

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Years B and C - Christmas 1, Text: Luke 2:22-40
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Luke 2:22-40

Luke 2:21 states that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Forty days after His birth, Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple “to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord.”

Two things are happening here. The first is a sacrifice on Mary’s behalf, to be declared clean from the birthing process, as written in Leviticus 12:

“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)

They also brought Jesus to “present him to the Lord” as a firstborn son. This was not a “dedication” but rather a sacrifice expected under the law. Since the firstborn of all living creatures were expected to be given to the Lord as an offering, it was necessary to “redeem” the firstborn child (i.e. buy him back). Since God in his mercy did not demand human sacrifice, He allowed/required an animal to be killed instead.

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.” and “Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. (Exodus 13:1-2, 13)

While the family was in the Temple, the baby was honored by words from Simeon and Anna, two devout, elderly persons.

Simeon refers to Jesus’ coming ministry as a “light for revelation to the Gentiles” — most likely the statement reflects a traditional Jewish hope based on Isaiah 60. According to that hope, the day would come when the Jewish people would play the central role in world affairs, and the Gentiles (sitting in darkness) would have to acknowledge the supremacy of the Jews.

Like most of his contemporaries, most likely Simeon saw the “salvation of Israel” in terms of national liberation and a restoration of the glories associated with the reign of David. However, Jesus’ ministry was not about obtaining glory for Israel, but was about calling humanity to serving — and suffering. Baron von Hugel, a Roman Catholic scholar and mystic, claimed that “there is no humility without humiliation.” The Christmas story should leave us more prepared to follow Jesus on His path of humiliation to glory — without seeking the comfortable shortcuts that human pride desires. Simeon does state that Jesus’ mission would prove to be stumbling block for many in Israel and would cause Mary deep pain (2:28–35).

Little is known about Anna. After Anna sees the infant Messiah, she speaks about Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (2:36–38). However, Jesus did not come to free Jerusalem from Roman control. He came to free God’s people, and humanity at large, from control by the powers of Satan, sin, and death. The prophetic words uttered by both Anna and Simeon indicated more than what they even knew.

Some time later, the Holy Family returns to Nazareth in Galilee — their hometown (2:39–40). The Authorized (King James) Version calls Nazareth a city; the New English Bible, a town. However, it was a village. Nathanael, who came from Cana three or four miles away, thought nothing of it (John 1:46). The profound truth is that God used the One whose hometown was a small village called Nazareth to achieve huge things.