



Luke 2:22–27

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons’. 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who

was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

Reflection

As Luke writes Christians are dying for their newfound faith. Great persecution is breaking out, Christians are fleeing persecution in urban centres, and as they do so, the Gospel spreads. It has well been said

that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. But what to make of this break-away sect of Judaism with the extraordinary claim that the long-promised Messiah from the Old Testament Scriptures has finally come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? How are faithful, God-fearing Jews worshipping in synagogues around the Mediterranean world supposed to receive this news?

As we've seen in the opening two chapters of Luke's gospel, Luke writes with these people in mind. More than any other New Testament author, Luke stresses the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. His opening two chapters place Jesus thoroughly within Judaism. While other New Testament authors deal with issues of continuity and discontinuity, Luke

is at pains to express that in this new religion that is tearing the world apart God is at work in patterns familiar in the Old Testament: the casting of lots, a vision in the temple, a heavenly messenger, a promise, a sign, a childless couple, the fulfilment of the last chapter of the Old Testament – Malachi 4 and the strong echo of Hannah’s song in the song of Mary. God is at work from within, not from outside, the institutions, rituals, and practices of Judaism.¹

And so in today’s passage, unsurprisingly, we find ourselves back in the Temple in Jerusalem. And as we’ve touched on before it’s hard to overstate the importance of the Temple to a first century Jew. The Temple dominated the Jerusalem skyline. It stood defiantly as the focal point of this subjugated people’s nationalistic, cultural

¹ Fred B. Craddock, Luke (Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching; Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990), 23–26; 37–39.

and religious zeal. Judaism was unthinkable without the Temple, and as long as the Temple held strong the Jewish nation held out hope of throwing off the yoke of their Roman oppressors. Because above all else, and all symbolism aside, the Temple was the place where God chose to dwell, the place where heaven and earth met, the terms upon which relationship was possible with the one true God. And if God was for them, they would prevail in the end.

Today we find ourselves back in the Temple. Luke's gospel began with Gabriel appearing to Zechariah in the Temple and it will end in the Temple – with the curtain that separates the Most Holy Place torn in two, from top to bottom, as Jesus' death opens up direct access to God for all peo-

ple. Luke's Gospel begins in the Temple and ends in the Temple, and today Jesus's family who meticulously observe the law of Moses bring the child Jesus to the Temple. Reading today's passage, from Luke 2:22–27,

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waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

And there it is again, four times in today's passage, verse 22, 23, 24 and 27, Luke repeating for us just so that we're sure not to miss it, Jesus' parents did everything required of them in the law. Luke interweaves two separate regulations: the purification of the mother after childbirth (forty days later in the case of a male child per Lev 12:1–8) and the dedication of the

firstborn son to God (Ex 13:1, 12–16). And Mary and Joseph once again affirm their poverty; their sacrifice (in keeping with the gift of those in financial hardship) – a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as we read in verse 24.

Background laid, and Jesus' Jewish credentials firmly expressed, Luke's narrative moves to Simeon; a devout, old man as full of faith as he is full of years and at one-month old Jesus' arrival at the Temple, filled also to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. Simeon, verse 25,

was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's

Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

When Jesus enters your life the Holy Spirit moves. It is true today; and was certainly true in an especially powerful way for Simeon as the child Jesus enters his Father's house for the very first time as a human babe. As we saw last week Jesus' birth was enough to tear heaven open and see a great company of the heavenly host burst out in praise of our God. Jesus' arrival will have a similar effect on Simeon as we'll see in tomorrow's passage.

Think

But for today I'll like you to meditate over Jesus' family's obedience to the law. In the Old Testament, the old covenant of law, sacrificial system and priesthood set out the terms that made relationship possible with God. The outworking of genuine faith in the Old Testament was evidenced by one's obedience to the law, and use of the sacrificial system and priesthood for the forgiveness of sin when the law was broken. But the new covenant is no longer about law and sacrifice but Spirit and grace. Jesus Christ has replaced the law, the sacrificial system and the priesthood. The law is now written on our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, God's word resounding into our inner beings when we read it as the very words of God, our consciences and the Holy Spirit at work within us at once commending us and convicting

us as we keep or break his commands. And Jesus became for us the full and final sacrifice for our sins; our great high priest who lay down his own body for us in sacrifice and right now in his high priestly duties is interceding for those who've placed their trust in his name before his Father in heaven.

The new covenant is so much superior to the old one and yet, still, I'd like you to consider your obedience to our Lord this morning. Considering our incomparable riches when placed alongside this humble ancient near eastern couple, how much more obedient to our gracious God and Father should we be?

How important is obedience to you as a Christian? How attuned and sensitive are

you to your sin? Is sinning like placing your hand on a hot stove, disobedience searing your soul? Is holiness one of your greatest desires as a person? To be Holy as your God is holy? Or has complacency crept in and grace been distorted to make concessions for a lax lifestyle when it comes to obeying our Father in response to who he is and the love he has extended to us in Jesus?

Pray

Pray that the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of holiness – would move in your life this morning. Pray that as you grow deeper in relationship with Jesus you would become more like him; wholly obedient to his Father in thought, word and deed. Pray against sin, the flesh and the Devil this morning

and anything else that may hinder us from growing in holiness. I'd really appreciate your prayers for my holiness too. For, Heb 12:14, 'without holiness no one will see the Lord.'