

# A New Heart for a New Year



*Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* by Gregorio Lazzarini(c. 1700)

**A**T THE END OF THE CHRISTMAS Octave, we celebrate the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord. Now, while this may sound like a strange thing to commemorate, it really isn't. Let's find out why.

Our *Synaxarion* tells us that under Hebrew Law, every male child is to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. Circumcision was the physical sign God gave to Abraham of His covenant with His chosen people. Through it, the Hebrew child received this sign of his membership in the chosen people of God and also the name by which he was to be known among them.

Where did it come from? God instituted it after aged Abram and Sarai sinned by impatiently trying to speed up the fulfillment of God's long awaited promise of descendants. As the years were passing by and nothing was happening, they resorted to a common practice of the day—using a servant

woman as a surrogate mother. Abram's lack of faith in God's promise caused a disastrous mess of polygamy, adultery, family strife, and an estranged son who would become the forefather of future rivals and bitter persecutors of Israel.

**“Abram's lack of faith in God's promise caused a disastrous mess of polygamy, adultery, family strife, and an estranged son...”**

Nevertheless, after Ishmael is born, God reaffirms their covenant relationship. But instead of the traditional sacrifice of animal flesh and blood, this time He demands the sacrifice of Abram's own flesh and blood through the covenant of circumcision.

Drs. Bergsma and Pitre write:

*“[A]lthough this ritual may seem bizarre, even irrational, when taken in isolation, [it makes sense when seen within the context of the Abrahamic Cycle]. In Genesis 16, Abram attempts to bring God's promise of descendants to pass by means of his own... power, by lying with Hagar. In Genesis 17, God reaffirms His promise of descendants, but [as a result] of Abram's action, obliges him and his descendants to perform, as*

*a sign of the covenant, a sacrificial and penitential act directly tied to the [part] of his body with which he deviated from God's will. [This] covenant has [a] ... penitential symbolism. In Genesis 15 Abram cut animals to solemnize the covenant of nationhood; he now must [circumcise himself] to solemnize the covenant of great name. Therefore, there does seem to be an escalation in the intensity of the covenant commitment: it becomes both more costly and more personal."*

Now while physical circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and established as the rite of initiation into the family of Israel, it was not a solely external sign. Rather it was the physical and external sign of an interior and spiritual reality. The Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy reveal that it was to reflect the interior circumcision of one's heart by consecrating it to God and cutting away its sinful inclinations. God told the Israelites through Moses: *"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn!"* (Deut 10:16)

Yet, over the centuries, the Israelites discovered from their chronic rebellion against God, that they couldn't circumcise their own hearts by themselves. They needed nothing less than divine assistance to do so! Moses foresees this and prophesies a time when the Lord will do what they cannot: that He will circumcise their hearts in an age to come, in the time of Restoration.

Drs. Bergsma and Pitre observe:

*"... that Moses sees the necessity of the New Covenant and its future coming, even while providing the definitive form of the Old Covenant for the people of Israel (cf. Rom 2:28-29)."*

Circumcision was of the Old Covenant, and so not required under the New Covenant of Christ. Yet Jesus' New Covenant did not reject it, but rather transformed and fulfilled it. For, as St. Paul said to the Colossians, Circumcision *prefigures that "circumci-*

*sion of Christ" which is Baptism* (cf. Col 2:11-13). A mark cut on the body by human hands signifying membership with God's people became the indelible mark made on the soul, without human hands, through the Sacrament of Baptism.

So our Lord, Jesus Christ accomplishes in Baptism what circumcision only foreshadowed in ancient Israel. It is the moment when God Himself cuts away from our hearts the fleshy desires that enslave us and prevent us from loving and obeying Him as we should.

Now the Law of Circumcision did not bind Jesus.

Nevertheless, He chose to observe it by

having His parents take Him to be

circumcised. St. Thomas Aquinas

explains that this was most fitting

because: (1) It proved the

reality of His human nature;

(2) It showed His approval of

a Divinely-instituted ceremony

that *prefigures the "circumcision of Christ" which is*

*Baptism*; (3) It proved that He

was descended from Abraham,

who had received the Command-

ment of Circumcision as a sign of the

Covenant God had made with him and all

his descendants; (4) It took away from His fellow

Jews an excuse for not receiving Him and believing

in Him; (5) It gave us an example of perfect obedi-

ence; (6) It showed that *He who had come in the like-*

*ness of sinful flesh would not reject the remedy whereby*

*sinful flesh was wont to be healed*. For while the Law

was itself unable to remove sin, it was the course of

training, the boot camp, so to speak, preparing the

Chosen People for Christ's coming and directing

those of good will to Him. And finally, (7) it showed

Jesus taking upon Himself the burden of the Law, in

order to set us free from it, giving us the grace to live

the New Law, which is the Law of Love.

So now, under the New Covenant of Christ, God

circumcises our hearts through Baptism, which is the

sacrament of rebirth, precisely as He promised



Moses He would do in the time of restoration.

A few final thoughts. Our Lord's Circumcision prefigured His Crucifixion. As the great martyr Bishop, St John Fisher, observed, it was the first of seven times His blood was shed.

Because Baptism is the *circumcision of the heart* promised by Moses that surpasses physical circumcision, Christians no longer practice it. Yet, at our Baptism, which is the "circumcision of our heart," we still receive our Christian name.

We do so because Jesus, like St John the Baptist, was given His name at the time of His circumcision. Traditionally, Israelite parents would name their boy on the day of his circumcision. Within Christendom, both boys and girls receive their name on the day of their baptism, the day of the circumcision of their hearts.

So on this glorious day, the Church celebrates the circumcision of the Lord Jesus, the source and fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. We rejoice and implore the Lord, through the intercession of all the saints, to grant grace, blessing and all good things for the world in this New Year: The pardon of faults, healing of the sick, hope for the suffering, deliverance from evil, and peace to nations. And may we ever more perfectly glorify the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen!



N.B. This article borrows liberally from the works of: [Drs. John Bergsma and Brant Pitre \(\*Introduction to the Old Testament\*\)](#), [Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch \(\*Ignatius Study Bible footnotes\*\)](#), [Msgr Charles Pope \(homilies\)](#) and [St Thomas Aquinas](#).

# Book Review: *After Suicide* by Alar & Lewis

Many of us know a family member or friend who tragically took their own lives. Currently, suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers (after automobile accidents) in our country. Of note: suicide rates are highest in the affluent countries and much lower in poor countries. We often feel great guilt: “I should have noticed something and perhaps done something to prevent it.” Also, we wonder what will be their condition in eternity? In the book *After Suicide: There’s Hope for Them and for You* we have a very timely Christian and compassionate resource.

Authored by Fr. Chris Alar, MIC (Marian Fathers of the Immaculate) and fellow member, Jason Lewis, MIC, this book takes an approach based on Christian hope and the Divine Mercy, and greatly assists us in facing this tragedy.

The inspiration for it came from the 1993 suicide of the grandmother of Fr. Chris which devastated him. The first part of the book deals with this event. In speaking with a priest he said, “I felt terribly guilty because my grandmother had already been judged by God back in 1993, and I had missed my opportunity to pray for her and help her. What I really feared most, however, was the fate of her immortal soul. I worried that she was eternally lost in hell. The priest then said something that changed my life. He said, ‘Go home tonight and pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the salvation of your grandmother’s soul. This is an incredibly powerful prayer...

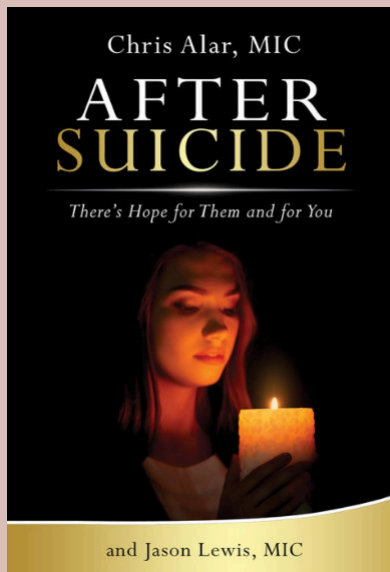
God is outside of time. There is no past or future for God, but only one big eternal present moment. God sees everything at one instant.”

Here is an important theme in the book. Because our loved one is in eternity then the constraints of time do not apply. It’s hard for us to imagine because we exist IN TIME with its beginnings and ends. This book also draws on Catholic teaching, saints and great Christian writers (C.S. Lewis, St. Padre Pio, and many more). Particularly important is the role given to the Divine Mercy Chaplet and Saint Faustina.

As the title implies, the second part of the book serves to assist you in your life. The loved ones on earth need the consolation of the Faith to carry on in life with the virtue of hope.

So if you are looking for a top notch Christian resource to assist you if this tragedy strikes

you or if you’re looking for something to enable you to help others who have suffered this, then here is the resource. The great light of Divine Mercy penetrating the darkness and hopelessness caused by the culture of death gives us great hope. You then help your loved one, yourself, and fight the culture of death with Divine Mercy.



*After Suicide: There's Hope for Them and for You* by Chris Alar, MIC and Jason Lewis, MIC. Published by Marian Press 2019.