

8 February 2006
The Presentation of our Lord (transferred)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Springfield, VA

Jesu Juva

“Presenting . . . Who?”

Text: Luke 2:22-32; Hebrews 2:14-18; 1 Samuel 1:21-28

It has been almost a full year now, since the angel first came. Almost a full year now, that transformed an unknown virgin in Nazareth into Mary, the Mother of our Lord. And what a year it had been! The angel. Having to tell Joseph! The trip to see old, barren Elizabeth, who was herself now with child! Going back to Nazareth, to hear the whispers behind her back, and the disapproving looks. The journey to Bethlehem, the birth, the shepherds. More angels! The circumcision, and giving this son the name Jesus, as the angel had told them. She had to grow up fast, Mary. . . . And now, something else. The time had come for her purification and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, according to the Law. And so they would go. And once again, it would prove to be no ordinary day in a year when *nothing* was ordinary! It would be another one of those days filled with the work and Word of God; another one of those days that Mary would keep and ponder in her heart.

And that this was no ordinary day, Luke shows us in how he reports it – and specifically in how he quotes the Old Testament. For what Luke does is quote the Old Testament, but *with a twist* – he *changes* the quotation *just a little*, to “prick the ears” of those who knew their Old Testament, so that in thinking that they were hearing *something wrong*, Luke could reveal to them (with his twist!) that what is happening here is not something wrong, but something *completely new*. That what is happening here is a new working of God, fulfilling the Old Testament and bringing in the New.

So listen to what Luke says. First he says: **“Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.”** (v. 23) Now, it is *true* that according to the Law, every first born male of both men and animals belonged to the Lord and were to be presented to the Lord (Ex 13). This was done as a memorial of the Exodus and the Passover, to remember when the angel of the Lord, in the tenth plague, killed the firstborn of all men and animals in Egypt, but *passed over* and spared all the firstborn of Israel – all who were protected by the lamb’s blood on the doorposts of their houses. That much is true, and that presentation was what Mary and Joseph were now doing with Jesus. . . . But the phrase **“holy to the Lord”** – *that’s* what’s different here. That’s Luke’s twist. **Holy to the**

Lord was one of those phrases that would make a good Jew's ears perk up, because it was not every firstborn male who was called ***holy to the Lord*** – *it was the High Priest*. For one of the special items the High Priest would wear when serving in the Temple of God was a small golden plate on his forehead that said, ***"Holy to the Lord."*** (Ex 28:36) . . . And so this twist of phrase by Luke would cause the Jews to say: *Wait Luke! That's not what it says. It says . . . ooohhh!* Are you saying: Jesus, Temple, High Priest . . . ooohhh! Or as we heard in the reading from Hebrews: ***"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God . . ."*** Or in other words, this was no ordinary presentation! Jesus was being made like us, under the Law, so that He could be our High Priest.

And then Luke does it again, with his next quotation: ***"to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'***" To which the Jews would reply: *Wait Luke! That's not what it says. It says, "a lamb a year old and a pigeon or turtledove . . . Or, if a lamb couldn't be afforded, two pigeons or turtledoves."* (Lev 12:6) So, they must have been a poor family. Why else would there not be a . . . ooohhh! Are you saying they did bring a lamb? Jesus, Temple, Lamb . . . ooohhh! Or as we heard in the reading from Hebrews: ***"so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."*** Or in other words, this was no ordinary purification! Jesus was here to be our propitiation – our substitute. To be the sacrificial Lamb. To be *our* purification. To take away the sin of the world.

Luke wants you to know. He is subtle, to make us think; to make an impression; to drive home his point. He is a master teacher. But as with any good teacher, just in case his "twists" don't work here, we have Simeon. Wonderful Simeon! Who tells us flat out, in case we missed it: here is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the Holy One of God. Simeon had been promised that he would see Him, and now that he has, he can die in peace.

And so can we. And that's the point of all this. When the firstborn were presented in the Temple on the 40th day, it reminded the people of God's gracious protection and deliverance after 40 years in the wilderness. The Exodus, the Passover, and finally, the Promised Land. And when Jesus came, God's plan and salvation reached its climax. For here was the One who would save not just a particular people of a particular time, but all people of all time. After Him, no other High Priest is needed. No other Lamb or sacrifice. No Temple. He is the Last and the Greatest and the One all these pointed to. The One all these were a shadow of. And so when He dies on the cross, the curtain in the

Temple is torn in two; the Holy of Holies is exposed – it is not needed anymore. All sin has been atoned for. And when Jesus then rises from the dead, *the exodus is complete*. Death has slain Him, so that it may *pass over* us. His blood now marks the door of our hearts, and so death is now for us, like Simeon, nothing to fear. It is now only the exodus from this land of slavery and sin, to the Promised Land of our heavenly home.

And when we get there, we will be the ones so presented to the Lord. Presented pure and holy through the sacrifice of Jesus. Presented, like Samuel, to live before the Lord as long as we live. And we will live forever. Born anew into the life of Heaven. . . . It may not look as if such a glorious future awaits us now, for here there is still sin and we sin. There is still death, and we suffer and struggle and die. And there are cemeteries full of graves that seem to mock our claims of victory. Right now, we stand and wait like Simeon. Waiting for consolation. Waiting in repentance. Waiting by faith in the great and wondrous promises made to us, that when we depart, we will depart in the forgiveness and peace of the Lord. And we will. For the forgiveness and peace we need is what this child has come to establish in His own body, and which He gives to us by grace. He is your God, your Temple, your Lord, your Sacrifice, and your Saviour. There is no other. You need no other. In Him, no day is ever again ordinary, but new. Filled with the work and Word of God. As He fills us with His Spirit and consolation until we depart in peace.

Jesus, by your presentation, When they blessed you, weak and poor,
Make us see your great salvation, Seal us with your promise sure;
And present us in your glory To your Father, cleansed and pure. (LW #186 v. 3)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.