

## January 1<sup>st</sup> Circumcision and Naming of Jesus

Luke 1:30 *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*

2:21 *After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 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 firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

Genesis 17:10 *This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old*

Possibly because of the controversy in the early Church over whether Christians of non-Jewish origin needed to be circumcised depiction of this episode is rare in cycles of Jesus' life until c 1000. One of the earliest examples is from the Menologion of Basil II (c 980). (A Menologion is the combined calendar and service book of the Eastern church and this feast was already being celebrated on 1 January, although this was not the first day of the year). This painting clearly depicts the setting as the Temple (note the looped-back curtains before the inner sanctuary) although in fact circumcision was performed in the home, and according to the Law Mary would not have been permitted to attend the Temple until her purification 40 days after the birth, which we will celebrate on 2<sup>nd</sup> February.



Gradually the scene became more common in Western art, with a remarkable peak in late 15<sup>th</sup>/ early 16<sup>th</sup> c Venice, from which it spread into German art. Bellini's version of around 1500 is known in at least 34 versions or copies, testimony to its popularity.



While the baby here submits quietly and willingly to this in Bernardino Butinone's painting (c 1485) the struggling child throws his arms wide, evoking his later suffering on the cross. This fits with a theological interpretation of the Circumcision as The "first shedding of Jesus' blood."



Mantegna did a number of paintings of the Circumcision. In this example (c 1460-1465) Joseph is carrying the basket with the two doves for sacrifice. On either side of the central column we see sculptured reliefs – one is of the Sacrifice of Isaac, the other of the Giving of the Law to Moses, thus linking the scene in to the Old Testament foreshadowing of the coming of Christ.



Durer's painted panel of around 1500 (probably executed by his studio team) is part of an altarpiece of "The Seven Sorrows of Mary". Durer also made a woodcut of the Circumcision around 1505, and if you look very closely at the twining tracery on the left you will see that he also includes the figure of Moses.

