

## Circumcision and Name of Jesus

Matthew 1:18 – 25

*<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

A few weeks ago, one could observe migratory birds embarking on their long journey across the sea to reach warmer climates. The birds have no choice. There are no outliers who say, "I don't like this! I'll just stay here!" People are also subject to orders that they cannot control. For example, I didn't choose my parents, my language, or my siblings. I didn't even choose how sick or healthy I am in life. All one can say to all of this is: fate willed it so.

In the time of the Apostle Paul, there was a philosophical school of thought called stoicism. According to this philosophy, the entire cosmos was organized in such a way that the gods and the powers had determined an order for every person. For the individual, there was nothing left to do but submit to it and make the best of it. We moderns have removed gods from this equation. For us, the stars are no longer gods, but celestial bodies now subject to physical laws, and I am subject to the genetic makeup I received from my parents. Instead of following the dictates of the gods, we stoically submit to the dictates of fate. According to the motto: "Fate has decreed it so!" Fate has just as much power over us as it did over the stoics of old, who submitted to the power of the stars and the gods.

The cycle of birth and death is subject to this power. The Galatians of old asked themselves: "How can I escape this eternal cycle?" They accepted the message of Christ and yet they believed that individuals had to keep the laws in order to live a fulfilled life. In modern terms, they wanted fellowship with Christ alongside legalism.

But it is precisely in this striving to lead a correct life that our utter lostness and the power of sin over us become clear. We try to do the right thing, but so often we find ourselves exposed by a mistake. Then we react sensitively or with hurt feelings. We tyrannize ourselves and others with an idealized image of how we would like to be or should be. We proclaim it loud and clear: "Look what a good, humble, politically correct person I am!" That's how life according to the law works. On this path, friends become enemies. In this attempt to lead a perfect life, we become hurt and ill.

Now, here we are, gathered on January 1, 2026. Each of us will ask ourselves: "What am I going to do with what I've been given this year?" Will my goals and plans come to fruition? Will I be successful?

In the midst of our suffering under the pressures we and our fate place on ourselves, when so much seems lost and hopeless, God sends his Son. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: "When the fullness of time had come..." When Jesus came, he announced this new era by saying, "The kingdom of God has come!" Both Paul and Jesus mean that the eternal laws of birth and death have been fulfilled. The glass of time has filled up. From now on, everything is different. It is a turning point in history. The fulfillment of the Law has arrived. The end of fate has arrived because Jesus submitted himself to the Law.

He submitted himself to the constraints of being human. He submitted to flawed parents. He was also subjected to Jewish law and bears all the consequences of being human. He doesn't just assume the role of an ideal human being, but the exact opposite. He submits to the worst situation in human history. He submits to the curse of humanity. He does all this by dying for us on the cross.

That is precisely the point where everything changes. The path to living a fulfilled life doesn't happen by people constantly improving and eventually reaching the pinnacle of human existence. What happens on

the cross is a judgment pronounced in the heart of our heavenly Father. From heaven, we are granted sonship. This sonship, bestowed upon us, does not originate from an ever-improving humanity, but rather comes from God himself and is fundamentally connected to God.

Our human nature always leaves a bitter aftertaste, because unfortunately we must admit that we are not what we are meant to be. The divine sonship that God bestows upon us is different. It speaks of perfect sonship. This gift is so great that Martin Luther once said of it: "When the angels saw this, they all wished to be human."

But something entirely new also happens from our perspective. In the realization that I am a child of the heavenly Father, I cry out, "Abba, dear Father," to my God. The interesting thing is that Paul, even when addressing Gentile Christians, quite naturally uses the Aramaic form "Abba." This makes it clear that the Lord's Prayer was already known among all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. Through the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, we can pray in this way. It is the Spirit who sets me free from the bonds of fate and the Law.

According to the old law, I had to perform myself. Whoever is under the old law must do that. But children are free! As children, we are allowed to be different. We are allowed to fall! We are allowed to cry! We are allowed to confess our sins! We are allowed to receive forgiveness! We are allowed to lose and to win! We can receive both from God's hand. As a child, I even have the power to be completely different from others. I can even endure being mocked or despised by others.

Being a child of God, is a gift that comes from above, which is why it is so powerful. We've just celebrated Christmas, and many celebrate Christmas according to the letter of the law. The motto there is: "Whoever loves me will be loved in return." Billions of Euros were spent on this idea once again. Were the gifts enough to demonstrate love? Did the recipients truly appreciate the gifts? Behind these feelings lies the harsh reality of the law. The law ruins everything. Even Christmas.

The poor old world is always striving for something better. It hasn't yet realized that everything is already fulfilled. God takes a different path. He becomes a child and thus makes us children. Jesus therefore invites us to be children too. He invites us to receive gifts. Without calculation. Jesus says it plainly: "You are an heir! You are a child. The Spirit of God guides you!"

So, we stand before God as a family in this new year—a family that may contain many eccentric characters. But they are all originals! They are all true children! And as such children, we look to the future with confidence. Whatever the year may bring us, there can be nothing more than what Jesus has already given us. Amen.