

§ 013

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE HOMAGE OF SIMEON AND ANNA

²² 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." ²⁵ 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, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ 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."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And 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 ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. ¹

Luke 2:22-38

Introduction

1. The story of the presentation of Jesus in the temple (2:22-24) is complicated by the fact that three distinct motifs underlie the story; these have been assimilated to one another so closely that it is difficult to disentangle them.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:22-38). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

2. The first element is the purification of the mother of a child.
 - The opening part of the verse is modeled on Lev. 12:6 which ordains what is to happen 'when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter'.
 - After the birth of a son the mother was ceremonially unclean for 7 days until the circumcision, and then had to remain at home for a further 33 days; she then offered a sacrifice on the fortieth day at the Nicanor Gate on the east of the Court of Women (Lev. 12:1-8).

3. The second element in the narrative is the offering of the child to the Lord in the temple.
 - The following verse shows that this offering was in accordance with the law requiring each first-born child (2:7) to be offered to God and a price paid for its redemption.

4. Since, however, the child was brought to the temple, which was not necessary for the act of redemption, we should probably find a third element in the narrative, namely the offering of the child to God for his service, in the same way as Samuel was offered by his parents to God (1 Sam. 1:11, 22, 28).²
 - Hence in the case of Jesus no redemption price was paid, for the child was not redeemed but rather consecrated to the service of God.³

Commentary

1. *When the time came for their purification.* This refers to the provisions of Leviticus 12.
 - A woman was regarded as ceremonially impure for forty days after the birth of a son.

² The law (Ex. 13; 22:28f.; 34:19f.; Nu. 3:11-13, 40-51; 8:16-18; 18:15-18; Dt. 15:19f.) required that the first-born of animals be offered in sacrifice to Yahweh. The choice of Levi as a sacred tribe was regarded as a substitute for the offering of the first-born of men, but at the same time a ransom price of 5 shekels was laid down. Although in Nu. 3:46f. this payment was made in the first instance only for the 273 Israelites in excess of the number of Levites, the payment had to be made subsequently for all first-born. It could be paid to a priest anywhere (Ex. 13:2 (22b)). The facts that the scene of the present incident is the temple, no ransom price is mentioned, and the child is present, show that Jesus is not here being redeemed but consecrated to the Lord. [Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text.*]

³ Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text.* Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (115). Exeter [Eng.]: Paternoster Press.

- Because her “impurity” was connected with the birth of a child, the child is also involved in it, and therefore the original reading is “*their* purification”.^{4 5}
2. Through this also the Savior undergoes humiliation.
 - For the sake of the redemption of His people, He takes their impurity upon Himself also in this connection.
 3. After the forty days two “purification” sacrifices—a lamb as burnt-offering and a pigeon as sin-offering—had to be brought.
 - But in the case of poor persons a _____⁶ could also be sacrificed in the place of the lamb.
 - Because Joseph and Mary were poor, they brought two pigeons to be sacrificed in the temple at Jerusalem.
 4. The sacrifices symbolized that the sacrificer deserved death, but that the sacrificial animal is loaded with the guilt and death-penalty and for the sake of the sacrificer enters upon death to set him free from his guilt of sin.
 - According to Exodus 13 a sacrifice had always to be offered for a first-born to symbolize the fact that the death-penalty lay on him and had to be taken away through the sacrifice.
 - This sacrifice is brought in the case of Jesus because He has taken upon Himself the death-penalty of the sinful people for whose salvation He became Man.⁷

⁴ However, Morris says: The reference to *their* purification is strange. Some think Jesus is included, but it seems more likely that *their* refers to the same people as the following *they*, i.e. Joseph and Mary. If Mary was ceremonially unclean it was almost a certainty that Joseph would contract defilement and they would both need cleansing. [Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (103). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]

⁵ Stein disagrees: The reference to “their purification” is difficult in that only Mary needed the purification rite. Also does “their” refer to Jesus and Mary or to Joseph and Mary? The clearest antecedent of “their” appears to be subject of the verb “took,” i.e., they. (The names Joseph and Mary are not found in the Greek text.) If it refers to Joseph and Mary, the pronoun “their” gives a sense of family solidarity in which Mary’s need of purification is seen as a need for this “one flesh” (Gen 2:24) unit. Since a child did not need to experience any such purification, if the “their” refers to Mary and Jesus this would indicate that Luke simply used the term “purification,” which was one element of the ritual, to describe the entire ritual that Mary and her son needed to experience. Compare 1 Sam 1:22–24. [Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (113). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

⁶ pigeon

⁷ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (117). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

5. *They brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.* Apart from the bringing of the sacrifices, Joseph and Mary also brought Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord (verse 22), to consecrate Him to the service of God.
- And whilst the consecration of first-born babes was but too often unrealized in later life, in the case of Jesus it was completely fulfilled.
 - Right from the very beginning until the end He served God perfectly and glorified Him by His voluntary and complete devotion.
6. This visit of Joseph and Mary with the Child to Jerusalem probably _____⁸ the visit of the Wise Men from the East (Matt. 2).
- For after the warning in connection with Herod they would probably not have come to Jerusalem.
 - And would they, after receiving the costly gifts from these men, have sacrificed only two pigeons?⁹
7. *As it is written¹⁰ in the Law of the Lord.* Luke adds the provision of the law for the sake of Theophilus and quotes from Exodus 13:2 and adds “every male” from v. 12, “the males.”
- The term is neuter, “every male thing opening the womb,” i.e., for the first time, and includes the first-born of animals as well as of men.
 - “Shall be called holy” is the future tense in legal phraseology, “called holy” because it is holy in fact, and “holy” is used in the sense of being separated unto the Lord, hence we have the dative: holy “to the Lord,” to *Yahweh*.¹¹
8. *Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon.* Luke records the inspired reaction of Simeon to the bringing of Jesus into the temple.
- We seem always to think of this man as old, though there is no evidence apart from his cheerful readiness to die (29; cf. 26).

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⁹ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (117). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁰ The tense of this verb is an “intensive perfect” and indicates that what has been written in the past has an abiding value, i.e., what has been written in the Scriptures remains written. This verse demonstrates that the main element in this account for Luke was the Savior’s consecration rather than his redemption or Mary’s purification. One should not read into this a Nazirite dedication, for Luke made no mention of this. [Stein, R.H. *Luke*, 113.]

¹¹ Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (142). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

- Attempts to identify him as a priest or an important citizen are without foundation.
 - The name was a common one; apart from this story we know nothing about him.¹²
9. *This man was righteous and devout.* Simeon was an upright man.
- *Righteous* shows that he behaved well towards people,
 - while *devout* (*eulabēs*; used by Luke alone in the New Testament) signifies ‘careful about religious duties’ (in the classics it means ‘cautious’).¹³
10. *The consolation of Israel* for which he looked is another name for the coming of the Messiah.¹⁴
- This was expected to be preceded by a time of great suffering (‘the woes of the Messiah’), so that he would certainly bring comfort.
 - In days when the nation was oppressed the faithful looked all the more intensely for the Deliverer who would solve their problems.¹⁵
11. The Holy Spirit *was upon him*, which seems to mean on him _____¹⁶.
- In Old Testament times we read of the Spirit coming upon people on special occasions, but a continuing presence is rare.
 - Simeon’s endowment was something special.

¹² Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*, 104.

¹³ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*, 104.

¹⁴ Lenski observes: He was “righteous” as God judged him, “devoted” as his life appeared to men; he was far more than just “churchly” but was in very truth a genuine son of Abraham. In full accord with these two terms is the participial addition “expecting Israel’s Consolation,” *παράκλησις* (Matt. 5:4; Luke 16:25; Isa. 40:1; 61:2). This term is by no means indefinite, “a consolation for Israel,” but is made decidedly definite by the genitive “Israel’s Consolation,” the one promised to Israel in and through the Messiah, it is hence worthy to be capitalized. The abstract term does not mean the concrete Consoler (Messiah) although, as the following context shows, this Consolation would come through the Messiah.

Παράκλησις is not used in the active sense (from *παρακαλεῖν*, to call to one’s aid) but in the passive sense regarding a consolation that was extended to Israel, the genitive being objective. When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as being “another Paraclete” (Comforter) he calls himself the first Paraclete who brought to Israel the *παράκλησις* that is here mentioned as being expected by Simeon. There is no political sense in the term. The context rebels against such a view. “Of Israel” is used in the sense of Jesus’ word to the Samaritan woman: “salvation is of the Jews,” namely the salvation for all nations (v. 32). Simeon is one of those characters, who were rare at this time, who fully apprehended the spiritual promises of the Old Testament. [Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (144). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.]

¹⁵ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*, 104.

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- The Spirit had indicated to Simeon in some way not specified that he would see the Messiah, *the Lord's Christ* (cf. 2:11) before his death.¹⁷

12. *He came in the Spirit into the temple.* In fulfillment of the promise the Spirit brought Simeon into the temple at the same time as Joseph and Mary.

- Simeon was 'in the Spirit' (cf. Rev. 1:10, etc.), which includes *inspired by the Spirit* but seems also to indicate something more, a special sensitivity.

13. *When the parents brought in the child Jesus.* Joseph and Mary are called *the parents*, which does not mean that Luke has forgotten that he has just told us of the virgin birth, nor that he is here using a source which was ignorant of it.

- 'The word *parents* is simply used to indicate the character in which Joseph and Mary appeared at this time'.¹⁸
- *The custom of the law* refers to the _____¹⁹ of the five shekels on behalf of the child rather than the sacrifice for the mother, for Luke says they do it *for him*.
- Simeon *blessed God*, i.e. offered up a prayer of thanksgiving (which would normally begin, 'Blessed be thou, O Lord').

14. *He took him up in his arms and blessed God and said...* As with the hymns in chapter 1, this little song (2:29-32) is known by its opening words in Latin, namely *Nunc Dimittis*.

- Simeon's *now* is important. He is ready to die peacefully *now* that he has seen God's *salvation*, i.e. the Baby through whom God would in time bring salvation.
- His language is that used of the freeing of a slave and he may be thinking of death as 'his release from a long task'.²⁰
- Simeon goes on to show that this salvation is not for any one nation but for all.
- This is clear enough in *all peoples*, but Simeon spells it out by speaking of both *the Gentiles* and *thy people Israel*.
- It is probably only the poetic structure that links *a light for revelation* with the former and *glory* with the latter, for he would bring revelation to Israel as to others.
- But there is appropriateness in linking *glory* with Israel.
- There is much about glory in the Old Testament, particularly in connection with God's manifestations of himself to his people.
- But Israel will see glory in its truest and fullest sense when it sees the Son of God (cf. John 1:14).

¹⁷ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*, 104.

¹⁸ Godet, F. *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 2 vols. (T. and T. Clark, 1889).

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²⁰ Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, *International Critical Commentary* (T. and T. Clark, 1928).

- His being a light to Gentiles means no diminution of Israel's glory, but rather its full realization.²¹
15. *And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.* Yet another of the pious people in Israel is led by God to the Child in the temple.
- She is Anna, the prophetess, one through whom God gave revelations, like Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).
 - She is of the tribe of Asher,²² one of the ten so-called lost tribes.
 - This shows, as also appears from other references in the Scriptures, that after the carrying away of the ten tribes some of them, nevertheless, returned to full membership of the Jewish people.
16. This Anna had been married only seven years when she became a widow and remained unmarried for the rest of her long life.
- It is possible, but not certain, that a room was given to her in one of the buildings on the temple-hill to live in.
 - In any case, she was exceptionally faithful in attending all services in the temple and spent much time in fasting and prayer.²³

Conclusion

THE OFFERING FOR THE FIRST-BORN

In the worship of the Old Testament, where everything was *symbolical*, that is, where spiritual realities were conveyed through outward signs, every physical defilement would point to, and carry with it, as it were, a spiritual counterpart. But especially was this the case with reference to birth and death, which were so closely connected with sin and the second death, with redemption and the second birth. Hence, all connected with the origin of life and with death, implied defilement, and required Levitical purification. But here there was considerable difference. Passing over the minor defilements attaching

²¹ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*, 104.

²² One of the ten tribes, of whom many were not carried captive, and not a few reunited themselves to Judah after the return from Babylon. The distinction of tribes, though practically destroyed by the captivity, was well enough known up to their final dispersion (Ro 11:1; Heb 7:14); nor is it now entirely lost. [Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Lk 2:36)*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.]

²³ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (121)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

to what is connected with the origin of life, the woman who had given birth to a child was Levitically unclean for forty or for eighty days, according as she had become the mother of a son or a daughter. After that she was to offer for her purification a lamb for a burnt-, and a turtledove, or young pigeon, for a sin-offering; in case of poverty, altogether only two turtledoves or two young pigeons. We remember that the mother of Jesus availed herself of that provision for the poor, when at the same time she presented in the Temple the Royal Babe, her firstborn son.

On bringing her offering, she would enter the Temple through 'the gate of the first-born,' and stand in waiting at the Gate of Nicanor, from the time that the incense was kindled on the golden altar. Behind her, in the Court of the Women, was the crowd of worshippers, while she herself, at the top of the Levites' steps, which led up to the great court, would witness all that passed in the sanctuary. At last one of the officiating priests would come to her at the gate of Nicanor, and take from her hand the 'poor's offering,' which she had brought. The morning sacrifice was ended; and but few would linger behind while the offering for her purification was actually made. She who brought it mingled prayer and thanksgiving with the service. And now the priest once more approached her, and, sprinkling her with the sacrificial blood, declared her cleansed. Her 'first-born' was next redeemed at the hand of the priest, with five shekels of silver; two benedictions being at the same time pronounced, one for the happy event which had enriched the family with a first-born, the other for the law of redemption. And when, with grateful heart, and solemnised in spirit, she descended those fifteen steps where the Levites were wont to sing the 'Hallel,' a sudden light of heavenly joy filled the heart of one who had long been in waiting 'for the consolation of Israel.' If the Holy Spirit had revealed it to just and devout *Simeon*, that he 'should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ,' who should vanquish death, it was the same Spirit, who had led him up into the Temple 'when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law.' Then the aged believer took the Divine Babe from His mother's into his own arms. He felt that the faithful Lord had truly fulfilled His word. Content now to depart in peace, he blessed God from the fulness of a grateful heart, for his eyes had seen His salvation—'a light to lighten the Gentiles,' and the 'glory of His people Israel.' But Joseph and Mary listened, wondering, to the words which fell from *Simeon's* lips.²⁴

²⁴ Edersheim, A. (2003). *The Temple, its ministry and services as they were at the time of Jesus Christ*. (343). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.