

Several customs and rites centered around Jesus' birth are often left out or are pushed into the background of the Christmas Story – possibly because some feel they are too Jewish. But Jesus was a Jew and was born and lived in the Jewish culture. To understand Him more fully one needs to know what these customs and rites mean in that culture.

On the eighth day, when it was time for his b'rit-milah (circumcision), he was given the name Yeshua (Jesus), which is what the angel had called him before his conception. Luke 2:21 (CJB)

Three important things occur here that are often overlooked. 1) He was circumcised, 2) He was named, and 3) He is presented to God as the firstborn son.

Circumcision in the Jewish culture is a sign of the person being a participant in the Mosaic Covenant and a part of the Hebraic community. Genesis 17 states that *every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised.*

Cutting includes bleeding and bleeding needs clotting and Vitamin K is the clotting factor in blood. Since the 1930's when Vitamin K was discovered, it has been found that the level of Vitamin K in a newborn's blood is lowest at 2 -3 days and rises to a high level at 8 days. Once again God knows what is best for us, but doesn't always tell us why.

The traditional practice is that the child is welcomed by the congregation with *Barukh ha-Ba* ("Blessed be he that comes"). The child is then brought from the mother by the godmother and handed over at the door of the room to the godfather. The godfather then hands the child to the *mohel* (a man trained in the art of circumcision). The *mohel* places the baby for a moment on the Chair of Elijah, after which it is placed on a pillow on the knees of the *sandak* ("holder").

At the end of the ceremony Joseph names the child Yeshua (Jesus) and thereby adopts Him as his own. For all intents and purposes the community is to accept Jesus as Joseph's first-born son, with all the rights and privileges of a natural born son.

In a figurative way we can see the foreshadowing of our relationship with God as a family. Just as Joseph adopts Jesus into his family; God adopts us into His family and calls us His children.

Jesus became Joseph's son and we become God's children. The family relationship was very strong in that culture and will be even stronger in our relationship with the Father, Son & Spirit.

In the following verses Luke has combined the next two ceremonies together; Mary's purification and Jesus' presentation and redemption at the Temple.

When the time came for their purification according to the Torah of Moshe, they took him up to Yerushalayim to present him to Adonai (as it is written in the Torah of Adonai, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to Adonai") and also to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the Torah of Adonai. Luke 2:22-24

The ceremony of *pidyon-haben* (redemption of a firstborn son) reminds the Jewish people of their redemption from slavery in Egypt where the last plague to afflict the Egyptians was the death of their firstborn. God commanded the Israelites to kill a lamb and place its blood on the doorposts; then the death angel would pass over their home saving their firstborn. (see Exodus chapters 12-14)

In this remembrance each family therefore dedicates its firstborn son to God's service but then redeems the boy for a payment of five shekels. Originally, the Jewish firstborn sons were the priestly class, but later God accepted the Levites, in place of the firstborn sons, for service in the Tabernacle or Temple.

Pidyon-haben takes place after the son is thirty days old, meaning that the child is at least one month old. Verse 22 suggests either that Miryam and Yosef went up to Jerusalem at the time of *pidyon-haben* and again ten days later for Miryam's purification, or waited and performed the two ceremonies on the 40th day.

In the next Bite Size Bible Study we will look at the purification of the mother after childbirth. Sometimes it seems excessive and restrictive and to some demeaning but we will see that is far from the truth.