

Exegetical Notes, Luke 2:21-38
“The Presentation”

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Luke 2:21-38

Verse 21

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

- These events happened on the eighth day after the baby was born in accordance with the Law of Moses (Genesis 17:12, Leviticus 12:3) and the traditions of the Jews (Josephus, the great historian of the Jews said that it was the custom of the Jews to name their children on the eighth day after their birth.).
- While it would have been traditional to give the baby the name of its father or that of some other family member, in this case the baby is given the name assigned to him by the angel before his birth. See Luke 2:31 and Matthew 1:21. The name means “savior” and refers to the special function the child will play in God’s plan.
- This verse shows us that Mary and Joseph were careful to comply with all the requirements and responsibilities of parenthood and servanthood. They diligently kept the requirements of the Law and the expectations of the traditions, and followed the angel’s instructions.

Verse 22-24

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 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.

- The quotation comes from Exodus 13:12-13. In Jesus’ day, it was believed that the Levites, the priestly clan, stood in the place of all of the firstborn sons of Israel. See Numbers 3:11-13 and Numbers 8:17-18. Thus, in Jesus’ time, the requirement of the Law that every

- firstborn male be presented in service to the Lord was not an obligation any longer, for God had claimed the Levities in fulfillment of this obligation. However, in Jesus' case, Mary and Joseph presented him as was required by the law for life-long service to God.
- After the birth of a male the Law of Moses also required a woman to wait for 40 days before coming to the Temple to offer sacrifice (Leviticus 12:1-8). This was called the time of her purification. Therefore, we know that Jesus' presentation in the Temple occurred at least 40 days after his birth since it happened after the purification.
 - Notice that the sacrifice that is made is that allowed by the laws for those who could not afford a lamb, "two doves or young pigeons." This indicates that Joseph was a poor man who could not afford the more expensive sacrifice.
 - Again, these verses show us how diligently Mary and Joseph followed all of the obligations and traditions related to the birth of Jesus.
 - Notice that the Bible lists their names in traditional Hebrew fashion, "Joseph and Mary" not as we always do, "Mary and Joseph." This shows that Joseph took the lead as head of his household and set the tone for Biblical obedience that is obvious in these verses. This is the proper role for a father in his household.
 - Scholars believe that this trip to Jerusalem indicates that 40 days after his birth Mary and Joseph were still residing in Bethlehem because Bethlehem is only six miles from Jerusalem. If they had returned to Nazareth, the long trip to Jerusalem would probably have been impossible.

Verse 25

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout.

- This verse introduces a new character, Simeon, to the story.
- At this point in the story, all we know about Simeon is that he is "righteous and devout." That means that like the other key players in the story, Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph, this man fulfilled the obligations of the Law of Moses and the Tradition of the Elders, and had found favor with God.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

- The “consolation of Israel,” was the birth of the Messiah. Simeon was waiting for this event to occur.
- Before Pentecost (See Acts 2) the Holy Spirit did not abide with people as he now does with Christians. Instead, the Holy Spirit visited people at special times for special reasons. At that moment in time, the Holy Spirit rested on Simeon in order to reveal to him the Messiah.

Verse 26

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.’

- The Holy Spirit had convinced Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died.
- The “Lord’s Christ” in the Greek way of saying “God’s Anointed One.” The Hebrew word Messiah also means “Anointed One.” The use of this phrase in the Gospel of Luke suggests that the author was a Greek speaking person, not someone who spoke Hebrew. However, given the detailed knowledge of Hebrew law in these verses, the author of the Gospel knew a great deal about Hebrew culture.

Verse 27

Moved by the Holy Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

- The prompting of the Holy Spirit caused this man to go into the Temple.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

- Concerning what was required by the Law, see comments on verses 21-24. Once again, our attention is focused on Mary and Joseph’s desire to keep all the requirements of the Law related to Jesus’ birth.

Verse 28

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying:

- Apparently, this man took Jesus from Mary and Joseph and began to thank God for him.
- It is hard to imagine any parent giving their child into the arms of a complete stranger, except that this, too, happened by the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 29-32

***Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.***

***For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.***

- This poetic prayer spoken by Simeon is called the *Nunc Dimittis*. In it Simeon acknowledges that God may now allow him to die because the promise, that he would not die before he saw the Messiah (see verse 26), had been fulfilled.
- In the prayer, Simeon ascribes several specific attributes to Jesus: (1) He calls Jesus God's salvation, (2) He calls Jesus a light to the Gentiles, (3) He calls Jesus glory to Israel. Each of these attributes is extremely important.
- Jesus is God's salvation. That means that he is the way, the only way, that God has provided by which people can be saved. That this "salvation" has been "prepared in the sight of all people" indicates that the method of salvation is not secret but is open to the eyes of anyone who will see. Jesus is clearly displayed before the whole world as the method God has provided for salvation.
- That Jesus is a "light for revelation to the Gentiles" indicates that God's plan for salvation is not limited to Israel. All people, everywhere will find salvation through Jesus Christ.
- However, he is also the "glory of Israel" because God's plan for salvation has come through his chosen people, Israel. This is why God chose them in the first place, that they might be a nation by which the whole world was blessed (Genesis 12:2-3).

Verse 33

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

- Mary and Joseph were constantly amazed that God revealed what they already knew about Jesus to others, especially to those who had no previous connection with them.
- These revelations confirm the truth to them and to us. There is no way that these unconnected witnesses could know what they know except through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 34-35

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

- What Simeon said was a warning to Mary that not everyone in Israel would welcome Jesus as God’s Messiah. Many would, but others would reject him and would openly renounce him. For those who know the rest of the story, Simeon’s prediction is painfully clear.

And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

- See John 19:25-27. Undoubtedly this verse refers to Mary’s pain as she watched Jesus die on the cross for, while he was God’s son sent into this world for that purpose, he was also her son. What mother could watch the execution of her son without having her heart pierced by his pain?

Verse 36-37

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

- There was an elderly woman named Anna present in the Temple on the day of Jesus’ presentation there. She was 84 years old and had been a widow for many years. She spent her days and nights worshiping God in the Temple. She was regarded as a prophetess. This may mean that she herself was a prophet or that her husband had been one.

Verse 38

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

- Jewish law required two independent witnesses to verify truth. Anna becomes the second such witness to verify who Jesus is. Thus it is established by two witnesses that Jesus is the Messiah.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Presentation*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)