

## ***“The Temple of Your Freedom”***

I have a question for you. Why do you go to church? I can almost hear the inaudible groans coming from the congregation – “not another sermon where we get beat up for not coming to church.” And then, that law-driven and man-centered response of sinners – “Wait, I’m here, so I guess this sermon isn’t for me. Now, I’ll just sit here with my going-to-church-box checked, and pretend like I’m paying attention.”

I ask the question because I want you to consider it from another perspective – standing in someone else’s shoes. What if we were to ask this question of Joseph and Mary, and Jesus? Why do you go to the Temple?

Well, the obvious answer is the one that St. Luke records for us in his Gospel. “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem and presented Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’”

Joseph and Mary and Jesus go to the Temple for the Purification of Mary and for the Presentation of Jesus. But, what does this mean?

This Purification and Presentation is all mandated by God. God has directed His people to do these things – but why – and what does this have to do with you and me? Is it just jumping through hoops and checking off boxes?

Although that’s the way we often treat such things (I have to go to church because God wants me to) – you know that God isn’t just making you jump through hoops – you know that God isn’t just putting frivolous demands on you and regulating your life so that you have to do certain things to be in His good graces. In the end, this is about Jesus the Savior – and about you and your salvation.

So, why does God want Mary and Jesus to go to the Temple? The short answer is – for their purification and to present Jesus to the Lord.

Let's begin with the Purification. When a child is born, there is blood. When we see blood, it startles us, and it should – because we're not supposed to see blood. When you see it, it's not where it's supposed to be – inside the body. Because “the life is in the blood” as the Scriptures say – blood flowing out of the body is a sign that life is flowing away. In other words – blood equals death.

To reveal this vital truth to us, God says that all contact with blood makes one unclean – showing that we have been touched by death – and therefore, need to be purified. And so, the Lord tells His people of old that they are to come to the Temple and He will purify them.

Joseph brings Mary and Jesus to the Temple in order to offer the sacrifice prescribed by God. Notice what is happening. It is the sacrifice of another (in this case, a pair of turtledoves) – that purifies and sets free from death.

Connected to this is the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple. He is the “male who first opens” Mary's womb and “shall be called holy to the Lord.” Jesus, and every firstborn male, is holy – which means, “set apart” to the Lord. Like Samuel in our Old Testament reading, they belong to the Lord.

The firstborn male represents ALL of Israel who is called the “firstborn” of the Lord. All of Israel – that is, all of God's people – are holy, “set apart,” belonging to the Lord. And in order to redeem them – to “buy them back” – a sacrifice of blood is required.

The Lord had revealed a vital truth already to Adam and Eve, saying – in the day you eat of it (in the day you sin against Me), you shall surely die. To redeem sinful Adam and Eve, and all their descendants enslaved by sin – a death is required – blood must be shed.

In providing redemption through the shedding of the blood of a sacrificial animal – the Lord was showing His love, His grace, His desire that we would not die, but live. Rather than requiring the blood and the life of the sinner – He provides a substitute.

Jesus is that substitute. All the sacrifices that came before find their fulfillment in the blood of His sacrifice – His holy, precious blood that redeems all sinners.

So, what does all this have to do with you and me? The short answer is – its about our redemption and salvation. But, let me tie this back into the question – “Why do Joseph and Mary and Jesus go to Temple” – “Why do you go to church?”

The Temple, first and foremost, is where God dwells in the midst of His people. Just as the Lord was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – so He always locates Himself in our midst, for our good.

The Temple in Jerusalem was where He promised to be for His people of old. They went to Temple to be with God – and most importantly – to be redeemed, to have their sins forgiven, to be set free from the slavery of their sin and the fear of death.

But now, God has come in the flesh. When the Son of God was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, she is now the Temple, the place where God dwells. With the birth of Jesus – the manger becomes the Temple. And now, here in our text, the Temple comes to the Temple (if you will) – and as Simeon declares – Jesus is the Temple.

And that’s why you come to church – because Jesus is here. He is the Temple where God lives and dwells in the midst of us. The Lord – through His Word and Sacraments – is here to purify you by His blood – redeeming you from sin, death and the power of the devil.

That’s why we sing Simeon’s song – “Lord, now you are letting [me, your servant, a sinner] depart in peace.” You are setting me free from my sin by the blood of your Substitute, Jesus – and “my eyes have seen your salvation.”

Or, to use the words of the psalmist in the Introit: “His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth.” Here, Jesus reveals Himself to you as your fortress. Here, His blood washes away your sin in Holy Baptism and purifies you. Here, His blood of the New Testament destroys the power of death as you eat and drink His Supper.

Here, Jesus is with you – as it says in our reading from Hebrews – to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

Dearly beloved, Jesus sets you free – free to live with Him – now, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.