

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Christmas is over for most Americans, even for many Christians. The presents have been unwrapped, the gift wrapping thrown out, the decorations are down, the Christmas tree put up or laid on the curb. But for us, it's the seventh day of Christmas, and the seven swans have just begun swimming. That is, we celebrated Christmas on December 25th, and it's still the Christmas season; we're still celebrating. By the way, I don't give any credence to the internet meme that the 18th century English song, The Twelve Days of Christmas, has anything to do with secretly passing on the faith during a time of persecution

We just celebrated Christmas, the coming of Jesus, the world's Savior, come as a little baby in Bethlehem, Jesus born of Mary, come in humble estate, laid in a manger (Luke 2:4, 7). We just heard the angels sing out "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased*" (Luke 2:14)! We have just celebrated Christmas, the coming of the divine λόγος, the Word, eternal God, come to bring life and light to the darkness of our world of sin. We celebrated how the temporal was assumed into the eternal, how human nature was brought into the divine, how the Word became flesh. We celebrated God's love in the Father's only-begotten Son who was sent from His side unto us as that little babe, that we might not perish but have everlasting life (John 1:14, 18; 3:16).

Here on the seventh day, we hear a bit more of the baby Jesus' infancy. There is precious little recorded of it in the Scriptures. Indeed, what is recorded in Luke follows the birth narrative. There is the single verse about Jesus' circumcision — done in accordance with the law. And there's our Gospel account heard today. There's also a bit in the Gospel according to Matthew — the visit of the wise men, the flight to Egypt, and the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. But that's it.

Before us today from Luke's gospel, we hear how Jesus' pious parents brought the forty day old infant to Jerusalem for Mary's purification and Jesus' presentation. This, too, was done in accordance with the law. There were actually two Jewish laws being followed here. First, the law decreed that a mother was unclean for 40 days after she had given birth to a son (Lev. 12:2-4), and so, according to the law, Mary came to Jerusalem to offer up her required sacrifice and be declared clean.

Interestingly, Luke bears witness again to the lowliness of the coming of our Savior. Mary sang about it in the Magnificat; Luke reported the lowly birth, and here at Mary's purification, too, for the law stipulated a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or dove for a sin offering. But if they couldn't afford a lamb, a pigeon or dove could also be used for the burnt offering. That's what Mary offered, Luke reports: "*a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*"

But then Luke turns to the second law to be fulfilled during this family trek to Jerusalem. That was to fulfill the requirement to consecrate Jesus, Mary's firstborn. We call it His presentation.

Think back to Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery. You'll recall that it was the tenth plague that finally forced Pharaoh to agree to set Israel free from their bondage, and that tenth plague was the death of all the firstborn of the land, men and beasts, all except those hunkered down in the houses marked by the blood of the Passover lamb. In this way, the firstborn of Israel were spared.

There was, however, a requirement placed on Israel. The firstborn of Israel were from that time to be consecrated to the Lord. "*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'*" (Ex. 13:1-2). The firstborn of the beasts were set apart for sacrifice, while the "*firstborn of man among [the] sons*" were set apart for redemption (Ex. 13:13). So Moses commanded Israel, "*you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb*" (Ex. 13:12) to serve as a reminder that "*By a strong hand the LORD brought [Israel] out of Egypt, from the house of slavery*" (Ex. 13:14).

Thus, through His parents, baby Jesus submitted Himself to this law, even as thirty-three days earlier He had submitted Himself to circumcision as the Lord had commanded Abraham and his offspring. That is, the virgin's son, Immanuel, even before He was able "*to refuse the evil and choose the good*" (Is. 7:15) was fulfilling all righteousness; He kept the law, for this was God's plan for our rescue. He would send forth His own Son to be born of a virgin woman. He would send Him forth to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law: "*born of woman, born under the law.*" He would send Him forth to redeem mankind, burdened "*under the law.*" And that requires sacrifice.

Which makes Jesus' presentation fascinating, for Jesus was not consecrated as a firstborn son to be redeemed, but as a firstborn beast to be sacrificed as the redemption price for the world. John the Baptist proclaimed it: "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Jesus said it: "*For ... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). St. Peter wrote of it: "*you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). By Jesus' sacrifice we are redeemed as the sons of God.

Thus, Jesus was brought to the temple as a forty-day-old infant and was presented there according to the law, a law keeper amidst a world of law breakers. And as He was presented, an amazing thing happened. Righteous and devout Simeon — he's often depicted as being old, but we don't know that from the text

— Simeon saw Jesus as He was carried into the temple. And when he saw the tiny baby, he recognized Him for who He was.

How could this be? Was there a transfigured glory about the baby Jesus' head, like the nimbus we often see Christian artists put around the head of the infant Savior? Did His face shine like the sun (Matt. 17:2); were His swaddling cloths radiant white, whiter than any launderer could bleach them? It seems not.

Rather, it seems to be a divine work of the Holy Spirit. There was a promise made to faithful Simeon, who was waiting for "*the consolation of Israel.*" "[It] had been revealed to [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Moreover, Luke says, "*the Holy Spirit was upon [Simeon],*" and Simeon came to the temple that day "*in the Spirit.*"

The Spirit, then, revealed to Simeon that the Divine promise to him was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that this little baby boy, seemingly unremarkable, was in fact the Lord's Salvation, Simeon's Consolation, "*the Lord's Christ,*" the world's Redeemer. Without any transfigured light glowing from His face, without any Divine glory shining through His cloths, Simeon knew that Jesus was the Savior of the world: "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [His] people Israel.*"

And Simeon proclaimed it. Still filled with the Holy Spirit, Simeon burst forth in a song that the church has been singing ever since. We call it the *Nunc Dimittis*, "*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.*" Simeon's song reminds us that all of God's promises are true; He is faithful, and His promises "*find their Yes in him,*" in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (2 Cor. 1:19-20). Anna, too, was waiting ... she for "*the redemption of Jerusalem,*" and when she heard Simeon's song, she realized that her wait was over. She began "*to give thanks to God and to speak of him.*"

Both of these realized that, because of this little infant Redeemer, they could depart in peace, filled with faith, filled with hope. The Holy Spirit leads us to the same. Though troubled by our sin and its consequence, death, filled with faith and hope in Christ, we sing or say this same canticle ... often: like at funerals when our souls have been tinged with death, we hear the promise of Jesus on our ears: "I am the resurrection and the life," says the Lord. "He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die," and we sing, "Lord, now you let Your servant go in peace." Like each night, laying our heads down without fear of death, we pray Compline: the Prayer at the Close of Day or we pray the Daily Prayer for the Close of the Day, and we say: "Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled...." Like after we partake of the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. The Holy Spirit leads us to see the Lord's Christ, to recognize Him in ordinary, earthly elements of bread and wine, given for

us. And so, forgiven and restored and ready for what the world might throw at us, we sing: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant, depart in peace, according to Thy word....”

Dear saints, like faithful Simeon and Anna, we also are people in waiting — waiting for the fullness of our salvation. Meanwhile, God grants us to see our Savior, our Redeemer, our Consolation, our Hope in the Lord's Christ and in His Sacraments. Receive Him often. May He be our Peace now in this Christmas season and for eternity.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.