

Text: Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21
Mary, Holy Mother of God
1 January 2017
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The reason we have this Gospel reading today, on the eighth day of Christmas, is because of that last sentence: 'When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.' That was the Jewish law: on the 8th day of his life, a male child was circumcised to show that he belonged to God's chosen people, the Jews, and was given his name. Starting with December 25th, Christmas Day, today - January 1st - is the 8th day of Jesus' life on earth, and that is why today, January 1st - which just happens to be New Years Day for us - is a feast day of Jesus, because today Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, followed Jewish law and had their son circumcised and given his name: "Jesus". No matter what name today's feast day has gone by - and it's gone by many names over the years: *The Circumcision of Jesus*, *The Name of Jesus*, *The 8th Day of Christmas*, and now *Mary, Holy Mother of God* - today is a celebration of Jesus, because today God the Father takes one more step in revealing his plan to give the world life and hope through his Son Jesus.

St Luke, in writing down this story in his Gospel, says, 'When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named *Jesus*' - *Jesus*, another form of the name *Joshua*. *Jesus* or *Joshua*, a name that means 'God has saved'. And St Luke goes on and adds, 'he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel *before* he was conceived in the womb' of Mary, as the angel Gabriel instructed Mary when he came to her with the message from heaven that she was to give birth to the Son of God. 'He was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel *before* he was conceived in the womb.' Even before the Son of God entered the womb of Mary to be conceived as the child *Jesus*, meaning 'God has saved', this was the Father's plan: to rescue our world, *his* world, from the downward spiral into death and destruction; to save us, and set creation again on the path of life, by sending the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, to become human like us, to fill every moment of our broken human existence with God's presence, and at the end to bring it back to the throne of God - to redeem human existence. That was the name given to the Father's rescue plan - *The Jesus Plan*, *The 'God Saves' Plan* - even before the Heavenly Father began carrying out his plan by having the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, conceived as Jesus in the womb of Mary the

child both human and divine.

And that is how today's feast got its current name, *Mary, the Holy Mother of God*. If Mary is the mother of only a human child, then Jesus is only a messenger from God, not our Savior – and we needed a Savior. That's why we celebrate Mary as *the Holy Mother of God*, because that title says that Mary's child is God with us, God in our human flesh, God living our human existence from the moment of conception to the end, and carrying us beyond our end. That's why, on today's feast, we read from St Paul, telling us, 'When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, *born of a woman, born under the law*' – the Son of God born of a woman as one of us, and born under the laws of human existence, including the Jewish law that on the 8th day – today - he be circumcised and be given his name, *Jesus – God has saved*.

The Jewish story of the creation that we read in the Bible, says that God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days, and then rested on the 7th. Today is the 8th day – both the 8th day on which Jesus is circumcised and given his name that means *God has saved*, and the 8th day of *creation*: the dawning day of God's *new* creation – creation rescued, creation restored to God's plan, creation redeemed in our Savior, the human and divine Jesus, who is both Son of God and Son of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.