

## CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST/HIS SPIRIT IS WITH US

In our Gospel Reading this morning we read of the circumcision of Jesus. In verse 21 of our Gospel reading from Saint Luke it says,

'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.' (Luke 2:21)

This rite was customary for all Jewish boys at this time. And the Jews continue this tradition to the present day. And it is of course a sign of that extraordinary relationship set up by God with Abraham to show that HE was choosing them, Abraham and his descendants, and that he was going to accomplish great things through them.

But let's be honest, circumcision is *only* a sign, In the end circumcision is only the **sign** of an agreement between God and his chosen people. It is a bit like a seal that you put on a legal document such as a will. The important thing about any agreement either between individuals or nations, is not the sign or signature, or the seal - but whether you were **keeping** the terms of the agreement. As in any agreement, the signing and the seal is the easy bit. The hard bit is following the terms of the agreement.

So what about the agreement that God had with Abraham's descendants, the Jews? What was it?

The terms of the agreement was that Israel would keep the law. Well what is the law? The Law is The Ten Commandments. We should all know them. The first four are to do with our relationship with God (Love God, no idols, Sabbath, using the name of the Lord in vain) and the next six are to do with our neighbour (cheat, kill, lie, adultery, covetous)

And so it was *sticking to this agreement* that the Jews were meant to do in order to fulfil the obligation of the agreement, the covenant. The circumcision was simply the seal of the covenant.

And as we read through the Old Testament, and God's relationship with his Chosen People we find that they were never able to keep the agreement that they'd entered into with God. And why was that?

The real issue was one of **obedience**. Keeping the covenant, obeying the Ten Commandments. They could not do it. And let's be honest, it is a

struggle. Even with the best of intentions. We want to do it, but we find that we can't do it. And so we have the likes of Saint Paul saying, 'Wretched man that I am,' (Romans 7:24) or the Prophet Isaiah, prior to his commissioning, saying, 'Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips' (Isaiah. 6:5). And we are the same when we encounter God.

And that is no surprise because the Law is perfection. It tells us something about the character of God. So it is always going to be an uphill struggle, yet there were people in Ancient Israel who were righteous, or probably a better word 'upright', for only God is righteous, in the eyes of God. We think of the Prophets, Mary and Joseph, the Disciples, Joseph of Arimathea, the Roman Centurion, Jesus marvelled at that man's faith (Luke 7:9). And there were those who were unrighteous. Jesus seems to be critical of the religious teachers of the day (Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes). Jesus said that their hearts were 'far from God' (Matt. 15:8).

So what is it that needs to change? It is the Old Testament Prophets who point to the real issue. It is our hearts. It is our heart for God. It is our heart for God over our own wills. Let's be honest, it is so easy to manipulate scripture to suit our own wills, and deny the will of God. It is not just people but even nations in the past who have done this. So the big issue is our hearts.

And so the Old Testament prophets, The likes of Ezekiel, Jeremiah and others, foretold God's desire for his people. God says...

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Ez. 36:26)

That was a promise God was making to his own people. That is to you and me. 'I will give you a new heart.'

The only way God's people were going to obey the law were with God's assistance. We need God's help if we are going to live upright lives, like the prophets, the disciples, the likes of Mary and Joseph, the early church martyrs, we are going to need God's assistance. Outward signs simply won't do it. It doesn't wash with God! So we need to ask God for his help, for his assistance, and God points us to Jesus, to show us the Way, and Jesus informs us that we need to be:

'born of water and the Spirit'. (John 3:5)

If we are to live life a new life, then we must be born of the Holy Spirit. 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but The Spirit gives birth to the Spirit'. (John 3:6).

So we come to the Father, through the Son by the Holy Spirit. That is how we have a living faith with God. As Christians, we are not legalists. Sometimes in the past the church has fallen into that approach. As long as you turn up to church, or are baptised, or go to mass, or be a committed Anglican or Catholic, that is what God wants? That is simply not the truth. It is not a tick list. A tick list is something that is put away once it is completed, but that is not a living faith at all. That is the definition of a Pharisee!

So we must have a heart for God, and God helps assists us with that by his Holy Spirit. It is God who replaces the heart of stone with a heart of flesh. We must ask him to do that.

And when we do that, he fills our sails by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is what Jesus promised when he ascended to heaven.

Prior to his ascension, Jesus said,

I will not leave you as orphans. I will ask the Father, and HE (God Almighty!) will give you another advocate, the counsellor, to help you, and he will be **IN** you and you will be my people. (John 14:15)

This is a reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit. He is telling you today as His followers, that you are not **alone**, you are not on your **own**, and He is with you on your journey of life. Remember once again what we say in our church services, 'the Lord is Here, His Spirit is with us'.

He is there to assist us, he is there to counsel us, he is there to guide us. And so when temptation seems to be getting the better of us, when we are struggling to cope, when everything seems to be on top of us, smothering us, remember 'The Lord is Here, His Spirit is with us.' We cannot do it on our own. **Amen.**

*Our blest Redeemer (that is Jesus), ere he breathed, his tender last **farewell**, a Friend, a Comforter bequeathed, with us to **dwell**.*