let us forget how much he was under the Law in all its forms. He grew weary and he wept before the death and grave of a friend. He grew hungry and thirsty. He bled and he died. Today we will note that eight days after his humble birth in Bethlehem's stable, Joseph and Mary had their baby boy circumcised. A knife and blood was involved in a ritual which was two thousand years old at this point. Infant Jesus was united with Abraham and all of Abraham's descendants into a covenant of which the child was the fulfillment.

The Logos, the second person of the Trinity, God's only Son, had come into the flesh and was made subject to the Law. It hurt, he cried, he bled, and finally, in a bloodletting of which this circumcision was only a hint, he died.

Then we ask God for something. We look to another circumcision, a work of the Spirit on our hearts. This is not the outward sign of some human action, but a divine action which purifies us of all our sins. A work accomplished by this child in Mary and Joseph's arms whom we see in the Gospel lesson, this second circumcision unites us with Abraham, surely, but more importantly it unites us with God in his holiness and purity.

Luther was adamant about this fact of the Holy Spirit. He was not called the "holy" Spirit because he was pure, though he surely is pure, but he is the Holy Spirit because he makes people holy. We do not call him holy because of what he is, but because of what he does. This act of God's Spirit, this baptismal regeneration, this Gospel action, this is the circumcision of the heart.

Readings

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

This passage has always interested me. The real key for this is to look at verse 27. The Aaronic blessing puts the "Name" of God on the people. That has large Baptismal significance as we are baptized into that name. I think too often people believe that we baptize in God's name, as if we are doing it in his place or by his authority. The Greek uses a different preposition, however, one which suggests motion into something. While surely baptism is an authoritative act, it is an act which does something. It puts the baptized into the very name of God.

Here we should probably do a little excursus on the name of God. When Moses was leading the people up out of Egypt, God said it was too much for them to bear his presence. He caused his Name to go before the people. When Solomon built the temple he prayed that God's Name would dwell there. The name of God seems, in the OT, to have been a thing. God could put it somewhere, or, in baptismal language, you could get put inside that thing.

It also has a great connection with the Great Commission in Matthew 28 in which Jesus tells the disciples to do that baptism into God's name. At the end of that passage he says, "I with you AM." Notice the strange word order I have used. This is the word order in Greek. Do you remember what God replied to Moses when asked about his name? He said "I AM" The Septuagint had a peculiar way of rendering that name which Matthew repeats in chapter 28. He meant to tell us that we are found right in the middle of the name of God.

If that is a little too grammatical for you, you could also develop the text as an adoption sort of theme. When a person is adopted the name of the parent is legally put on them. When Aaron blessed his people, when we bless the people God has gathered before us, we are putting God's name on them. They are carrying that name out the door and into the world.

Another fun way to run with this is to run with the concept of blessing. The Saxon word for "bless" is related to the word for "blood." That also has legs to preach. We thought of seeing this name on us, baptism, as a tattoo, imprinted on the head and heart of the Christian in Baptism.

If you wanted to do more with this blessing theme, you might also want look at the blessing which Jacob stole from his father Isaac. It was a real thing in that culture, not just an empty set of words in which we speak a pious wish or when someone sneezes. I think we tend to see blessing as little more than a pious wish, words empty of real meaning, but the ancients saw it as a real, tangible thing. This blessing we speak on Sunday at the ending of the services does something to the people who hear it. I think we may sometimes forget that as we rotely rattle these things off, but this might be a great opportunity to breathe some life into that part of our services.

One might also work with the Greek literal translation of Bless which is "eulogeo" from which the term eulogy also comes. Do we speak a blessing at a funeral? Do we speak a similar blessing at a service? Have we truly lived inside these walls and it is time to eulogize us before we re-enter the dying world of the first creation? Is there another way to think about this? Another image which might help us?

Sermon Idea: Sent forth by God's Blessing! (That the Holy Spirit would open the ears the hearer to listen and believe what God is doing in every benediction.)

(It would seem a good day to sing the hymn of this title. It is not a Christmas hymn but it is a good one.)

This day is dedicated to the name of Jesus. It is eight days by Jewish reckoning from the birth of Jesus. The ancients counted inclusively, so this really is eight days by their way of thinking.

But just sitting here and admiring God's name is hardly what we are about here, as beautiful as Jesus is. His names means "The Lord Saves" or perhaps we should say "The Lord Rescues." We have probably turned "save" into a word which we hear only in church unless you are talking to a banker and that is not the sort of saving we are talking about. This saving is much more like a life-guard pulling a drowning child out of a pool. Remember, this is Moses talking to the Israelites who have just walked through the Red Sea and eaten manna in the desert. They know that God saves. They eat that salvation every day.

God is not content that we should just admire the name, but he does more. He puts it on us. No longer orphans or spectators in the divine drama of history, God puts his name on us and makes us participants. It is like going to a football game and having the coach remember that you used to play and summoning you out of the stands to don a helmet, pads, and jersey. God puts his name on you!

We are familiar with these words of the benediction. We likely hear them or similar words every Sunday we attend church. This being the Sunday after Christmas and New Year's Day, if you are hear listening to this sermon, you are one of those folks who come to Church pretty often. Chances are the words of the benediction have washed over us countless times without us ever giving it a thought. But God is not waiting for you to notice what he does, he is just doing it. (Nike stole the idea from him.) He has been putting his name on you every time you hear those words. God has been doing that to folks for over three thousand years since he first spoke these words to Moses and Aaron.

The preacher will want to examine just what it is that God's name does to a person. Look at the last sermon idea after the Gospel lesson today for a list of a few things that means, but the preacher needs to be ready to articulate at least one thing that bearing the name of God does to the person. There are lots of entities which would like to label us. Our accuser (that's what "devil" means: accuser) wants to call us "sinner." Our sinful flesh would have us submit to being named "addict" or "failure" or "fool." Eventually death will want to call us all "corpse."

But God has put his name on us. His favor rests upon us, his peace is bestowed. He smiles when his gaze rests upon us. His name is Teflon to those other attempts to label us. Call us corpse, but God has the last word. Label us sinner and failure and fool, but God has called us by his own name. Will you really say those things of God and his name? Will you really say that God is wrong? The accuser's accusation falls flat, the judge looks down from his judgment seat and holds out his hands. There we see the scars that won for us the name of "righteous" and "holy" and "perfect." Those are the things that properly belong only to God, but he has given us his name and with that name comes all those things one can say of God.

This is the New Year, perhaps we have made some resolutions to better this year. Good for you. But there is one thing that can be no better than last year, no more so true of you than on the day of your baptism. You have God's perfect and holy name applied to your life. It sticks to you and shouts a beautiful thing about you every day.

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

- ⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
- ⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

We tend to see the psalter as a collection of songs rather haphazardly put together. But this is not so. They are arranged in five books. (Is this an echo of the five books of Moses?) What is more there are some other structures involved. It appears the first two psalms serve as an introduction to the whole collection. If you count in six psalms from that point, to this psalm, #8, and then count down from the end of the psalter six psalms, down to #144, you find that they are asking the same question: What is man that you look at him. Both of them are attributed to David, but they come to the question from very different places and seem to arrive at different conclusions. Psalm 144 is much darker.

I really don't know what to make of this, except that the Bible continues to amaze and baffle me. Just when I think I have something figured out, there is something else lurking in there which I have never considered.

The preacher who considers this psalm will want to note the antiphon which begins and ends this brief poem. God's name is majestic. But look at why the psalmist calls God's name majestic. He has set his glory in the heavens. One can look at the images of the Hubble telescope or other similar devices and see what is meant. But even more so, God has silenced enemies and foes with the weakest of things, the gurgling of an infant and the cries of a child. Is the enemy struck dumb and stilled because Jesus long ago lay in her lap and cooed at Mary? Did he tremble that day? He should have.

The psalmist marvels at the position of man, but does he mean the whole of mankind or this race reduced to One, to one human being who would bear its whole burden to redemption?

Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there

is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We see this same reading in the summer of Series C when we take up a semi-continuous reading of the letter to the Galatians.

This passage is tremendously important for the understanding of why we do things. Notice the discussion of faith and Jesus in vss 23ff. Notice that all this falls under the question that Paul asked in vs 19 as well. In vs 23 we are enslaved until faith comes, in vs 24 Christ comes and we are released. Is faith then Christ? It would appear that Paul is using the terms, faith and Christ, interchangeably here. Try reading the instances of faith as Christ and vice-versa. This is bolstered when one remembers that in 2:16 the actual Greek of the text says that we are justified by the “faith of Jesus.”

Now as many of us as have put on Christ, or have put on faith, remember they are the same thing, we are all sons of God – we have the faith of Jesus, we are all in the same relational place with the Father. We may with Jesus call him “Daddy!” which is what “Abba” means.

We may toil side by side with the slaves, those who try to earn something from God by their deeds. We may in fact look just like them in the fields of this world, even with those who go by the name Christian. But the critical difference for the Christian who has heard and believed what Paul says here is found in the heart. What we do, we do for love. We are sons of God. Just as the son may be out in the field picking grapes with the slaves, just as dirty and sweaty as the servants, so to we are out doing much the same thing as the folks who working for all the wrong reasons. The man who gives a million dollars to the hospital so they will name the wing after his wife is looking for glory. But that does not mean we eschew generosity on that account. In fact, our relationship to Jesus may mean that we proportionately give even more. It is likely that the million dollar donor gives from his excess and we from our poverty, because we love God.

And please don't fall into this silliness of suggesting that we are “sons and daughters of God” That has serious problems. In the ancient world a daughter did not inherit like a son. To call someone a daughter was to admit that her standing in the law was not the same as a son. Even today, very few men will change their names when they get married, that is still the expectation of the bride. Likewise there is still much talk about glass ceilings and marble ceilings and other barriers that are set before women. Whether one likes it or not, these are still facts. Paul is making a radically equalizing statement here when he calls us all sons. Just read verse 28. There is no male or female, we are all sons, we are all heirs equally of the kingdom. When we say that we are sons and daughters, we are suggesting that there are two categories for children of God. Don't do that!

How shall we preach this marvelous relationship and what is the law against which we preach here? It seems that our human nature really only understands the relationship of the law. We like it, it works in our everyday dealings, and we think it is the only way. But Paul is proclaiming a wholly other motive for our deeds and the living of our whole life. It is a freedom which he proclaims, a freedom which still serves, but do so for a very different, liberated reason. We are the sons of God.

The preacher will want to notice, but do so briefly, a very important fact about this relationship of a son to God. First of all, parents make children, it is not the other way around. This is even more evident in the case of an adoption, but equally true in the case of a naturally born child. God establishes this, I don't, any more than some orphan in an orphanage makes his family come true by wishing for it. It takes people willing to adopt him or her before he/she has a family. The real point here is that this relationship is truly free and therefore more potent.

So notice the power and joy of this relationship. This motive for working beside the slaves is powerful and much stronger than any fear of the lash or the promise of some reward. This loving motive is born something divine which God has planted within us. It is a mystery and we will want to talk about how we will preach this on Tuesday. We can point to folks for whom this drive to serve God has led them to fantastic heights. It was no promise of reward or fear which pushed MLK to stand up for Civil Rights, or Mother Theresa to advance the cause of the poor in Calcutta. They were serving God in tremendous love. I always say that the power company will get a lot of money from me, because they threaten to cut off my power if I don't pay. But they won't get a dime more than that bill says I have to pay. It ends right there. But my children and the people I love get far more from me.

How else can we illustrate this because this is a piece which demands illustration? Do we point to shepherds jumping up to seek the infant Lord? Will we point to aged Simeon and Anna who wait for the Lord's promise to be fulfilled in the temple? Will we look at the giving of gifts and the volunteering at the homeless shelter or foodbank which we might have done this past week or next week?

Sermon Idea: Sons of God - Heirs of the Promise (That the Holy Spirit would move the hearer to joyful service rendered to a loving heavenly Father.)

If you have read the letter to the Galatians, and you really should, you know that Paul gets pretty hot in this letter. He has gotten personal. Earlier in the chapter he argued the point of the Gospel – to say that we have earned this simply contradicts the facts. In this passage Paul wants the hearer to grasp that this Gospel truth changes everything. It turns the whole world on its head. Paul wants to completely upset the traditional relationship which people have had of God, the relationship which still is the natural default position of human beings. In Paul's day people were used to being creatures, servants, even slaves of the Gods. There were sons of God, of course. They had their Hercules and Achilles sorts of heroes, but they belonged to mythology and did not live in my world.

But Paul extends that title, "Son of God" to everyone. It transcends every imaginable barrier. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. Even the Scythians get a spot in there. You might want to play with that one, actually. In the first century, Scythians were the latest barbarian horde to threaten the north-eastern boundary of the empire. They were fierce horsemen and the Romans were afraid of them. Paul says Jesus died even for them. They too are sons of God. If you want to get a sense of this happening today, look up the story of Pr. Gottfried Martens at Trinity in Berlin. Here is a link:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/why.muslim.migrants.are.embracing.christ.even.if.t.his.is.not.needed.for.them.to.stay.in.germany/70297.htm>

But for Paul this son-ship is not a static sense of being something and that is the end of the story. For Paul this son status is lived out. Much of chapters five and six will explain what he means in greater detail. Here he wants to establish that we really are sons of God, no longer slaves, no longer under the rod of our tutor. (You may want to explore the role of a tutor in ancient Greece, they really did carry a rod and they used it!)

But being out from under the tutelage of the law does not mean we suddenly are set loose with nothing to do and no accountability. Paul speaks of a greater but more joyful responsibility. Now we are serving in our own house. We are heirs. Once we were slaves, toiling for a god who demanded our service. Now we are His sons serving our own father. That does not mean we do less, we do so much more.

The slave, motivated by the lash, will work hard as long as the eyes of the foreman are on him and the threat of the lash is over him. But walk around the corner, get out of the sight of the one wielding the punishment, and his motivation to work evaporates. The son, however, does what he does for very different reasons and even when the master is not looking. He works hard, perhaps harder than the slave, because it is his own inheritance he serves. He loves his father and joyfully toils beside him in the field. It is his field too after all.

(Now, we all know that I am painting this as a fairly rosy picture of families. There are many families where sons and fathers have great tension. Don't dwell on that, but don't ignore it either. This is the divine family, perhaps imagined more than experienced, but it is a family in which people really do serve one another out of love.)

We are heirs of the promise – God has, in Jesus, delivered the Kingdom of Heaven to us. Just at the right time, Jesus came under the Law to redeem all of us slaves, to adopt each of us as sons. It is true, this is not a natural thing for us. We were not born to us. We did not deserve it. We have no claim to any right to pray the “Our Father.” But that hardly changes the fact that God did just that. He gave it to us.

Paul's image of a family is perhaps still the best one. But the creative preacher might also want to explore others. Why do people do amazing things? Why does the man go down to the local school and tutor struggling children in how to read? Why does the woman volunteer at the homeless shelter or build houses at the local Habitat for Humanity site? Surely the motives are always mixed in sinful human beings, but Paul says that for Christians, there is something more than self-interest involved here. There something of the Son of God peering out at us from those eyes. The carpenter of Nazareth may be wielding the hammer at the building site.

But this goes also for the everyday sorts of things. Why do we care for our neighbor and our own family members. Is it just because it is a habit or because they have helped us out in the past? I hope and pray not. It is Jesus inside us. Why do we drive carefully or buy groceries for our children? Are we afraid of the policeman who would ticket us or the family services types who

would charge us with neglect? Really, is that why we do that? Or do we love our fellow human being and especially our children just because we do? Do we spend that money joyfully because Christ has grabbed at least a corner of our hearts? I think so. The preacher will want to work on this. Paul is reorienting the whole world for us. To be an heir of the promise means we see and do everything differently now. God has given us life and heaven itself. He has called us his very sons. How will I live that today?

Luke 2:21

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

This may be the shortest Gospel reading in the whole lectionary. Of course Luther manages to say quite a bit about this, in face, in Klug's translation he goes on for 10 pages in the first sermon which was preached in 1531 and 8 pages in a second sermon.

Luther

14. This is circumcision different, indeed, from the old Jewish circumcision because with this circumcision our dear Lord Jesus Christ began his office, fulfilling what the angel and Simeon had proclaimed, namely, that he is the Savior, Christ the Lord, and the true light not only for the Jews in the narrow confines of their land, but also for all the Gentiles in the whole world! This the ministry he began by this first action, being circumcised on the eighth day according to the law. Here, so to speak, he grabs hold of the law and by his circumcision not only abolishes the old circumcision but the entire ceremonial Law! Circumcision, like the Law itself, was given for those conceived and born in sin and, therefore, deserving of eternal death. Neither Law nor circumcision, however, don this with divine power and might, as Lord of the law, and none would have dared to contradict him, but instead he did it all for us out of love and in humility, so that we might take it to heart for our comfort.

15. Personally, he had no need to circumcision, as a little as he needed to obey his mother, or even to die on the cross! He had both right and authority not to be subjected to the law; he did it for our sakes. But we needed a sinless one to keep the Law in our stead and thus appease the wrath of God, otherwise we would be under the curse of the law forever. That's why he put himself under the law, and with his merit and work earned freedom for us from the Law, as St. Paul says in Galatians 4:4-5: "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent for his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The fact that he placed himself under the Law was not done for his sake, for he had satisfied all righteousness and holiness required by the law without such obedience. But he came under the Law for our sakes; and the victory and righteousness he attained there was granted unto us, as he sates, Whoever believes on me, him

will neither circumcision nor law bind any longer, for, although I was not beholden to them, nonetheless I subjected myself under their demands and satisfied the; and by so doing, both circumcision and the Law have become subject to me, their Lord who has exhausted their power. Therefore, whoever clings to me in true faith I will assist in being made free from both the Law's and circumcision's burden so that he will not come under judgment.

16. And so mark this difference well; everything depends on it! Abraham came under the Law as a sinner; the infant Jesus, however, came under it not as a sinner but without guilt, as Lord of the Law, who takes away the Law's authority and power; yes, tears the Law to pieces so that it can no longer ensnare and condemn those who believe in him.

17. That's why the observance of Christ's circumcision offers such a rich sermon; there's enough here to talk about for several hours!

22. As long as men are under the Law, they have no certainty about their standing with God. No matter what man does, he forever has to say, I don't really know whether this is God-pleasing. The Law simply cannot bring us peace of mind; yes, the Law has the very opposite effect on conscience. The Law reveals sin and kills...Nobody can say, Lord, I'm in your good graces because I have done this or that good deed; instead, everyone remains troubled and fearful. Because we are thus held hostage under the Law, in the master-slave relationship, there can neither be a good conscience nor a joyous heart! And that's why we need something higher, greater, better, to give us peace. And that, of course, is the Gospel of Christ who was made under the Law to redeem us.

(Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils Vol. 1. Baker Books, 1996. Pp. 181-182, 184-185.)

Sermon Idea: He was called Jesus (OT, Epistle, and Gospel: That the hearer would trust that in Christ God has given us the fullness of life itself – we are the people defined by the name of Jesus)

This sermon builds on the naming of Jesus in verse 21. God has given Jesus a beautiful and meaningful name, a name to which he lives up when he dies on the cross for the sins of the world and rises again for our justification.

But then in the OT lesson, God tells Moses that the name of God something that can be transferred to us, by this prescriptive word, this spoken action, this blessing. When we stand before a congregation and these words are spoken, the name of Jesus is showered down upon them.

That means some things.

- a. That means the saving work of Jesus is applied to us – we are forgiven. The name of Jesus, spoken in baptism, spoken in prayer, spoken in the sacrament, spoken in sermons and read in Scriptures speaks a truth about what he does. He saves, he rescues us. When the name of Jesus comes to us, God's salvation comes to us.

- b. That means we have his name, we carry it around, we are part of the family. We are adopted into the very family of God. We have been restored to the place to which we were created to be. We are his – we belong to God. Just as we might say “she is my wife” or “he is my son” God says about us “You are mine.” That reality empowers our lives to be lives lived in God’s love.
- c. Like children who bear the name of their father, people will see Him through us. We carry his name around now with us. When people see us, they see “Christ-ians” the Jesus people. That can rebound to God positively or negatively, but he has tied his name to us. God has bound himself to us.
- d. But ultimately and most importantly this speaks of our hope. The name of Jesus speaks of a reality that Simeon and Anna saw, they died, but they saw another reality which transcended their death. Jesus means “He Saves.” God has in this name spoken something about us, a reality which is opaque to the world, but which faith can begin to see clearly. Jesus saves us from all sorts of things, all things really. Jesus really is the answer. We expect great things from God because Jesus has this name, a name he has given to us. This is a blessing, as God says. His face shines upon us. His favor rests upon us. Our art work is on his refrigerator.

So what does all this mean to us? Philippians 2 might be a good place to think about this. God gave him the name above every name. You might also talk of Simeon and Anna. They kept their eyes fixed upon the promise, they were dutiful children of their father, blessed by him.

This really is a fullness of life – not an emptiness of life. In Law/Gospel terms, our lives are empty without God, just as our days are empty time without him. He fills the void. The preacher will need to proclaim Law – that the life without that Jesus and his name applied to it, is empty, void, and desolate. But don’t spend too much time there. It is Christmas, after all. Jesus, his name, his presence, his life, is now our life. That is the Gospel and where the preacher will need to spend most of his time. Jesus’ name given to us does not mean some empty word which has no power, but it is the very presence of Christ. He dwells in us. (I John 4 – if we love, God dwells us in and we in him, for God is love.)

We might talk about gifts which get old, batteries wear out, the clothes get frayed. This is the gift which never wears out. We got the second person of the Trinity. That one doesn’t get old. The preacher might want to consider the Epistle reading here as well, or even the Psalm as a fitting conclusion to this sermon.