

“To the Temple!” Luke 2:22-30 Christmas 1 2021

Dear fellow saints, the Law of Moses is fairly clear. Concerning the first born, it states:

The LORD said to Moses, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” (Exodus 13:1–2, ESV)

When God freed the Children of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, He sent the angel of death to slaughter the first born of every man and animal in the land of Egypt. The angel of death only spared those households that had the sign of the blood of the lamb painted on their doorposts. From that moment on, God claimed the firstborn of every man and animal. As Mary’s firstborn, Jesus had to keep this law. The law required Mary and Joseph to bring Jesus to the temple and consecrate Him to the Lord.

The law also spoke about mothers who had just given birth. Concerning these mothers, it states:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “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. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch

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anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed.” (Leviticus 12:1–4, ESV)

“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, 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. 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 12:6–8, ESV)

According to the law, mothers who had just given birth were basically unclean for forty days after giving birth to boys and eighty days after giving birth to girls. At the end of that time, they had to present themselves for purification. This was a blessing in disguise. You see, anyone who was unclean was forbidden from participating in the normal routine of the community. For a woman, this included the normal household duties. The indirect result was that she was forced

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to rest up for forty days, or eighty days in the case of a baby girl, before she could rejoin the community and resume her normal duties.

So, we have one reason for Joseph to take Jesus to the temple, and another reason take Mary to the temple. The simple thing was to kill two birds with one stone ... perform the presentation of the firstborn and the purification of the mother on the same day. So it is that today's Gospel informs us that Joseph brought Mary and Jesus to the temple in order to perform these rituals.

Now, let's just stop right here and consider how weird this is. Remember who this little child is. This little child is the Word made flesh. He is God incarnate. This temple is His temple. The sacrifices in this temple are made to Him. Now, He is going to work through Joseph to place Himself under the law and keep it Himself. In a way, the consecration of Jesus will be to Himself.

In addition to that, the temple itself is the place where God dwells with His people. That means that the baby that Mary and Joseph carry into the stone temple is, in fact, the living temple of flesh and blood ... Immanuel, God with Us. So Mary and Joseph are bringing the living, breathing temple into the stone temple. There are all kinds of amazing things happening as the infant Jesus enters His holy temple.

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Then there are these two Old Testament saints waiting for Jesus ... Simeon and Anna. The Holy Spirit had given Simeon a special promise. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:26 ESV) Anna was also ready for she did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” (Luke 2:37, ESV)

People often wonder about the faithful who live at the time of Jesus. The Old Testament Christians are saved by faith in the Christ who will come sometime in their future. The New Testament Christians are saved by faith in the Christ who has already come in their past. But what about the faithful people who lived between the time Jesus was born and the time He ascended. What are they to believe?

Simeon and Anna provide one answer to that question. The Holy Spirit guided Simeon into the temple at the exact right time so that he was waiting for Jesus when Mary and Joseph brought Him into the temple. Anna was always in the temple, so that she was also ready when the Lord came. These two remind us that God never abandons His people, but always preserves them in His salvation.

The reaction of Simeon to the presence of the Christ-child is marvelous. Parents do not ordinarily allow strangers to take their babies from them. Perhaps there was something special in Simeon's

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face when he approached Mary and Joseph, or it may be that Mary and Joseph already knew Simeon from some other time. At any rate, Jesus ended up in Simeon’s embrace.

Apparently, Simeon knew exactly who he enfolded in his embrace. As he looked down into the face of this infant, he prayed, not to the heavens, but to the baby in his arms, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29–32, ESV) Simeon’s faith was in the baby who laid in his arms.

I imagine that Simeon was reluctant to give the infant back to Mary and Joseph, but as he did, he had a word for them as well. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:34–35, ESV) Even in this account from Jesus’ infancy, we already see God preparing Mary for the road ahead. The Holy Spirit spoke through the mouth of Simeon to begin preparing Mary for that day when she would look upon this son as He hung on a cross and paid for the sins of the world. When the

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Virgin saw that her innocent Son had been condemned, it cut through her heart, especially his crucifixion. And she was not the only one who had to see and experience the malice of the world. The entire Christian Church at all times must have a broken heart as she observes the price God paid to redeem us from sin.

Anna also believed, for although we do not have her exact words, Luke provides a description of her activity as she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38, ESV) She proclaimed this infant as the redeemer.

The events of today’s Gospel finally come to a close as Luke once again reminds us that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had done everything according to the law. So we see that even as an infant when, from a human point of view, Jesus was absolutely helpless, God still worked through Joseph and Mary so that Jesus kept the law perfectly. In this way, we see that Jesus was already our substitute under the law even though He was only a tiny baby.

When we combine this obedience with the piercing of the heart that Simeon spoke of, we see that the Gospel already teaches that Jesus will fulfill the law of God perfectly until His innocent sacrifice on the cross where He will totally redeem the entire world from sin. So we

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see that even as an infant, the Lord was already on the path that led to the cross.

The church today joins Simeon and Anna as we too celebrate the coming of the Lord to His people. We even join in Simeon’s song as we also have seen and even tasted the Lord’s salvation as He comes to us in His body and blood. Just as the Holy Spirit worked in Simeon to bring him into the temple to see the Lord’s Salvation, so also the Lord has given us His sacrament so that we may also see the Lord’s salvation as we eat His body and drink His blood. So it is that the Lord will always dwell with His people and give them His gifts. Amen