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The Purification of Mary and
the Presentation of our Lord

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“The Day It All Came Together”

Text: Luke 2:22-40; 1 Samuel 1:21-28; Hebrews 2:14-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Any festival that has in its name “The Purification of Mary” is going to raise more than a few eyebrows in our day and age. For why would a woman need to be “purified” after childbirth? This seems to be something better left in the past; or better off forgotten all together. It is a dredging up of less civilized days, of the subjugation of women, of unwarranted male superiority. Why celebrate and commemorate something that seems superstitious and unnecessary at best, and chauvinistic and controlling at worst?

Well, to be sure, there are many things we read about in the Old Testament, many rituals and regulations, that don't seem to make sense to us today, in our time, in our culture. But one of the good things this particular ritual - of purification and presentation - did was connect the birth of a child and the health of the mother with the grace of God. For contrary to the thinking of many these days, these are not things that just happen, nor things to be taken for granted. The birth of a child and the health of the mother are gifts undeserved. Gifts because ever since the day that sin entered the world, one of the consequences of sin was that childbirth would no longer be easy, but difficult and painful.

And the sad truth - then and still today - is that not all children make it to the day of delivery. Not all children make it *through* delivery. Not all mothers either. Sin - not a particular sin done by a particular mother - but sin as a condition, sin as the corruption of our human nature, has caused death to intrude even on this passage into life. And to death *we need an answer*. To death *we need a solution*. So connecting birth and purification with God is a vivid reminder not only that we live in a world fraught with danger and death, *but even more* - that another child was coming, another child was promised, who would purify us, who would defeat death, and provide life. Who would be the answer, the solution, to our biggest need and our every need.

And that day in the Temple, that day when Joseph, Mary, and Jesus came in, it all came together. The prophecy, the promise, and the fulfillment, all right there. For the things done were pointing to a Saviour no longer far away in space or time, but now nestled in His mother's arms. *That's* what Simeon was given eyes to see that day - not just the fulfillment of his own personal promise, but ALL the prophecies of God, ALL the promises of God, the past and the future, all coming together in this one, in this child. Everything that Temple was

about and everything that happened in that Temple, was now being fulfilled in this child. The Promised One, the Promised Seed, had arrived. *No wonder Simeon couldn't contain himself!*

That we don't "get" that, that we don't react like Simeon, is symptomatic of just how far we have fallen and how deep sin has been embedded into hearts, minds, and lives and corrupted us. So that we don't think as we should, we don't desire what we should, we don't live as we should. That's why we think things like: *the purification of a woman?* What an unnecessary law! And it's why we're amazed with Hannah - in the Old Testament reading - *keeping her vow to give her son* - the son she had so wanted and for whom she had been praying so long and so hard - actually giving her son to the service of the Lord? That's like folks today who cry out: *God, if you'll just get me out of this mess, then I'll . . .* but we never actually do it! We didn't really mean it. God doesn't really expect . . . *does He?*

But it's not just with God - think about how the law is regarded in general in our day and age. There is the disturbing - and growing - trend of ignoring the law. And I don't mean just not doing it - but purposefully ignoring it; purposefully not doing it because you don't believe it's right or necessary. And so the putting of your mind, your opinion, your judgment, over the law that was established and given by those whose job it is to do that. Our president and his administration are doing it. Our new state Attorney General has publicly announced that he is going to do it. And it's why many (for example) don't obey the traffic laws, why children often think their parents' rules stupid and unnecessary, and employees go against what their bosses have said. And think for yourself, your own life - what rules or laws do you consider silly, not worth obeying, not worth enforcing?

But here's the question: Does that give us the right to break them? Yes, if they go against God's Word. But if they don't . . . is your opinion, then, and judgment the supreme court, the final arbiter, of right and wrong? Of what should be right and wrong *for you?*

And that we don't get caught, or if we do we get away with it, or that the consequences are insignificant, just makes it all worse. That just feeds our belief that these things really don't matter. That I am the judge. That while some laws are good and right, many laws are just there to oppress, control, and rob me of getting and doing what I want. So I'm just going to ignore them.

But it is not so with God's law. **First:** the God who is all-seeing and all-knowing knows all the violations. **Second:** you won't get away with it. Though you may or may not see or experience the consequences now, there are consequences, and **three:** they are not insignificant. Keeping 51 percent, or 75 percent, or even 99.99 percent is not good enough. As God has said from the very beginning, *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). *The soul that sins is the soul that dies* (Ezekiel 18:20). *In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die* (Genesis 2:17). Physical death, spiritual death, eternal dying. And **four:** you are not the judge - He is. And His Word, His Law, matters. His Word, His Law, must be kept.

But if His Word, His Law, must be kept, but you do not keep it, you *cannot* keep it - if you are unwilling or unable, either out of ignorance, or weakness, or rebellion - then either you must suffer the dreadful consequences, or you need someone to keep it for you. Someone to take your place. Someone - as we heard from Hebrews - to ***make propitiation for your sins***; or in other words, to be the sacrifice, the substitute, for you under the law, under your sentence. To do what must be done for you, to take the consequences for what you have not done, and set you free.

God had promised such a Saviour. Not just to Simeon, but all the way back to Adam. A promise then passed down to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel; to David and Solomon. The rites of purification and presentation were given to point to that promise and to be done with faith in that promise. And when Jesus arrived at the Temple that day, Simeon was given the eyes to see and the faith to believe that promise now being fulfilled. That one who would fulfill all the Law and all the promises, the one who would be ***the consolation of Israel*** by purifying us from our sin, by defeating death, and by providing life, the one who is the answer to our every need, **had come**. *And that one was God Himself in human flesh.* God, so that His sacrifice be for the sin of the world - all people, of all times and all places; and man, to take man's place under the Law and in death.

So God becomes weak, that man may be strong. God becomes the sinner, that man may be forgiven. God suffers, that man may be consoled. God dies, that man may live. God goes to the cross, that man may have a throne. That all this be for you.

And now that Jesus is risen from the dead, having taken your sin and death and done away with it, **it is for you**. It is the gift given to you when you are baptized, the gift given to you when you hear the words of His absolution, and the gift given to you when you receive His resurrected Body and Blood. For in all these you receive Jesus. And when you receive Jesus, you receive His forgiveness and His life.

And that's what Simeon got to see in the Temple that day. He probably didn't know all the details of how it would all work out and be done, but He knew He saw the promise keeper, the purifier, the one who was presented in the Temple that day but who on the Last Day would be the One presenting us to His Father. And that's why Simeon could say, after seeing Jesus: *Lord, now I can die, in peace.*

And that's why after we are given the eyes and faith to see Jesus come to us here, after taking Him up not in our arms but in our ears and mouths, we make Simeon's song our song, which we sing right after receiving Jesus: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.* For having received Jesus' forgiveness and life, death no longer has the power over us it once had. We'll still die - unless Jesus comes again first! But that death, in Jesus, has now been transformed into the gate to life. To a life that will never end.

Now that doesn't mean that death won't still be frightening and awful. It will be! It's still a monster. We were not created to die. It is unnatural and unknown and never meant to be.

And so it's terrible. And you can be sure that satan will be there, taking advantage of your fear, accusing you, reminding you of your sin, your unworthiness, your failure, and adding to the burden. And yet at the same time, in the midst of all that, you can face death with a kind of peace. Not with resignation, resigned to die like everyone else and that this is the end. But the peace of knowing that death is not the end, that your sins are forgiven, and that when it comes, you will not be alone. For that while death is more powerful than you, it is not more powerful than your Good Shepherd. So that: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me* (Psalm 23:4).

Yet this is true not only of death but also before death, for in life we have Jesus' promise, too: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20). A promise to effect not only how we die, but how we live now. How we live each and every day. How we live in the midst of trials and temptations, of hurts and disappointments, of strife and division, of sadness and loneliness and despair. These aren't going to go away, but the one who has fulfilled all of God's Word and is with us through death is with us in these too. To be our hope in trouble, our strength in weakness, our consolation when nothing else can help. So that perhaps we can be like Anna, who had her own share of troubles, and give thanks to God in all times and places of our lives, speaking of Him to all still in need of consolation, still in need of hope, still in need of forgiveness and life. For there are many who need such hope. Sitting next to you in school, at work, at home, even in church.

So next time someone asks you what day February 2nd is, *don't* say Groundhog Day or Super Bowl Sunday! Those might be good days, *especially* when the groundhog doesn't see his shadow and winter is predicted to end sooner rather than later. But for us, it is an even better day. The day that points us to the end not of a season of weather or of football, but to the end of the shadow *of death*, the winter *of our sins*, and the fight *against the old evil foe*. The day that shows us the beginning of our victory. The day when the light of the world shone forth and the shadows flee. The day that points us to that day when that seed buried in the ground for three days and three nights would rise and grow in a Springtime of life that would never end. A good day indeed, when we - with Simeon and Anna and all who are in Christ - will be presented by the Son to the Father, purified and cleansed by His sacrifice, by His blood, a new birth, to a new life that will never end.

Promised fulfilled.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.