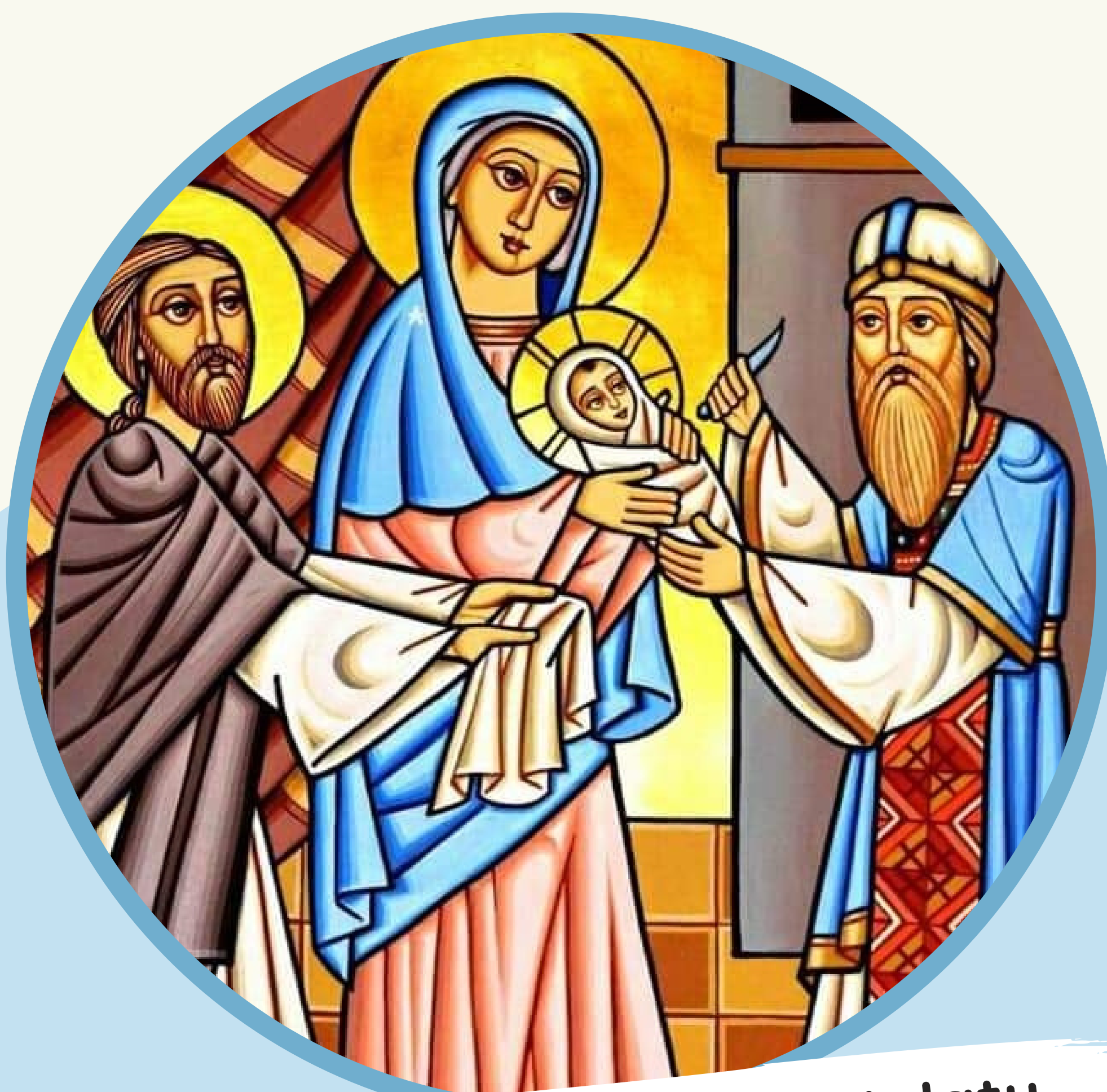


# The Feast of Circumcision & Experiencing the Heavenly Life



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## The Eighth Day

Father Abraham was ninety nine years old when he made a covenant with God, after which he was circumcised along with his son and all the men in his house. His name was also changed to Abraham by a divine order (Genesis 17). At this age, Abraham considered himself dead and as Moses the prophet says: "The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years." (Psalm 90:10) So after he was almost considered dead, he entered into a covenant with God to become a father for many nations. What is behind this covenant? It is a promise that Abraham's embrace will widen to include many nations as his children, holding them in his bosom, and accompanying them to eternal life, to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is why it's not a surprise that the circumcision was done on the eighth day from a male child's date of birth, as the seventh day refers to the perfection/completion of times, where time itself is divided into weeks (7 days). The seventh day was considered the day of the Lord, when God rested in His people, and they rested in His bosom (Genesis 2:3). As for number 6 it refers to imperfection/incompletion (because it doesn't reach number 7) and that is why the beast or the Antichrist's name is 666 (Revelation 13:18).

As for number 8, it refers to the passing from the perfection of time to what is beyond time. Our Lord Jesus Christ rose on the



first day of the week, which is the eighth day, to guide humanity towards eternal life, beyond the limits of time. Then the eighth and last blessing came saying, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10-11) When a believer is persecuted and the world sees him as not belonging to it, he becomes an affiliate of eternal life, i.e the number 8.

Abraham was circumcised and his bosom became a symbol of the open heavens that embraces his faithful children. When Christ spoke about the rich man and Lazarus, He said: "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried" (Luke 16:22). And when the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked the Jews of His time, He said: "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39), for they even being circumcised in the flesh, like their father Abraham, they did not have the bosom that widened by the inclusive love for all people. They ought to have had his loving soul!





## The Bitter Cries of the Prophets!

Jeremiah the prophet expressed the bitterness within the prophets' hearts, as the people with their leaders were only concerned with circumcising the people in the flesh but not their souls, hearts and ears, where our inner man becomes liberated from all carnal lusts that it may fly with the wings of the Spirit to the heavens.

**By circumcising the soul**, the soul doesn't remain confined to the flesh and its desires, but proceeds to taste heaven every day! It enjoys learning more about heaven practically. **The circumcision of the heart** removes from it all anger, hatred or bitterness towards any person, even if that person carries an enmity against him/her. The heart enjoys the love of Christ; the Lover of all humanity, so he loves everyone. **By circumcising the ears**, they do not find their happiness in the letter that kills (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6), but rather listens to the word of God and understand it spiritually so that the believer hears the voice of the Lord, as the voice of his/her heavenly bridegroom.

## Elijah the Prophet and the Covenant of Circumcision

The celebration of circumcision became associated with the character of the prophet Elijah because during his time, Queen Jezebel and her husband king Ahab devoted all their attention and authorities to annihilate the worship of the Living God and spread the worship of Baal, as Elijah said: "[They] have

forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.." (1 Kings 19:10). They forbade the circumcision of the flesh.

Elijah the prophet fought, and a movement of returning to the worship of the Living God began. The people repented and circumcised those who were uncircumcised with great joy. According to the Jewish tradition, Elijah the prophet becomes the patron saint of every child while being circumcised. It also became a Jewish custom across the generations, to leave an empty chair during any circumcision ceremony for Elijah, believing that Elijah himself comes every ceremony to cheerfully celebrate the circumcision of the child. **Therefore, the Coptic Church celebrates the feast of the prophet Elijah on the same day as the feast of Christ's circumcision.**





## **Our Spiritual Circumcision in the Christ Who Ascended to Heaven**

The celebration of circumcision also became associated with the event of prophet Elijah's ascension to heaven. Elijah is the only prophet who had a heavenly chariot sent to carry him to heaven until the coming of the Antichrist, when he will return to live on earth to witness for Christ to the point of shedding his blood. At his ascension, his garment had to fall off of him because this world's clothes, though not defiled, are not fit for heaven. And perhaps the falling of his clothes off his body refers to the spiritual circumcision for whoever wants to repeat after the apostle: **"and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** (Ephesians 2:6).

Even with Elijah's greatness, being unique amongst the prophets, as the only one to be lifted up temporarily to heaven, he still wasn't able to lift someone with him to heaven as but he was only a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly accepted to be circumcised - so as not be considered as breaking the law even though He was the One who legislated it - to grant us the circumcision of our souls, hearts and ears.

## **Why was the Lord Jesus Christ Circumcised?**

Some people marvel that Christ, who is alone without sin, the incarnate Word of God who is blameless, was circumcised on

the eighth day even though He didn't need it - like Abraham and his descendants - to enter into a covenant with the Father, as He Himself is the Savior of the world; the One who enables that believers to enter into a new covenant!

Others may also marvel that the church has established this event as a feast for the Lord, which comes between the Nativity Feast and the Glorious Epiphany. Was there a need for the Lord to be circumcised? Is there a need for an annual celebration of this circumcision?

The law required every male to be circumcised on the eighth day, which is a symbol for cutting off evil, and taking off the old man to enjoy fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ; achieved by the power of the Lord's resurrection that took place on the first day of the week, that is the eighth day of the week that preceded; as Saint Justin Martyr and Saint Ambrose say.

Since the symbolized has been fulfilled, the symbol - that is the circumcision of the flesh - no longer has a spiritual benefit, but instead it's the circumcision of the heart and senses. Our Christ took our place, sharing with me the burden of the law, carrying it on my behalf, performing all the rites and ordinances, even though He did not need any of them!

- And today too we have seen Him obedient to the laws of Moses, or rather we have seen Him Who as God is the Legislator, subject to His own decrees. And the reason of this

the most wise Paul teaches us, saying, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:3-5) Christ therefore ransomed from the curse of the law those who being subject to it, had been unable to keep its enactments.

And in what way did He ransom them? By fulfilling it. And to put it in another way: in order that He might expiate the guilt of Adam's transgression, He showed Himself obedient and submissive in every respect to God the Father in our stead: for it is written, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by One Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

He yielded therefore His neck to the law in company with us, because the plan of salvation so required: for it became Him to fulfill all righteousness. For having assumed the form of a slave, **as being now enrolled by reason of His human nature among those subject to the yoke**, He once even paid the half shekel to the collectors of the tribute, although by nature He is free, and as the Son not liable to pay the tax, because He took our form.

When therefore you see Him keeping the law, do not be offended, nor place the free-born among the slaves, but



reflect rather upon the profoundness of the plan of salvation. Upon the arrival, therefore, of the eighth day, on which it was customary for the circumcision in the flesh to be performed according to the enactment of the law.

### **St. Cyril of Alexandria**

- He came to be circumcised, so that no one would deny His own humanity, and He came with the sacrifice, so it can be seen that He is not a stranger to us! He offered the doves, whose symbol He established!

Mary carried the recipient of all with His offering, to bring the sacrifice to the Holy Temple according to the law. Joseph carried the doves. He came for the sake of the Boy and went up to the Holy Place to have them offered according to the law.<sup>1</sup>

### **Saint Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Alexandria on Luke 2

