

CHRISTMAS 1
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LOGANVILLE, GA
DECEMBER 30, 2023

**THE CRYING JESUS MAKES
(Luke 2:21-30)**

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the widely cherished Christmas carol, "Away in a Manger," an unfortunate phrase found its way into the lyrics. I understand the intention behind incorporating this phrase into the song. It's an attempt to impart a sentimental notion to children, illustrating the profound dissimilarity between Jesus' birth and their own, underscoring the distinctiveness of Jesus Himself from all of us. The phrase in question is "The little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes."

Why do I deem this phrase unfortunate? Primarily because it erroneously suggests that Jesus, in His infancy, refrained from shedding tears – a notion that is, without question, inaccurate. We possess accounts of at least two instances when Jesus wept – once at the graveside of His dear friend, Lazarus, and another poignant moment on the cross, where He bore the pangs of hell itself on behalf of the entire human race. His tears flowed for the same reasons ours do – He experienced suffering. Thus, unequivocally, even as a newborn, Jesus did cry, as crying stands as the sole means by which an infant communicates hunger, teething discomfort, coldness, and every other affliction

introduced into our existence through the pervasive stain of sin.

The undeniable reality is that the entirety of the maturation process is a painful one for children, evoking also emotional distress for parents. Children cry because of physical pain, and parents cry for their children because of the emotional pain they obtain in watching their children hurt. This immutable truth held true for Jesus and His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary. Consequently, in Jesus, the only perfect child ever to be born, we find the remedy for all our physical pains and emotional heartaches. This forms the crux of our contemplation today as we consider the profound event inscribed in Luke 2:21-30.

(ESV) And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (22) And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (23) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") (24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." (25) Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (26) And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (27) And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for

him according to the custom of the Law, (28) he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, (29) "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; (30) for my eyes have seen your salvation

While the topic of circumcision may not be the most comfortable one for casual conversation, its enactment was far less comfortable, inflicting considerable pain upon the infant. Entrusting their child to a man armed with a knife, the parents were making a solemn commitment to nurture their son to be a servant of the one true God, adhering to every command of His Word, yes even when it caused pain of body and soul.

Circumcision was more than a thoughtless ritual of an ancient and ignorant culture; it served as a solemn reminder that living and raising children in accordance with God's Law is a formidable undertaking. The act of circumcision demanded parents to witness their baby bleed for the first time, inflicting a pain upon his flesh unparalleled by any prior experience. Before the eighth day, a mother might have heard cries expressing the typical needs of a newborn – cries for nourishment, cries to be held close for warmth, cries to express the need for human affection. Each of these occasions would come from within the child as he passively experienced the effects of sin in his body. However, the cry heard on circumcision day was different; it was a scream, an acknowledgment of pain, excruciating pain. This pain was actively inflicted on the child, and intentionally so.

The question that has persisted through the ages is: "Why?" Why did God ordain circumcision as the ritual for all male newborns in Israel? Why not opt for an alternative, like a pierced ear, or something devoid of pain, such as the growth of an uncut lock of hair, or at least a tattoo at a later age? Every pagan culture has some sort of ritual. Wouldn't one of those suffice?

While the precise reason behind God's choice of circumcision remains hidden from us, what we can discern is that circumcision involved the fleshly instrument through which sin is transmitted from one generation to the next. From the moment of conception, every child inherits not only the DNA determining their gender but also the spiritual corruption that defines their status as a sinner. Thus, circumcision serves as both a symbol and a tangible illustration of the depth of corruption brought on us all by sin.

Although circumcision is no longer a mandated practice for God's people, as made clear by the New Testament Scriptures, what it symbolized remains inescapable. The pervasive influence of sin and its consequential impact on our lives persists, echoing the day when Adam and Eve defied God's command. We confront this stark reality daily, but there is a sharpness to it especially when witnessing a child—our own child—bearing the repercussions of this fallen world, particularly when those consequences are transmitted by us, the parents.

As our children grow, we find happiness and joy in witnessing their every achievement – the first smile, the first uttered word, those initial steps, and beyond. Yet, intertwined with these moments of joy, we must also observe them contend with pain. Much like an Israelite mother standing helpless as her newborn son undergoes a profoundly distressing ritual, we, too, find ourselves sometimes playing the role of passive witnesses, watching our children, even in adulthood, endure pain and scream out: IT HURTS!!! Indeed, it does. Sin inflicts wounds upon us more profound than we often comprehend.

Now, the question arises: Why did Jesus undergo circumcision? He had no sin or sinful nature inherited from an earthly father. The answer to that question lies in the realization that Jesus, in effect, didn't need to undertake any specific action for our salvation, except in the sense that it aligns with God's intrinsic nature. He chose to immerse Himself in the entirety of the Law, a law that, for us, only begets pain and tears. This deliberate choice underscores Jesus' profound love for you. By subjecting Himself to the very elements of our existence that bring anguish, He leaves no room for doubt that His actions were undeniably for your sake.

In contemplating the tears shed by Jesus, we are afforded a profound perspective. Instead of resigning ourselves to the sorrow of witnessing our descendants repeat our errors, and perhaps even surpassing them, we have the privilege of observing Jesus stand in their stead and ours, leading a life of righteousness that none of us could attain. In Him,

we discover the peace of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. On the day of circumcision, it wasn't merely an indelible mark bestowed upon the infant; it was the impartation of a name. The name given to the Babe nestled in a manger, as conveyed by the angel, carried immense significance: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Thus, the priest, knife in hand, poised to inflict the pain common to every male Israelite newborn, declared for all to hear – this is the One who brings salvation. This is Jesus.

On the day of Jesus' circumcision, then, we are given a glimpse, a foreshadowing of that day on which the holy, precious blood of God's Son would be shed for you. On this eighth day after His birth a trickle of blood together with tears would eventually change into a flood of cleansing blood and substitutionary tears flowing from a cross to atone for our sins. Jesus, true to His name, embraced the full weight of sin and the hellish pains it merited to secure your eternal life. Though silent before His accusers, reminiscent of a lamb led to slaughter, on the cross, He utters words that simultaneously evoke tears of repentance and cries of profound joy: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Jesus willingly subjected Himself to laws and ordinances that, in His case, seemingly made no sense, and in the case of others seem to be so arbitrary, all to lift the burdensome weight of the Law that can only cut into your heart. When the knife descended upon the Child born of Mary, Jesus was unequivocally crying for us all. In return, you are

cleansed in His blood, from your earliest days to your final breath, united with Him and every promise in His name through Holy Baptism.

In this brief gospel narrative, profound layers unfold. A little Jewish Boy sent from heaven above encapsulates immeasurable significance. The fact that He was cut denotes the reality of His human nature, with flesh and blood like your own. The fact that He received the name His Father had chosen from eternity relays the reality of His divine nature, making the tears He cried along with the blood He shed on Calvary able to purify you from every sin.

Did the little Lord Jesus cry? Yes, because He was every bit a baby as you once were. The only difference, of course, is that He was without sin, so the tears He cried along with the blood He shed is able to set you right with your God and Father and to give you comfort and hope in all your pains. AMEN!

