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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY  
First Sunday after Christmas  
December 27, 2015  
Text: Luke 2:22–40

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas is a time for families. And well it should be. One of the remarkable things we see in the Christmas readings is that the eternal Son of God, who took on our human flesh and blood, was born into a family. Who was there on that first Christmas? Our Lord's virgin mother and His protective stepfather. Jesus was the firstborn. Otherwise there might have been siblings present too. The rest of the immediate family was in Nazareth. In a very real sense, God became domesticated; that is, the eternal Son of God chose to be born into and live in a family. By His very presence, He sanctifies the institution of the family. For that reason alone, though there are others, the family, as defined by Holy Scripture, should be protected and supported by every means possible.

Today's Gospel reading from Luke 2:22–40 recounts the first few days of this blessed family. It's been 40 days since Jesus' birth. The scene has shifted from Bethlehem's manger to Jerusalem's Temple. Jesus and Mary must appear before the Lord to offer the appropriate sacrifices in order to fulfill the Old Testament Law of Moses just like any other Jewish family. It's quite amazing that the infant Lord Jesus is already fulfilling His heavenly Father's will of keeping the Law so that His people might be saved from condemnation and judgment.

Here's what I mean by the Lord fulfilling the Law. Exodus 13:2, from today's OT reading, says, "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." And then vs. 12, "you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb." All firstborn Jewish males belonged to God. The reason for such consecration is explained in vs. 14–15:

<sup>14</sup>And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. <sup>15</sup>For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD

killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

Every firstborn son was to be a reminder that God had saved His people in the past. He will continue to save His people in the present and the future.

Jesus is Mary’s firstborn Son, so He must go to the Temple and be consecrated to the Lord. That’s what families in Israel did in faithful obedience to God.

But there is more that the OT requires of families. Blood sacrifices must be offered for the mothers as well. Leviticus 12 requires that a lamb be provided as a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtledove as a sin offering for the mother. Only one alternative is allowed. If the mother cannot afford a lamb, then she will provide either two turtledoves or two pigeons; one for a burnt offering the other for a sin offering. Joseph and Mary chose to offer the two birds, evidently because they were too poor to afford a lamb.

Luke writes in today’s reading, “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses...” (vs. 22). Notice he says, “their purification.” He’s referring to both Mary and Jesus and the OT requirements of the Law that must be observed for their sanctification. Even though Joseph and Mary knew and believed the angelic message that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world, they fulfilled their parental vocations faithfully and fully.

I want to pause a moment and commend you parents and grandparents for being faithful in your parental vocations. You care for your families, pray for them, and support them, sometimes sacrificially. In various ways, you share the love of Christ. Your work of love and grace does not go unnoticed and the Lord will use it to accomplish His good and saving purposes. Even as God the Father used Joseph and Mary’s faithfulness in the Lord Jesus’ very early life. Thank you for your loving faithfulness.

Joseph and Mary offer their sacrifices to the Lord in obedience to God’s Word. The NT Church no longer offers animal sacrifices to sanctify our children and families. Those sacrifices were given by God in order to prepare the world for the final, end-times sacrifices offered by the Lord Jesus on Good Friday. He is their fulfillment and completion. No other sacrifices need be offered.

Soon after His resurrection from the dead on Easter morning, Jesus gave instructions to His disciples about how people are to be sanctified and consecrated to God. Listen to our Lord's instructions in Matthew 28:18–20:

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to (the disciples), “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mothers, fathers, children, people in all stations of life, from the very young to the very old are sanctified to God through Trinitarian baptism and on-going teaching in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord promises to be with us even unto the end of the age precisely through our baptism and continual reception of the Gospel. You are God's holy people because you are His baptized people who receive His word in faith and trust.

I'd like to pause here again and say something that I teach to all my catechism students and young parents when I have opportunity. Though I'm finding that I need to encourage grandparents in this regard all the more. It has to do with “children's church.” I have stated, somewhat provocatively, that I think children's church, or any variation of it, is a heresy, though a heresy with the best, most sincere intentions behind it. Any kind of activity that takes children out of the service where God's Word is preached and proclaimed must be avoided. For it is through the continual teaching of God's Word that they are consecrated to God. Children need to be with their parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members in Church.

Joseph and Mary didn't pass off the 40-day old Jesus to a well-meaning preschool priest. They took Him themselves and presented Him to the Lord in fulfillment of God's Word. I have had a number of parents tell me that they've visited other congregations, some Lutheran some not Lutheran, in which they were greatly encouraged to take their kids to children's church. When they refused, the response was surprise, almost irritation.

In today's gospel reading, we learn about Simeon. In vs. 27–28 we read, “when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said...” Notice what Luke wrote, “the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law.” Jesus remained with His parents. And next week, we'll read about the 12 year old

Jesus who goes to Jerusalem for the Passover with His parents and a large company of extended family.

Simeon, we learn in vs. 26 had been promised that he would see the Christ before he (i.e., Simeon) died. God the Father used Joseph and Mary's faithfulness to fulfill His promise to Simeon. Simeon held Jesus in rapturous praise and thanksgiving but He did not separate the infant Jesus from His parents. Because of Joseph and Mary's faithfulness in bringing Jesus to God's Temple, we have Simeon's beautiful song of praise, in vs. 29–32, which we call Simeon's Song or more traditionally it's Latin title *Nunc Dimittis*. We sing it in our Sunday Divine Worship services. Dear saints of God, our families need to worship in church together as much as possible. Infants and young children may be noisy and distracting. So be it. They need to be in worship. And the Lord Jesus wants them with us.

For when they join us in church, they join in the praise of all creation. As a closing blessings for all our families, I want to read today's epistle reading from Colossians 3: 12 – 17. May it enrich your heart, mind, body, and soul as well as your family and homes:

<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

A Merry Christmas to you all!!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.