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The Feast of the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Lk 2.22-40

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

Here we are now, 40 days after Christmas.

Over the past 40 days we've followed Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus into Egypt
and witnessed the slaughtering of the Holy Innocent.

We've gone with Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus to the Temple,
where He was forgotten, but by no means lost.

We witnessed the Star and the Magi and their gifts,

Then there was His baptism, where the Holy Spirit came down like a dove,
and the Father declared Jesus His beloved Son.

We gradually saw, then, John's disciples becoming Jesus' disciples.

We learned of St. Titus, sent to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Christ.

Over the past 40 days we've followed Jesus from infancy to childhood and back;
and from adulthood into the life of the Church.

Here we are now, 40 days after Christmas, literally celebrating the 40th day of His life!
If you can wrap your mind around that, all the better!

Now why the 40th day? And what are they doing in the Temple?

First of all, much of what's going on is precisely as it's said in the Old Testament.

Leviticus 12 tells us:

*"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel, saying,
If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days...
She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary,
until the days of her purifying are completed.*

*⁶ "And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter,
she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a
burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, ⁷ and he shall offer it
before the LORD and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of
her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. ⁸ And if she
cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt
offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and
she shall be clean." (Lev 12:1-2,4, 6-8)*

And then Exodus 13 gives us this:

*"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.'" (Exod 13:1-2)*

So it makes sense why Mary brought Jesus to the Temple.

She gets purified, He gets presented to the Lord.

But there's more going on than that.

That would all be normal, and right—but there's nothing normal about Jesus' birth. Remember?

I wonder what she needed purification from?

And what about in Leviticus where the mother's not to even touch anything holy—
do you think she didn't hold the Christ child? Is there anything holier than Him?

The Law isn't running the show with Christ. It's not in charge. *He is*.
And even though He's the author of the Law, the very Word made Flesh,
our Lord desired to be *under the Law*.

Just as we saw with His circumcision, and His Baptism—and as it'll be for the cross, too—
none of this is because He *had to*, but because He wanted all this *for you*.

*He was presented to the Father wearing our humanity,
so that we might be presented to the Father wearing His divinity.*

Now, take consider for a moment Mary's offering for her purification.
Luke tells us that she offered, "*a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*" (Lk 2:24)
Leviticus demanded a Lamb—
but if the mother was poor enough, she could offer two turtledoves, or young pigeons.

This tells us that Mary and Joseph lived quite humbly, not rich by any means.
And Christ entered this world through poverty.

But on the other hand—considering this text in light of *the rest of the story*—
we realize that Mary, in fact, offers both the Lamb *and* the two turtledoves.
The Lamb she offers, is the *Lamb who takes away the sin of the world*.

When she offers this Lamb—not on the 40th day, but at the cross—
purification is made not only for Mary, but for the entire world!

And to show that this event of the 40th day is, in fact, all about the cross—
two other temple-goers appear on the scene: old man Simeon, and the prophetess Anna.

Simeon, we're told, is *righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel*. (2:25)
Anna is commended for her chastity.

We're not told *when* she married, exactly, but that she was only married 7 years.
When we meet her, she's 84, which means she lived her life as a virgin for 77 years.
We're also told she stayed in the temple, night and day,
worshipping with fasting and prayers.

Both Simeon and Anna recognize in this Jesus the fulfillment of prophecy.
Simeon—though not called a prophet, has all the things of prophecy about him:
"the Holy Spirit was upon him" (2:25);
*"and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit
that he wouldn't see death before seeing the Lord's Christ"* (2:26);
"and he came in the Spirit to the temple" (2:27).

And when this Simeon saw Jesus, he took Him into his arms and blessed God.

Simeon saw in this 40-day-old Jesus the salvation of God—
a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.

He saw the fulfillment of all God's promises.
All of the Law, all of the Prophets, all of the Writings of old are now fulfilled in this Christ.
And having believed for so many years, Simeon may now die in peace.
Anna, too, praised God and spoke about this Jesus as the *redemption* of Jerusalem.

Now what does all this have to do with the cross?
Well, redemption only comes by the shedding of blood.
“*The wages of sin is death,*” Paul tells us (Rom 6:23).
That is, if you've got sin then you've earned for yourself a death.

But, if someone pays off your debt, if someone *redeems* what you owe—
then death doesn't come in to play; it wouldn't be yours to worry about.

This Jesus, the 40-day-old Jesus, is your redemption.
It's His blood that is shed as a ransom, paying your debt to the Father.
Remember, He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—
but for that, the Lamb must die.

Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph, and then warns Mary about all this:
“*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.*” (2:34-35)

What was an otherwise joyful, unexpected, and marvelous encounter at the Temple—
has now become a prophecy of the suffering, death, and crucifixion of Christ.

It's at the cross that Mary's soul is pierced.
And it's the word of the cross that pierces our own souls as well.
That word cuts and divides sharper than any two-edged sword,
revealing our sinful thoughts and leaving us without any defense.

And yet it's also that word of the cross that gives us life,
that raises us from the dead, and unites us to Christ.

This child truly is the cause of the falling and rising of many.
As St. Paul says, *you have been crucified with Christ;*
it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. (Gal 2:20)

In that way, just as Mary and Joseph brought Him to the temple to present Him to God,
so also, like Simeon and Anna, you present Christ to the world.
For in Him, you have fallen, and you have risen. And may now go in peace.
In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit