



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Rd O}Port St john Fl 32927

**Feast of the Circumcision transferred
January 3, 2017**

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the sermon today is taken from the Old Testament reading for the Circumcision;

“the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”

Deuteronomy 30:6

To our modern way of thinking, circumcision is an outdated surgical procedure, perhaps even one we dismiss as cosmetic. To the Jewish people, circumcision was the outward sign of the particular identity of the Jews as the Chosen People of God. It was given as a commandment from God to Abraham, first as the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham himself, and second for all males who would be his descendants as a sign that the covenant would be transferred as a heritage to the children of Abraham.

What circumcision represented was the selection by God of Abraham and his descendants to be a people with a unique and particular gift. They would be the vessel through which God would be known to the world. He would speak to them directly. They would hear His Word, record the Word, and it would be through the lineage of this chosen people that the Word itself would be made flesh.

The circumstance of God making this commandment wasn't capricious. Abram, though selected by God to be the Father of a Chosen people, despaired in his old age of God fulfilling the promise.

He had a child by his consort as his way of fixing what he did not have faith in God to do. God spoke to Abram, chastising him for his pride, and then God did something remarkable. He re-named Abram, giving him the name of Abraham, and renewed His promise that He would make a Chosen people by Abraham. The instrument through which that miracle would be performed became the element of blood that is required in a covenant, and of course the birth of Isaac was miraculous, since both Abraham and Sarah were in their nineties. The circumcision of Abraham is the outward sign of the covenant, and the reminder that God's will is done by God, and that our part in the fulfillment of that will is not presumptuous action in the place of God, but through obedience and humility to Him.

It is important to remember that the circumcision was the not only a physical act, but also a spiritual act. Just as God named Abraham at the first circumcision, for the Jewish people, the ritual of circumcision became the opportunity for naming a child. The names were not chosen idly. Names were extension of a family's legacy.

We see how serious a moment the naming became when Elizabeth tried to name her child John, as her husband Zacharias was instructed by The Angel Gabriel. The priests were indignant, complaining “There are none of your family with that name”, and appealing to Zacharias. In fact when Zacharias affirms the name, his voice, which had been taken from him for his disbelief, is returned and he praises

God in the Canticle that is the prophecy that the child would be come the herald of the Messiah. The symbolism of being named to a purpose, to a mission, to be dedicated as a Chosen person of God was a deep tradition of the Jewish faith. God named Adam when he created man to His purpose. He re-named Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah, to symbolize the covenant. Jacob was made Israel. John the Baptist, as the last prophet of that Covenant with Abraham, was named by the Angel Gabriel, even before his miraculous birth to another aged couple. The very name of Jesus is given to Mary through the angel at her Annunciation.

Jesus continues that tradition with His Apostles. Simon the fisherman became St. Peter, the Rock whose faithful proclamation is the foundation of the Church. Saul of Tarsus, who was with the mob that stoned St. Stephen to death, and imprisoned and murdered Christians for their belief, is thrown from his horse and blinded. As he receives his sight and his commission from God, he becomes St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the New Covenant, that holiness of naming, as the symbol of being received into a community with the particular Godly purpose of

witnessing the Word of God to the world, is reflected in the sacrament of Baptism, when we start with the command to "Name this child."

In fact, the sacrament of baptism is the Circumcision of Christians. It is our initiation into the Church, and the means by which we are re-born as Christians. To be made a Christian is a serious proclamation. We face the world, the flesh and the devil with the Name of Jesus Christ which is given to us. Accepting that name means that we accept the commission that comes with it. We are to become Evangelists and heralds of the Love of God for His Children, and of His impending return to establish His kingdom for eternity.

We have the ritual of making resolutions as we enter the New Year. Let's make the resolution this year, that as we celebrate the Circumcision of Christ on January 1st, to make this a year we try to live up to the Name we have been given. To live as Christians, praising God and loving each other, drawing the world to Christ and to the desire to share his Name and His inheritance.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen