

**THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH
PROVISIONAL PARISH OF ST. LUKE, AMPHILL**

Rev'd Michael Gray 15 Chesterfield Road, Cambridge CB4 1LN (01223) 426278



Sermon notes for the Circumcision

This is the Prayer Book provision for the period between the 1st and 5th of January. The 1928 book supplied a separate collect, epistle and gospel for the second Sunday after Christmas, but they are not very good choices.

Saint Luke's Christmas

Saint John provides a theological (almost philosophical) analysis of the meaning of Christmas, and it is only from ironical hints elsewhere in his Gospel that we realise he knows some details about the birth.

Saint Matthew provides a theological analysis of the meaning of Christmas in which the Old Testament is the main tool for understanding.

Saint Mark, notoriously, says nothing.

So what does Saint Luke do?

Firstly, he gives a long thought-out exposition of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus, and of that between both of them and the hopes of Israel. (Exactly the introduction a gentile reader like Theophilus needs.) Secondly, he is mainly concerned to stress the routine nature of the birth. This may seem odd, but if we want the colourful and dramatic incidents (like the Magi, the massacre of the innocents and the flight into Egypt) we go to Saint Matthew.

Saint Luke does seem to be stressing that this is a pious Jewish birth (consistent with what he has already said). Jesus is a Jew (because he is born to a Jewish mother); he is circumcised on the eighth day according to

the Law; he is redeemed on the fortieth day according to the Law, making use of the temple ritual because the family is living locally and this is practical. There is no sense of danger anywhere in the narrative.

So many of the surrounding details are secular (the census, no room at the inn, the manger) with no Old Testament antecedents. We do well to assume that it did happen like this. Even the shepherds are very humdrum (there are no gifts in Luke, their business is simply to be witnesses); almost the only theological touch, if you like, is in the passage which gives rise to our Glory be to God on High: "Let all the angels of God worship him".

When God immerses Himself in our world, He does so not in some abstract, philosophical, politically correct manner, as if he could be human without any of the details which make us human. No, He chose a particular time and place, a particular nation, a particular religion, a particular sex.

Circumcision is a very obvious instance of this. Jesus is to be marked out as a Jew, as one dedicated to God, almost from birth, in a manner almost ineradicable. This mark had only a few generations before led to the martyrdom of children - the first chapter of 1 Maccabees tells how women were hung with their circumcised children, when the mad Greek king was trying to eliminate the Jewish faith.

So when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus did so as a Jew, with all the heritage of God's people.

We are not required to be Jews ourselves, of course. But Saint Luke is sure this is our history, our heritage. And Saint Paul gives us the understanding of it: just as many plants are grown by being grafted onto a different root stock, so we have been grafted onto the Jewish root (see Romans 11.17). There was no other way for our Lord to be human; there is no other way for us to be Christian.

The readings are: epistle Romans 4.8-14, gospel St. Luke 2.15-21