

**On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. (Luk 2:21 NIV)**

**Let us pray:** Almighty God and heavenly Father, you made your only-begotten Son Saviour of all mankind and gave him the precious name “Jesus” mercifully grant that we who worship his name on earth may joyfully behold him in heaven. Amen.

Dear friends of our dear Lord Jesus Christ: Today all around the world people have closed off the old year and are starting the new one 2015. It's a time of new beginnings even if it takes some getting used to. It's time to move on even if the old one lingers on, be it only in our memories, be it in unsettled accounts, be it in hurts and sores that have not healed yet. Some might still be hoping for the fulfilment of old dreams, promises made long ago or just that with the new year there's a chance of getting off to a fresh start. Well, I wish you a very blessed new year of the Lord 2015. May it be a year of blessings for you – with loads of goodness, which will let you flourish and prosper under the grace and mercy of the triune God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May his peace, grace and mercy be with you today and all the days of this new year and also for the rest of your precious life.

Today we celebrate something else also. Something very special. A real Holiday. I don't mean vacation – like mother's or father's day, or Youth and Workers day, which are all nice in their own sort of way – no, I mean holiday as in holy day. A day which has special significance because of God's plan with mankind, a day on which he again did great miracles and wonders of salvation for the people of this world. This is something different from the order of blessed creation, which is also special, but reoccurring every morning by the wonderful blessing of our gracious heavenly father, who lets it rain over good and evil, and who lets his sun shine over all people too. No, this is something special – extra-ordinary - and has got to do with his good and most gracious will to have all people saved from all evil, sin and the power of the devil and come to the knowledge of his wholesome truth. That sort of holy day – and the Church commemorates these kind of holy deeds and precious histories of God's works of salvation with its many holy days. Days reserved for going to church and letting God do his saving work to us through his means of grace, his forgiving word and his redeeming sacraments.

The Christian Church celebrates Christmas at the turn of the cold and dark winter season up north. After this 25 the days get longer again. It gets light earlier and the light lingers longer too. That's all symbolism from the northern hemisphere – and for the unity of the Church and because its good to do things in harmony and with common ground, we down south follow suit. We too celebrate Christmas on this fixed date – even though it is purely symbolical and not the historic birthdate of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet this fixed date gives us reason to celebrate Advent four weeks before Christmas. At Christmas we of course celebrate the birth of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ and his wonderful incarnation and because that is such a big and marvellous occasion, happening and story we celebrate it for a whole range of weeks – right up to the Sunday of Transfiguration, which marks the end of the Epiphany cycle and the first stage of Jesus Christ's revelation and appearance in this our world and age.

Obviously this Christmas time, which encompasses Advent and several weeks of Epiphany too and takes us right up to the time of Lent and suffering of our Lord, is a very detailed story and not just about the birthday of Jesus, of shepherds and angels, about the big star in the east and the wise men from far, the murdering of the holy innocents and all the various stations of his early life fleeing to Egypt, returning to Nazareth and working as an apprentice with his father Joseph in the carpentry until his public appearance at his baptism by John the Baptist at the Jordan, the temptation by the devil in the desert, the wedding at Cana, the first miraculous healings, wonderworks and sermons until he turns and faces Jerusalem, where he knew he had to suffer many things and ultimately die shamefully on the cross. Thank God we've got a number of Sundays to listen to this detailed story – which was written down so that we too might believe in this Jesus of Nazareth, who is the saviour and redeemer of the world, the true lamb of God, that carries the sins of the world, our Lord and our God.

Now today is the first January 2014 – the eight day after Jesus birth – and that is why the holy Christian Church commemorates the most holy circumcision of the little baby Jesus. As we read in the gospel of St. Luke: On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. (Luk 2:21 NIV) See our Lord Jesus Christ, who was true God before all time and space, became true man from the virgin Mary, who had conceived from the Holy Spirit and thus became the most highly venerated mother of God. Thus the one person Jesus Christ had 2 natures – truly divine and truly human - not mixed, but inseparable. He was the only person, who was born without sin, who did not commit any sin and who lived a pure and holy life – in complete and faithful obedience to the most holy will of the heavenly Father – right up to his sacrificial death on the cross, where he suffered vicariously for us and for our salvation. Through this obedient and faithful life he absolutely fulfilled the divine law and godly will – leaving nothing to be desired and nothing outstanding. His perfect obedience soothed the Fathers wrath over our sin and placated the heavenly Judge of all, bringing about peace and godly favour for all mankind. See – that's why he is called Jesus, because he is the saviour of the world. That was his destiny from the very beginning and before the creation of the world. That was his mission, when he was born from the holy mother Mary in Bethlehem. That is why he was then also circumcised in the temple of Jerusalem 8 days after he was born – because that was the holy and divine will and godly commandment and precept for the children of Abraham and the true Israelites as we hear it from Moses in today's Old Testament reading (Gn.17:10ff). Then for the first time he spilt his most holy and precious blood in accordance of God's most holy Law and he did it to fulfil this law perfectly and he did it vicariously and completely satisfactorily for the forgiveness of all our sins. It would not be the last time that he would pour out his blood for us. On the cross he would shed the rest of this most precious blood – for us and for our salvation – so that we would be at peace with God and live under his gracious favour now and forever. That is why we intone with the Psalmist: Oh Lord, our God, how excellent is your name in all the earth. What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you visit him? You o Lord are our Father and our Redeemer. Your name is for everlasting. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. Amen.

Let us pray: O Lord God, who for our sakes made your blessed Son, our Saviour, subject to the Law and caused him to endure the circumcision of the flesh, yes, you had him be circumcised on this 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth so that he would not break the law, which he had come to fulfil, grant that he may ever defend our minds and hearts against all allurements of our sinful flesh by the power of his grace and grant to us the true circumcision of the Spirit that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lustful passions, through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit – one God now and forever. Amen.