

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2011-2012

CHRIST JESUS, HOLY TO THE LORD: A MESSAGE ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (*Luke 2:22-24*)

I. Christ Jesus, the Heart of a New Creation

II. A Mother's Purification (Luke 2:22-23)

- A. The time had come for the purification of Joseph and Mary (but especially Mary).
- B. By this time, Jesus had already been circumcised.
- C. Aside from circumcision, the Old Testament required additional rituals to be performed. These include...
 - 1. The purification of the child's mother.
 - 2. The dedication of the child to the Lord, in the event that he is the firstborn son.
- D. Instructions for the mother's purification are found in Leviticus 12:1-4: "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days....Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed.'
 - 1. Why should the woman be unclean after she had given birth?
 - a. Such a question arises because we do not always understand the logic behind certain laws.
 - b. But Scripture interprets Scripture.
 - c. According to Scripture, this ceremonial concept of clean versus unclean does not always have to do with moral matters.
 - i. While sin does make a person unclean, a person can become unclean apart from sin.
 - ii. Unclean people also include those who have had some kind of disease (e.g. leprosy; Lev 13); or else, some loss of important bodily fluids—especially *blood*, which is the key symbol of life.
 - iii. Women who had just given birth are considered unclean because they have lost blood; and so, in a symbolic way, are closer to death.

- iv. Holiness is the opposite of death. It is perfect and absolute life and wholeness.
 - v. In order for an unclean person to come into contact with holiness again, he or she has to be purified.
3. By the time we come to Luke 2:22, it has been thirty-three days since Jesus was circumcised, altogether forty days since he was born.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Aside from circumcision, what other rituals did the Old Testament Laws require surrounding childbirth? (2) Apart from those who sin, who else is considered unclean in the Old Testament? (3) Why is a woman considered ceremonially unclean after childbirth?

III. The Presentation of the Firstborn Son (Luke 2:22b-23)

- A. Since Jesus was also Mary's *first* son, there is an additional ritual required by the Law of God.
 - 1. "...they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord."
 - 2. The reason? "as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'" (Lk 2:23).
- B. The sources of this law are in Exodus 13.
 - 1. Exodus 13:1-2: "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*.'"
 - 2. Exodus 13:12: "you shall *set apart to the LORD* all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be *the LORD's*."
- C. In many traditional cultures, the first child—especially if he is a son—is very precious to the family.
 - 1. The firstborn son represents the economic future of the family.
 - 2. The firstborn son represents the continuation of the family name.
 - 3. The firstborn son is an auspicious sign that God wishes the family to continue for another generation.
- D. By asking all Israelite families to give him their firstborn sons, God is asking...
 - 1. All Israelite families to trust him with their future.
 - 2. All Israelites to exalt him above their own perceived needs and dreams.
- E. The Holy Spirit is showing us what kind of family our Lord Jesus was born into.

—It was a pious, God-centered, Scripture-loving, Jewish home.
- F. There is a lesson here for parents.
 - 1. Our children belong first to God.
 - 2. While want what is best for our kids, we must not equate our opinions with God's will.

3. Parental authority is for the purpose of nurturing children who love God first.
4. Therefore, the most important thing parents must insist upon for our children is their loyalty to the Lord.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What did God require for a firstborn male? Where in the Old Testament is this requirement seen? (2) By asking all Israelite families to give him their first-born sons, what is God in effect asking? What lesson does God want parents to learn? (3) What ambitions do you have for your child? What fears do you have about surrendering your child's future to God? How can those fears be silenced?

IV. Mary and Joseph Offer Their Humble Sacrifice (Luke 2:24)

- A. Joseph and Mary “offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’”
- B. Again, we see the godliness and tender devotion of this family.
- C. The fact that Joseph and Mary offer birds instead of lambs reveals their economic situation.
—God’s Law allows for worshipers from poorer families to use birds in place of lambs (Lev 12:8).
- D. The eternal Son of God incarnated himself right at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the sacrifice of birds instead of lambs teach us about Joseph and Mary’s economic status? Where in God’s Law is provision made for poorer worshipers? (2) “The eternal Son of God incarnated himself right at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.” What does this mean to you? What does this tell you about God’s heart for the poor and weak?

V. Jesus Christ, Holy to the Lord

- A. The phrase “holy to the Lord” is one that comes from the Old Testament.
 1. It is used for the Sabbath Day: “...‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a *holy Sabbath to the LORD*...’ (Ex 16:23)
 2. It is used for the high priest of Israel: “You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it...‘*Holy to the LORD*’” (Ex 28:36).
 3. It is used for Nazirites: “All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body....All the days of his separation *he is holy to the LORD*” (Num 6:6-8).

4. It is used for the firstborn males of Israel (including animals): “[Y]ou shall *set apart to the LORD* all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be *the LORD’s*” (Ex 13:12).

—To be holy to the Lord is to be separated from things that defile, and to be reserved for the Lord alone.

B. God wants us to appreciate Jesus’ holiness in two ways.

1. First, we must appreciate Jesus’ holiness as it relates to Jesus himself.
 - a. Jesus’ holiness is his own life of God-dependent and God-centered obedience.
 - b. Jesus did not live a holy life merely to provide a good example for Christians.
—His holiness was his own personal expression of his relationship to God the Father.
 - c. The Lord God was the supreme passion and religion of Jesus.
 - d. When Jesus asks us to seek first the Kingdom of God (Mk 6:33), he was preaching out of his own life.
—Jesus lived in the first Great Commandment: “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Dt 6:5).
 - e. We need to appreciate Jesus’ holiness in relation to himself because it reminds us that our Lord was a real, flesh-and-blood human being, who obeyed God in the role that God had called him to do.
2. Second, we must appreciate Jesus’ holiness as it relates to his people—you and me.
 - a. Since Jesus is our representative, our king and priest, his holiness is also for us.
—The personal holiness of Jesus is the gift that he graciously gives to us.
 - b. The holiness of Jesus has two effects on us:
 - i. It counts as our holiness, making us acceptable to God (Rom 5:19).
 - ii. It creates real righteousness in our own lives (Rom 8:29).
—Jesus is meant to be the first of many holy ones of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How is the phrase “holy to the Lord” used in the Old Testament? (2) What does it mean for one to be “holy to the Lord”? (3) How are we to understand and appreciate the holiness of Jesus? (4) What effects does Jesus’ holiness have on us?

VI. Holy to the Lord in Jesus Christ

Our heavenly Father wants us to receive the holiness of Christ as a free gift from him. He wants us to depend on the perfect holiness of Christ alone to make us acceptable to him, and to transform us into his holy people.

- A. To do this, we need to recognize that apart from Christ, we are truly and deeply unclean.
 - 1. The ceremonial category of uncleanness in the Old Testament is a symbol of the true state of the fallen world.
 - 2. We are unclean because of our many sins against God.
 - 3. We are unclean because we are all under a curse for those sins.
—The curse leads to the condition of decay and death.
- B. How do people try to get themselves clean?
 - 1. They set up relatively easy and superficial standards of goodness.
—But God’s holy commands are deep and wide, not superficial.
 - 2. They pretend that they are better than others.
—But God condemns all sin, not just those that land you in jail.
 - 3. They try to think positively.
—But God’s opinion is what ultimately counts.
 - 4. They try not to dwell on the past, but live for the future.
—But the past will catch up with you on the Day of Judgment.
 - 5. They develop elaborate habits of self-washing to achieve a clean conscience (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).
- C. Instead of these futile ways of self-cleansing, God wants us to go to his Holy One for cleansing and true holiness (1 Cor 6:11; Rev 7:14).
—Only in Christ are we holy to the Lord. And only in Christ can we live that way.
- D. When Jesus was devoted to the Lord, all his people were included in him.

The presentation of the Lord Jesus to God was for all of us.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does God want us to respond to the holiness of Christ Jesus? (2) What must we admit about ourselves before we can even desire to go to Christ? (3) How do some people try to cleanse themselves? How do you clean your own conscience? (4) What must we do to be cleansed from all our uncleanness? *Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ?*