

Lesson 8

First Sunday after Christmas

The Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22–40

Joseph and Mary walked the six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem for a purpose. The Law of Moses declared a woman to be ceremonially unclean following childbirth. The birth of a son called for seven days of seclusion as “contagiously” unclean, followed by another 33 days of religious impurity, during all of which she was not to come into contact with hallowed things, nor enter the sanctuary. In the case of the birth of a daughter, the numbers were doubled (see Leviticus 12). Joseph and Mary had come to the temple to offer the prescribed sacrifice for her purification: “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

They also had brought Jesus, now 40 days old, “to present Him to the Lord.” This ritual requirement, the redemption of the firstborn son, memorialized God’s sparing the firstborn of the Israelite families in Egypt the night the angel of the Lord slew the firstborn of all the Egyptians (see Exodus 13:11–16). The concept was that from that time on, every firstborn belonged to the Lord. The firstborn animals were to be sacrificed to Him; the firstborn sons were to serve Him throughout their lives. In actual practice, the Levites served in the place of the firstborn (see Numbers 3:5–13). The firstborn sons were “redeemed” (bought back from the Lord) to live with their parents by the offering of the appointed sacrifice. This ritual presentation of Jesus to the Lord and His redemption through the offering of a sacrifice were carried out by Joseph and Mary after she had gone through her rite of purification.

103. What is especially striking about *these* two parents acknowledging that their firstborn son belonged to God?

Simeon is introduced simply as “a man in Jerusalem.” He was not particularly prominent in Jerusalem’s religious circles, but had great spiritual qualifications: he “was ___ and ___, waiting for ___, and the ___ was upon him.”

104. What does it mean that Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel”? What promise had the Holy Spirit made to Simeon? How did Simeon recognize the baby Jesus as the Lord’s Christ?

Simeon’s song of praise is called the *Nunc Dimittis* from its first words in Latin. In the fifth century, it became part of the Church’s worship life, fittingly used as a liturgical song that celebrates our having seen the Lord’s Christ in Holy Communion.

105. What did Simeon say that made Joseph and Mary marvel?

106. To Mary, Simeon spoke of the destiny that awaited her son, a destiny that would have a direct effect on her. What does it mean that Jesus was “appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel”? (See I Peter 2:6–8.) How would Jesus be “a sign that is opposed . . . , so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed”? (See John 10:22–33.) When did a sword pierce through Mary’s soul?

Anna is introduced, not just as a woman but as “a prophetess.” Since she was a fixture in the temple, Anna’s testimony about Jesus must have carried some weight with those who heard her.

107. What do you think Anna said as she “began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem”?

Luke does not mention the flight to Egypt and the family’s living there for a time. Having provided significant information about Jesus’ birth and infancy, Luke wrote in a summary way about His childhood development in His family in Nazareth.

108. Could we say about our own children in our Christian homes, “[They] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon [them]”?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 61:10–62:3

Chapters 56–66 deal with the restoration following the exile in Babylon, and contain Isaiah’s prophetic and poetic vision of what will be for Judah in God’s plan, colored by anticipation of the messianic kingdom. In this passage from chapters 61 and 62, two word pictures portray the joyous attitude of the prophet and of all who respond in faith to the glad tidings of salvation. The first is that of a wedding—the groom adorned with a festive wedding headdress, and the bride with her jewels. The second is that of a garden causing seeds to grow.

109. What “clothes” have been received from the Lord that so delight the prophet?

110. What is the produce that this “garden” will yield? Who will see this garden and benefit from it? How is that significant to us?

In the opening verses of chapter 62, Isaiah exults over the coming fulfillment of his prophecies in the salvation of God’s people.

111. What are the qualities of His saved people that will be displayed before the nations?