

Sunday, January 15, 2011

## The feast of Circumcision

+ The church celebrates the feast of circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ every year on the eighth day of His birth. The Lord was circumcised in the flesh to fulfill the law on behalf of man who was unable to carry out most of the commandments of the law. Thus, Christ successfully went through the path that man failed to go through, in order to bless this path and to help him complete it successfully.

+ If we go back in history, we would find that the beginning of circumcision started with our father Abraham, as the Lord commanded him to be circumcised while he was 90 years of age (one year before the birth of his son Isaac). Thus, this act becomes a covenant carried out through blood in his flesh and the flesh of his male offspring. Therefore, Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael, and all his servants, then he circumcised Isaac when he was born. This is to fulfill the word of the Lord: ***“This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations”*** (Gen 17:10-12).

+ Here, we notice that circumcision is a covenant. God always wants to enter into a covenant with us, a covenant of Love and life. Because blood signifies life,

God’s covenants with man were always through blood. Additionally, circumcision is carried out by removing the foreskin of the male reproductive organ which carries life over from generation to generation. God chose circumcision to be the sign of the covenant, to assure us that He wants this covenant with us to be a covenant of life that He grants us to enjoy it with Him.

+ We also notice that circumcision was carried out on the eighth day of the birth of the boy, and on that day, he receives his new name. The eighth day is a symbol to the new life, after the completion of the seven days of the week, the beginning of the new week comes on the eighth day. This is a clear indication that through circumcision man starts a new life and a new covenant, with a new name and a new relationship with God.

+ Very early in the Old Testament, God drew the attention of His people to the deep spiritual meaning of circumcision, which is removing sin that separates us from God. Sin is the barrier that separates man from connecting with God and being in harmony with Him. Therefore, removing this barrier [Foreskin] is essential to restore our fellowship with God.

This barrier may cover the eyes such that they don’t see God or the spiritual matters. It may cover the ears such that they don’t hear the voice of God, or it may cover the heart such that it doesn’t feel God or experience His love. There are many beautiful passages in the Old Testament that stresses this spiritual meaning, such as:

\* *“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer”* (Deuteronomy 10:16)

\* *“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”* (Deuteronomy 30:6)

\* *“Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed.”* (Jeremiah 6:10)

\* *“all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”* (Jeremiah 9:26)

Therefore, our teacher Saint Paul the apostle, emphasizes through the Holy Spirit that ***“Circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter.”*** (Romans 2:29)

+ In the New Testament, circumcision of the flesh no longer has any religious value because it was a symbol of a covenant that was completely fulfilled by the blood of Christ on the cross. Hence, all the old symbols have been abolished by the revelation of Christ, but the spiritual meaning of circumcision abides. Many passages of the Bible emphasize this concept such as:

\* *“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.”* (1 Corinthians 7:19)

\* *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”* (Galatians 5:6)

\* *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”* (Galatians 6:15)

+ It is also important to know that circumcision in the Old Testament was a symbol for baptism in the New Testament. This is what St Paul the apostle explained through the holy spirit in his epistle to the Colossians: ***“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the un-circumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,”*** (Gal 2:11-13) because through Baptism we have removed from ourselves the barrier of sins and put on the righteousness of Christ.

+ Circumcision was the way to enter in a covenant and fellowship with God in the Old Testament, and without it we cannot enjoy this fellowship. Likewise, without baptism in the New Testament, we cannot obtain the rest of the sacraments, nor can we enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. In the rites of the Passover lamb, for instance, we see that the commandment of God is: ***“Every man’s servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it... For no uncircumcised person shall eat it”*** (Exodus 12:44,48). Likewise, he who has not entered in a covenant with God through baptism cannot partake of the holy sacraments, which are the true Passover lamb slain for the salvation of the world (1 Corinthians 5:7).

+ And finally, as we celebrate the feast of circumcision, we ought to renew our covenant of baptism with repentance, and remove from our lives every sin that separates us from God. We also ought to fervently pray that God may use the knife of his word to circumcise our hearts and senses, so its former innocence and purity may be restored and we become qualified to enjoy the fellowship with God.

*Fr. Yohanna Naseef*

[fryohanna@hotmail.com](mailto:fryohanna@hotmail.com)

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL