

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

The Presentation of Our Lord and the Purification of Mary

February 2, 2025

Luke 2:22-32

Seeing the Light

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 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

What are you looking for? What will give you true hope? It's an important question, you know. For if you're looking for the wrong thing, it won't matter much if you find it or not. And if you're looking for the right thing, how do you know where to look and how will you know if you find it? This is important because there is much today to distract us and cause us to take our eyes off Jesus. And that's never good. So, what draws your attention today? Since you're here, it should be safe to say it's not a certain groundhog in Pennsylvania. Still, with longer daylight coming on, it reminds us to look for the Light of the world, for He is our only hope.

Today is forty days after our Lord's birth. It brings to an end the Scriptural narrative of Christ's birth. Then we skip to the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, and then to His baptism by John in the Jordan. Today is sometimes called Candlemas from the blessing of candles (both for the Church's use and the devotions of the home) throughout the coming year. It's importance comes from the account in today's Gospel where we read of the presentation of our Lord and the purification of Mary, when Simeon says on seeing Jesus, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

St. Paul tells us, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Now the Law of God given to Moses required that a woman, after giving birth to a son, would be set apart for forty days. She could not go to any holy place or touch any holy thing during that time (Lev. 12:2-4). At the end of that time, the mother was to bring a lamb to the priest at the tent of meeting for a burnt offering and a turtledove or a pigeon for a sin offering. And if she can't afford a lamb, then it's two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for the burnt offering and one for the sin offering (Lev. 12:6-8). In this way she was cleansed and made pure once again.

Likewise, from the time of Mount Sinai, every firstborn male child of the sons of Israel was holy to the Lord, and dedicated to service in the Tabernacle of God. This is what we hear Hannah did with Samuel in today's Old Testament reading (1 Sam. 1:21-28). But since the tribe of Levi was the tribe of the priests, all of the other firstborn sons were redeemed, or bought back, from such service, forty days after their birth.

So here comes Mary and Joseph to do as the Law required. Yet, all was not as it appeared. For here the infant Lord comes to His home, the temple, His Father's House, to fulfill the Law, for “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”, but He was already holy, for He is the Son of God. But He who knew no sin came down from heaven and was made man, fulfilling the Law for us, even as an infant. His mother, Mary, and His foster father, Joseph, fulfilled the ceremonial law in their coming to the temple to offer up sacrifices to the Lord, that they, especially Mary, may be declared clean. Joseph and Mary offered up two turtledoves or two pigeons as a prescribed alternative to the sacrificial lamb. This lowly sacrifice further validates the fact that Jesus was born of humble origins, for His parents could not afford to buy a lamb for the sacrifice. Little did they know that their small Son was the Lamb of God who would later be sacrificed, and that by His death He would take away the sin of the world.

Yes, that holy Infant, so meek and so mild, was redeemed so that we too might be redeemed. The price of His redemption was a couple of birds, but the price of our redemption was His very life, the shedding of His divine blood. For He is the world's Redeemer. He is holy to

the LORD because He is the very Lord Himself in the flesh. He is the genuine Lamb of God who shed His blood so that our sins would be forgiven and that we would be purified. He has redeemed us so that we too can be holy.

The Lord has come to His Temple, His House, to save. And that's what Simeon saw in the little infant Jesus. Simeon picked Him up in his arms, blessed God and said, "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." Simeon had seen the Light and that was his hope.

Yes, Simeon could now depart in peace, because he had seen the very Temple of God was now in the flesh of Jesus Christ. And He got to hold Jesus in his very arms. What a blessing indeed! The salvation and redemption of God's people did not finally lie in turtledoves and temples and lambs. All of these things were but shadows that pointed to the One. God's salvation, the light for the Gentiles like you and me, and the true glory of Israel, came in that little baby that would one day die for the sins of the whole world. Only He could make Simeon whole. And when Simeon held Him in his arms, then he could go home and depart this world in peace.

But that's not even the most miraculous part of this wonderful story. For we are given the same gift of seeing God's salvation for ourselves, with our own eyes. We, who long for peace with God and consolation in the midst of this messed-up world and our messed-up lives, like Simeon, have seen our Savior. The One Simeon held in his arms, you take in your mouth. Simeon longed to be in the presence of God, and you take that Real Presence of our forgiving Lord into your very body and soul. Take and eat, take and drink, the very body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Yes, what Simeon longed for his whole life, you receive in the Lord's Supper over and over again. Here our Lord cleanses you body and soul. Here He forgives your sins. Here He makes right everything that is wrong and messed up in your life. For He has taken all your sins, all your troubles, all your sorrows and testing upon Himself. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts it this way, "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (Heb. 2:17).

Jesus was made to be like you, yet without sin, so that He could remake you to be like Him. What a wonderful gift and treasure our Lord gives you in His body and blood! He comes into the messiness, the mire, and muck of your life, and cleanses you from all sins. Thus we may truly pray:

Jesus, by Your presentation,
When they blessed You, weak and poor,
Make us see Your great salvation,
Seal us with Your promise sure;
And present us in Your glory
To Your Father, cleansed and pure. (LSB 519.3)

Truly,

Salvation unto us has come

By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.

Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

Yet as the Law must be fulfilled

Or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God's anger stilled,
Our human nature sharing.

He has for us the Law obeyed
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed

Which over us impended" (LSB 555.1, 5).

Yes, Jesus is the world's only Redeemer and He presents Himself to you in Word and Sacrament to forgive you and to give you life. Here is what you're looking for. Here is what fills you with hope. God grant you eyes that see His salvation and rejoice in it so that you too can depart in peace and live in God's presence forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener