

Pure and Cleansed In Christ

Luke 2:22-40

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

December 30, 2018 – First Sunday After Christmas

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. According to the Law of Moses, after giving birth, a woman was to be “set apart” for forty days. What that means is that during those forty days she could neither go to any holy place, nor could she touch any holy thing. Now to us who live in the so-called “enlightened” age of the 21st Century, the idea that giving birth to a child would make a woman impure or unclean is quite puzzling – perhaps even offensive. After all, what could be more natural than childbirth? Are children not a gift from the Lord and a blessing from the hand of God? Unfortunately, however, because of sin, this blessing is also accompanied by a curse. The way children come into the world *is* quite a messy business – and children themselves are equally messy. They start out messy, and they usually get messier the older they get. And may I say that the messiest children of all are those we most commonly call “adults.” Truth be known, life on this side of the grave is full of messes – some of those messes we cause ourselves, others simply fall into our laps, but life still remains messy, filled with sin of one sort or another, because sin infects us all.

The Scriptures understand this quite well, which was why in Jesus’ day forty days following the birth of a child every mother was to bring a sin offering to the Temple – either a lamb if the family could afford one, or two turtledoves if they couldn’t. In this way the mother would be ritually cleansed and made pure again. But, if her child also happened to be the firstborn son – as was the case with our Lord Christ – there was another ritual which had to be carried out. From the time of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, every firstborn male of an Israelite mother was to be dedicated for service in the Temple of God because in the Exodus God had redeemed His children from the

Angel of Death. However, since only the men of tribe of Levi had been designated to serve as priests, all the other firstborn sons were to be redeemed by their parents – bought back from their required service with an offering presented at the Temple, again, forty days after their birth.

So then, the forty day time period mentioned in this morning’s Gospel was to be, for Mary, a time both for purification, as well as an opportunity for her and Joseph to prepare for the day they would present Jesus at the Temple. But when Mary and Joseph came to present *this* Son as required by the Law, it would be like no other presentation before or since. For they brought with them not only the two turtledoves, but also the ultimate Sacrifice – the One who would stand in our place to keep the Law which we are unable to keep – who would endure the punishment we deserve – and in the process would cleanse and purify all mankind from sin and death. *This* Son was the ultimate High Priest promised of old who, nearly 33 years later, would make His way to Calvary’s cross to suffer, die and rise again for sinners such as you and me. Jesus Himself had come as the promised Sacrifice which would redeem all mankind from sin and every evil!

That’s what God revealed to Simeon when he gazed into the face of this little Infant Savior. And when Simeon realized who this was, he cradled this 40 day old Savior in his arms, blessed God, raised his eyes to heaven and said: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people Israel.” Simeon could now finally depart in peace, because it had been made known to him that the true Temple of God

whom he served had finally come to him in the flesh of this little Baby Boy. No longer was the salvation of God's people to be found in turtle-doves, lambs, or earthly temples – for these had never been anything more than shadows pointing to Christ – because now God's Salvation, the Glory of God's people, Israel, had visited him in the Person of the Son of Mary – whose destiny was to die for the sin of the world.

These words of Simeon: "Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace," are, of course, the very same words we oftentimes sing at that point in the Liturgy after which we've just had the privilege of receiving the body and blood of our Lord Jesus in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Church has sung this song of Simeon for centuries in the recognition that He whom Simeon held in his arms, you and I also receive into our mouths. Simeon longed to be in the presence of God, but you and I take Him into our own bodies every time we take, eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus, which was given and shed for the forgiveness of our sin!

Imagine! Throughout his long life Simeon desired to have for himself the very thing you and I are privileged to receive right here at this Altar every week – and often take for granted. Here in this blessed Meal – which the ancients rightly called the "Medicine of Immortality" – our Lord Christ Himself comes to cleanse us – body, soul and spirit. Here, in simple bread and wine, God comes to us in a very real, fleshly,

body-and-blood way so as to impart to us the forgiveness of sins, and to right everything wrong or messed up in our lives. A little earlier I made mention of the fact that children are messy – especially those who are of the adult variety. And yet it's that very messiness caused by sin which Christ our Lord came to take upon Himself so that we might be purified and made holy.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ – God of god, Light of light, very God of very god – came into our fallen world for one reason, and one reason only. He came so that He might become like one of us – so that He might become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh – so that He might be like us in every way, only without sin. He came to make us worthy through His sacrificial death and resurrection – so that we might be able to stand before God on the Last Day and inherit the salvation He won for us all. He made Himself to be like us so that we could be like Him. What a wonderful treasure Jesus gives us here in His body and blood as He willingly enters into the sin, messiness, mire and muck of our lives to make us holy – just as our first parents were in the Garden before the fall. In His name and by the power of the Holy Spirit it may it always be so for you. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.