

In Nomine Jesu

The Eighth Day and the First Blood

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Merry eighth day of Christmas! Unfortunately I do not have any maids a milking, but I do have a sermon and that's better anyway. Today, we are celebrating the Circumcision of our Lord. This is the day when our Lord shed His blood on our account for the first time. Our reading is as follows:

And when eight days came to an end they circumcised Him, and it was called, the name of Him, Jesus which He was called by the angel from His conception in the womb.¹

Before we talk of circumcision, let's talk about the fact that it happened on the eighth day after Jesus was born. At first glance, the eighth day seems a bit arbitrary. Remember though that it was God who established that circumcision should happen on the eighth day, and God doesn't do things arbitrarily.

So what is so important about the eighth day? Why did God establish it as the day the young sons of Abraham should be circumcised? From a purely practical and physical point of view it makes a certain amount of sense. You give the boy a week to make sure that he was strong enough to get through it. Yet we are a bit more interested in the theological significance of eight days.

Eight days show up in some interesting places. Not only is it the day when boys were supposed to be circumcised, it was also how old the oxen and sheep were supposed to be who were given as tithes to God.² It was on the eighth day that God accepted the offerings of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and Aaron's sons, and ordained them as priests.³ As we saw in our Old Testament reading, the

¹ Luke 2:21

² Exodus 22:30

³ Leviticus 9:1

benediction that we often hear after the Divine Service was given by God to Aaron to give to His people as His High Priest.⁴ As High Priest he would have officiated over the sacrifices in the tabernacle. It was on the eighth day is when a great many of the sacrifices were supposed to be offered in the Tabernacle according to the book of Leviticus.

The eighth day is often associated with sacrifices in the Old Testament, but what's important about the eighth day is not so much that the sacrifices were offered. What's important, is that it is on the eighth day that the sacrifices, and therefore the people, were accepted by God, as Ezekiel tells us,

“And when they have completed these days, then from the eighth day onward the priests shall offer on the altar your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, and I will accept you, declares the Lord God.”⁵

We also see eight days show up in the Gospel of John. In John, it is eight days after Easter that Jesus appears to Thomas and the rest of His disciples.

Now all of these examples are meant to show you that important things happen on the eighth day. However, we still want to know what kind of important things happen on the Eighth day. Is it important in the same way as how the Lord rested on the seventh day of creation leading to the Sabbath day? Or is it important like the number 10, which is the number of completion?

The eighth day is important because it carries with it the connotations of new life, especially new life from death. Before the sacrifices were offered, the sinner would have to wait for seven days before the eighth day arrived.

After studying this, it is my theological opinion that these seven days showed the repentance of the one who had sinned. They were living in death for seven days until the Lord finally gave them new life. These seven days seem to be

⁴ Numbers 6:22-27

⁵ Ezekiel 43:27 (ESV)

similar to the symbolism of wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes to show repentance, ashes to ashes and dust to dust. The number seven is another number of completion. We see that clearly in Creation. It was also likely on the seventh day of creation that the Fall occurred. Death entered the world on the seventh day, but Adam and Eve's repentance was completed on the eighth day. And on the eighth day, God gave the promise of new life through His Son. Therefore, I think the completion of those seven days symbolized that their living in death and their repentance was complete, but I can't bind you to that.

When the eighth day finally arrived, then they were accepted by God, through Faith and trust the One who the sacrifices were offered, and were given new life in forgiveness. Thomas doubted the Resurrection of our Lord for eight days before Jesus came to him and gave him new hope, restored faith and new life.

Even Easter is on the eighth day. You might not have thought about this before, but Holy Week is actually eight days long. It starts on Palm Sunday and isn't completed until Easter, when we declare the truth that Jesus is resurrected, and new life is obtained for all.

Coming back to circumcision, why then does it happen on the eighth day, where new life comes from death? Remember that you were born in your sins. Spiritually speaking, every single one of you was stillborn. In the Old Testament, the way to enter into the covenant, into new life, was circumcision. That is what set the Israelites apart as God's children. In many ways, circumcision was the foreshadowing of the Sacrament of Baptism. However it isn't a direct forerunner. So it's not like all babies must now be baptized on the eighth day, because that's not what Jesus said when he instituted it.

Baptism does for you more fully what circumcision did for the Israelites. One of the ways that baptism is fuller than circumcision is that both males and females are baptized, while only males are circumcised. They lived for eight days,

dead in their sin, before finally receiving new life by being included in the covenant of Abraham. In a similar way, you all were dead in your sins, before you were included in the new covenant of Faith by Baptism. In Baptism, you have received new life out of death, like the male Israelites did from circumcision.

So now we know the importance of the eighth day, the day of new life and new creation out of death. Now the question becomes, why did Jesus have to be circumcised? He was one of only three humans who were not born dead in their sin. (Adam and Eve were the other ones if you're wondering, and they actually weren't born, so I guess that makes Jesus the only human who was ever not born in His sin.) So He shouldn't have needed to be circumcised right? He was already alive because He had no sin to kill Him.

This is all very true, however, what you must remember is that Jesus was the incarnation of the entire human race. He was the representative of the entire human race. As I spoke about on Sunday, He fulfilled the entire Law because He had to save the entire human race. Part of the Law of the Lord taught that boys get circumcised on the eighth day. So even though Jesus Himself had no need for circumcision, He underwent it on our account. Because Jesus was circumcised as the representative of the entire human race, you now are no longer bound by the Law to have your sons circumcised. Because He shed His blood when He was just eight days old, you need not shed your or your sons' blood.

Today, we celebrate our Lord's first shedding of His blood on your account, His first act of Atonement. He was circumcised on the eighth day, giving you new life through His fulfilling of the Law. This is but a taste of the things to come, as we begin to look forward from the time of Christmas. Through His completion of the Law, you all have been raised from the dead, just as He was raised from the dead on the Eighth day. We also look forward to the Last Day. The Last Day is another Eighth Day. Because on that day, you will come into the full measure of

your new life. On that Last Eighth Day, you will never taste death ever again. And that is all because of our Lord fulfilling and completing the Law for you, even when He was but eight days old.

Now, may the peace which passes all understanding, and which comes from Jesus' completion of the Law on the eighth day, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Circumcision of our Lord
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Psalm 116; Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 2:21

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Soli Deo Gloria