

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The First Reading - Numbers 6: 22-27

Numbers interrupts the story of preparing to leave Sinai with several case laws regarding the maintenance of purity in the community. Our reading is a blessing to be given to the Israelites.

The Psalm - Psalm 8

The Second Reading - Galatians 4: 4-7

Paul has told us that, before Christ came, we were like an heir under guardianship, unable to speak or to act on our own behalf. But now we are heirs in God's family, under grace. We are no longer subject to the guardianship of the Law.

The Gospel Reading - Luke 2: 15-21

After Mary has given birth to Jesus, angels have appeared to shepherds living with their flocks. They have told the great good news of Jesus' birth and have told the shepherds where to find him.

[Click here to view the readings](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Numbers%206:%2022-27%0Acw%20Psalm%208%0AGalatians%204:%204-7%0ALuke%202:%2015-21)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Numbers%206:%2022-27%0Acw%20Psalm%208%0AGalatians%204:%204-7%0ALuke%202:%2015-21

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised,
and obedient to the law for man;
Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit;
that, our hearts and all our members being mortified
from all worldly and carnal lusts,
we may in all things obey thy holy will;
through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
whose blessed Son was circumcised
in obedience to the law for our sake
and given the Name that declares your saving love:
Give us grace faithfully to bear his Name,
to worship him in the freedom of the Spirit,
and to proclaim him as the Saviour of the world;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

The Holy Name

Presider or deacon

As we celebrate the circumcision and naming of Jesus at the end of eight days, let us offer prayers to God who sends new life into every year.

Deacon or other leader

By the birth of the timeless Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God the maker of each year's dawning, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. Shine your face on all whom you have adopted in Mary's Son; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

Eternal God,

whose incarnate Son was given the name of Saviour:

Grant that we who have shared in this sacrament of our salvation

may live out our years

in the power of the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

O Holy One,

heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds

and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem.

Through the telling of the Christmas story,

let our temporal lives be caught up in the eternal

in that same child,

that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host

in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

God of glory,
your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem,
where the Light of the world is humbly born
into the darkness of human night.
Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world,
so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice,
and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.

We bless you, Abba, Father,
for you have visited your people
in one like us in all things but sin,
and in human fragility you have revealed
the face of divinity.
Gather into your arms
all the peoples of the world,
so that in your embrace
we may find blessing, peace,
and the fullness of our inheritance
as your daughters and sons. Amen.

God,
you have claimed us as your people
and entrusted the justice and holiness
of your creation
to our hands and hearts.
Hear the prayers we offer this day
on behalf of this world.

New Year

God of new beginnings,
you wipe away our tears
and call us to care for one another.
Give us eyes to see your gifts,
hearts to embrace all creation,
and hands to serve you every day of our lives.
We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

At the beginning of this new year,
we implore God's blessing upon our work
and pray for the needs of this new year of grace.
Throughout all time you have blessed your people, O God,
and dwelt among them.
On the eve [first day] of this new year,

inspire and guide us,
that all we do may find in you its beginning and fulfillment. Amen.

How majestic your name in all the earth, O Lord our Sovereign!
The heavens reflect your glory
and the earth proclaims the wonder of your loving care.
In the fullness of time you crowned creation
with the birth of your Son.
Continue your work of salvation among us
and form us into a new creation
that, as we behold the vision of a new heaven and a new earth,
we may sing your glory.
Grant that we may not only pray with our lips,
but be courageous in conduct,
responding to your grace
with faithful and fruitful action. Amen.

O God of ancient blessing,
your servant Mary pondered in her heart
the treasured words spoken about her Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Prepare our hearts to receive his Spirit,
that our tongues may confess him Lord. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES

The celebration of this scriptural festival marks three events: firstly, the naming of the infant; secondly, the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham 'and his children for ever', thus Christ's keeping of the Law; and thirdly, traditionally the first shedding of the Christ's blood. The most significant of these in the gospels is the name itself, which means 'Yahweh saves' and so is linked to the question asked by Moses of God: "What is your name?" "I am who I am," was the reply, thus the significance of Jesus's words: "Before Abraham was, I am." This feast has been observed in the church since at least the sixth century.

Numbers 6:22-27

Numbers interrupts the story of preparing to leave Sinai by stating several case laws regarding maintenance of purity and, assuming that members of the Israelite community will keep these laws and others, tells us of the priestly blessing to be bestowed on all. The law in [5:1-4](#) states that those who have skin diseases ("leprous", [5:2](#)) or have been in contact with a dead body shall be excluded from the tabernacle. [5:5-10](#) prescribes to whom restitution should be made where the injured party has died and has no next of kin. [5:12-31](#) state how marital harmony can be restored where a man suspects his wife of adultery. [6:1-21](#) state the terms of a vow required of a Nazirite, one who separates himself to the LORD for a time, rather like a monk or nun, and what is required of this person if the vow is broken. All restitution shall be before the LORD.

Now, in words used today in Christian and Jewish liturgies, God tells Moses the blessing to be given by the priests ("Aaron and his sons", v. [23](#)) when the Israelite community keeps these and other laws. While "you" is singular in v. [23](#), it is the whole community who will benefit from God's blessing and protection. May God be present ("face", v. [25](#)) with them and grant them divine favour ("gracious"); and give them "peace" (v. [26](#), wholeness, well-

being, both material and spiritual welfare). In so blessing them, the priests will put something of God's very self ("name", v. [27](#)) on them. He will identify himself with them.

Galatians 4:4-7

Some teachers in Galatia have claimed that a Christian must first embrace Judaism, observing Mosaic law. Paul wrote this letter to rebut this argument, to insist that one comes into union with God through faith in Christ, and not through ritual observances.

In vv. [1-3](#), he takes the example of an orphaned boy of minor age, an *heir*: although he owns his dead father's property, it remains under the control of trustees until the date his father set (per Palestinian practice.) He cannot speak or act on his own behalf. So it is with Paul and his readers: before "we" accepted Christ, we had no power to speak or act, being slaves to *spiritual elements*, celestial beings that control the physical elements of the universe.

But, at the time our Father set ("fullness of time", v. [4](#)), "God sent his Son", born a human ("of a woman"), indeed a Jew ("under the law"). God sent him so that we Jewish Christians might be adopted as God's children, be made part of him. Then v. [6](#): being his children, he sent the "Spirit of his Son", God's Spirit, to empower us to call him Father. ("Abba", v. [6](#), is Aramaic for *father*. Jesus prayed "Abba, ..." in the Garden of Gethsemane: see Mark [14:36](#).) So, v. [7](#), you are free from the obligations of Mosaic law, and being his child makes you an heir to God's kingdom, through Christ.

In vv. [8-9](#), Paul questions how, now that God has chosen them to know him, can they go back to *spiritual elements*. (Contemporary Jewish belief was that at Mount Sinai the Law was spoken by angels, celestial beings, *spiritual elements*.) How can they want to be enslaved again?

Luke 2:15-21

Luke has told us of Joseph and Mary's visit to Bethlehem (his ancestral town) to register in the census, and of Jesus' birth. He lies "in a manger" (v. [12](#)), a trough from which animals eat; he is sustenance for all peoples. Shepherds, living in the field with their flocks have heard the angel's announcement of the birth of "a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (v. [11](#)). Many heavenly beings have appeared, praising God and pronouncing peace: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (v. [14](#)).

Now the shepherds decide to see the glorious event for themselves (v. [15](#)). It is appropriate that the first visitors to the newborn child be shepherds: Jesus is our shepherd. Note "with haste" in v. [16](#); as Mary set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth "with haste" in [1:39](#); Jesus will later stress the urgency of his mission. The shepherds look for, and find, the infant where the angel has told them in v. [12](#), "in the manger" (v. [16](#)). They *make known*, tell Mary and Joseph – and others – the good news the angel has delivered. Mary and Zechariah have already told us something of the meaning of the birth and the destiny of Jesus in [1:31-33](#), [1:46-55](#) and [1:68-79](#). What the shepherds have been told provides another perspective on this event. Mary tries to understand ("pondered", v. [19](#)) all that she has experienced and been told, especially the great news told by the angels, but she does not immediately grasp the full significance of God's action of Jesus being born into the world. Later, after Jesus as a boy has asked his parents "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (v. [49](#)), she understands a little more. Luke does not tell us directly about Jesus' circumcision but infant boys were named on this occasion; being a Jew, he is circumcised (v. [21](#)). As a member of God's chosen people he will bring salvation to the

world. Before Jesus was conceived, an angel has said “you will name him Jesus” (1:31). His name means *God saves*. The Hebrew and Aramaic forms of *Jesus* are similar to *he will save*.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Sermons that work -

Names can tell us a lot about people’s characters and the roles they play in a story.

One of the pleasures of reading literature is discovering the meaning of characters’ names. Authors will often give their characters names that tell us something important about who they are and about what they will do in the story. The great master of giving characters names is Charles Dickens. He gives us the policemen, Sharpeye and Quickear; the family physician, Dr. Pilkens; and the surgeon, Dr. Slasher. The Bigwig Family are the stateliest people in town, Mr Bounderby is a self-made man and social climber, and the Reverend Mechisedech Howler is a preacher of the Ranting Persuasion.

One of the things that children seem to like about the Harry Potter stories is the names of the characters. They have fun sounds, and their meanings are none too subtle. Severus is a Latin word for “severe” or “strict,” and Professor Severus Snape is a strict teacher if every there was one. “Malfoy” sounds like the French for “bad faith,” mal foi; and draco means “snake” or “dragon” in Latin. Put them together and you get Draco Malfoy, a real bad apple. And the headmaster Dumbledore’s first name is Albus, which means “white,” so we may suppose he is the leader of those on the side of light.

Today in our church calendar we celebrate the Holy Name of Jesus. In the New Testament we are told that God is the one who gives Jesus his name. And in giving Jesus his name, God is telling us something important about Jesus’ character and the role he will play in the story of God’s love for the world.

<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/?s=Naming+and+circumcision+of+Jesus>

*** Scroll down Sermons that Work for two more sermons

A BRIEF HOMILY

It is a wonderful coincidence that **1st January** follows seven days after **25th December** when we celebrate the birth of Christ. For on the eighth day, according to Jewish practice, newborn males are circumcised and named.

This festival actually marks **three scriptural events**:

1. Firstly, the naming of the infant;
2. Secondly, circumcision as the sign of the covenant between God and 'Abraham and his children'
3. And thirdly, it is traditionally the first shedding of Christ's blood

The fact that Jesus was circumcised indicates that he entered the great tradition of his fathers, yet his blood would be uniquely shed on the cross. In the gospels perhaps **the most significant of the three events celebrated today is the name itself**, which means '**Yahweh saves**' and so is linked to the question that Moses asked of God: "What is your name?" "I am who I am," was the reply, hence the significance of Jesus' claim, "Before Abraham was, I am."

Miracles were performed in the name of Jesus as is baptism, we are justified in the name of Jesus and Jesus is the name above all others. Furthermore, all Christian prayer is through '**Jesus Christ our Lord.**' This feast has been observed in the church since at least the sixth century.