

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in Christ on this Feast Day of “The purification of Mary and the presentation of our Lord”. The title for today’s sermon is “Where is the Lamb?” and is from the appointed Gospel reading for this day, from Luke chapter 2. Let us pray...Amen.

Today we remember and celebrate the purification of Mary, and, at the same time, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. We remember Mary’s purification because as she was purified from her uncleanness we too need to be purified and our sins forgiven through the Son of Mary, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We read what happened that 40th day after Christ’s birth,

“And 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 male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.””(Luke 2:22-24)

There they were, going up to the temple with Jesus wrapped up in their arms and the two birds in hand. They were at the temple that day following God’s Law as given them through Moses.

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. ³ And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. ⁴ Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. ⁵ But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation. And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days.

⁶ “And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, ⁷ and he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. ⁸ And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.”(Leviticus 12:1-8)

The reason they went up to the temple was twofold. 1. For the purification of Mary as demanded by the Law. After childbirth a woman was considered unclean. To be restored and to

be ritually clean required a sacrifice. In this case it required two sacrifices. The Law demanded a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove.

“The two sacrifices performed two specific functions. Through the rite of atonement with the blood from both sacrifices, the woman was cleansed from any impurity that she had incurred from her flow of blood (12:7). Through the burning up of the lamb on the altar she was accepted by God and reinstated as a member of the congregation. She was once again ritually clean. She therefore had access to God’s holiness and His blessing. That meant too that she was once again open to the gift of another child from Him.

The observance of this rite had a profound impact on the life of every *Jewish* mother. It connected her life as a mother with her participation in the divine service and her reception of blessing from God. The rite also affirmed her status as a full member of the holy congregation and recognized her role as a bearer of blessing from God.

Her vocation as a mother then was connected with her call to holiness. What’s more, the continuity and survival of her family—and, more broadly, of Israel—depended on her and her access to the blessing gained from the presence of God in the sacred domain.”(Leviticus, Kleinig, p.268)

Not to get side tracked, but this time of ‘uncleanness’ was not to shun the woman, nor was it to say childbirth was unholy, quite the opposite. What this time of separation did was allow the new mother to heal after childbirth and not to have any additional pressures placed on her for the first couple of months. While the sacrifice for a having a son or daughter was the same, the days of uncleanness were different. After giving birth to a son, a woman was unclean for 40 days, while after giving birth to a daughter it was 80 days. This time demonstrated the importance of daughters as potential mothers. The promise of the Messiah and Saviour was to come through a woman. This time of uncleanness also made the new mother unavailable to an overzealous husband who may not wish to wait before trying to have more children.

So, Mary goes to the temple to offer her sacrifices so she can be purified. The result of her purification would allow Mary access again to the temple. But she only brought two birds. Reading the Law you might ask, ‘Where is the Lamb?’ Well, Mary could not afford the lamb to sacrifice to purify her because she was too poor. The magi had not yet visited bringing their treasure. So, Mary had to use the exception to the Law and offer the birds. A little embarrassing, but it also demonstrates how much Mary and Joseph had to offer God, almost nothing.

But there is a second reason they went up to the temple: to present Jesus, the firstborn child of Mary. An interesting detail, Jesus did not have to come with his parents to the temple as part of Mary’s purifying. The Law never demanded the child to accompany his or her mother.

What the Law did demand, according to Exodus 13(:2, 12), was for the firstborn be consecrated to the Lord or redeemed by paying a pre-set price for his, or her, life. Still, Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus with them to the temple to consecrate Jesus to the Lord and the Lord’s service, in a similar way to what Hannah did in the Old Testament lesson with her firstborn son, Samuel. Luke is clear, Jesus was never redeemed, and that is a really good thing. It is good for us because He never came to be redeemed, Jesus came to redeem all people; He came to exchange His life for ours, and to redeem us from our terminally sinful condition, to cleanse and purify us from our spiritual death with His own holiness to give us life.

Yet, while the purifying time is important, along with the sacrifices offered, they are not what is most important to Luke. Luke does not focus in on what the family was wearing, he did not go on a long excursus about the need to help the poor, nor did he explain the rationale for using the two birds. In fact, Luke hardly even mentions that Jesus’ parents are even there. Instead, Luke focuses on Jesus and the attention paid to Him. This reading fits well in the season of Epiphany in that Christ, even at 40 days old is heralded as the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation, as the Light of the world, and as the Saviour of all nations and people. Luke pays more attention on details about Simeon than on Mary and Joseph combined. This makes a huge amount of sense because as much favour and grace was shown to Jesus’ parents, it was never about them: it was all, and always about Jesus.

In today’s Gospel reading God was in His temple. The Saviour of the world, come in flesh and blood, God incarnate, was carried into the place He promised He would hear the prayers of His people. While most were oblivious to the enormity of this event, since people were coming and going as regularly happened, not everyone missed the significance. We read,

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,” something amazing happened.

(leave pulpit and walk to pick up a child)

In the midst of everything else going on at that time at the temple in Jerusalem—people coming and going from the roughly 13 different entrances into the temple—Simeon walked up to Jesus’ parents, in the midst of everyone else, all the people, the children, the commotion, and **“²⁸ Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God and said,”**(Luke 2:25-28)

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all

peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”(Luke 2:29-32)

The offspring promised to Eve; her offspring that would crush the head of the serpent had arrived. The Old Testament promise was fulfilled in this child, God in the flesh had arrived.

Those 2 birds Mary was carrying, whose blood, soon to be shed, were pointing ahead to the day when the blood of her infant become a man be shed for her, for Joseph, for you, for me and for all people. Those two birds death which would ritually purify Mary and to bring her back into the congregation of God pointed ahead to Jesus’ death for you, me, and all people: yet Jesus’ death would actuality purify us. The forgiveness and purification of all the sacrifices happening that day and every day in the temple received their power from, and pointed to, this child in Simeon’s arms. All those animals sacrificed, all the blood poured out on the altar and sprinkled on the people pointed to this Jesus and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of all sins and to restore all who believe back to God. Here Jesus was already carrying our sins and our impurities in Himself. He carried and died for all sins because we could not atone for them, we could not pay the price to purify ourselves from of our sin because the price is too high, and apart from Jesus we are spiritually bankrupt. Yet despite our unworthiness, this is why Jesus came. He came to save His creation, His people. He came to pay the price for you and to bring you into the His holy Christian church, and make you part of the communion of saints. God began this through your Baptism, when you were washed clean by water, God's Word and the blood of Christ. God continues to purify and forgive you through your regular hearing of His Word, and through eating and drinking His body and blood broken and poured out for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins.

In seeing the Saviour, Simeon was ready to die, not in sorrow, not hating his life, but rejoicing! Simeon saw with his own eyes God’s promised salvation. Simeon held in his hands Christ Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. We often sing Simeon’s words after Holy Communion, as we will again today, after tasting the forgiveness of our Lord and Saviour in His Supper. As you sing Simeon’s words, know for certain you have just received something even better. While Simeon clung to the promised Lamb, you can stand assured of Jesus’ completed work for your salvation. More than just holding an infant, you will have eaten and drank the Lamb’s own body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. Here the Holy Spirit equips you for life in this world and purifies you in Christ for access to the heavenly sanctuary for eternity. The Lamb is in His church and He is with you always. Hear again His Word of salvation; Your sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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