

Testifying to Jesus: Joseph & Mary

Luke 2:21-24

42-28

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2. We have gone through the first 20 verses of this wonderful chapter which details for us the birth of Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, the Messiah, Savior of the world. And, you know, we're so very familiar with the story, the story of the birth of Jesus, familiar with Joseph and Mary, familiar with Bethlehem, familiar with shepherds, angels, a manger, a stable. Those are very familiar parts to the story. And Luke has taken us through those familiar elements.

And were we to study the gospel of Matthew, we would meet some more familiar elements that Luke doesn't bring up, such as the wise men. Luke doesn't tell us about the wise men but Matthew does. Those mysterious and wonderful men from the east who followed the star looking for the great King that had been born, that incredible account of their arrival and the gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And then there was the wonderful and fascinating story of Herod who, hearing about the birth of the rival king, as he saw Him, decided that he had to save his own throne and so he massacred all the little baby boys in the area. Matthew tells us about that familiar story.

And then there is the very brief account of the family of Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus fleeing for their lives into Egypt to be protected from Herod.

Familiar and beloved scenes that get retold every Christmas season; they...they sort of go into an eleven-month fade every year and then they're brought back to vivid color around Christmas season. And we hear them oft repeated with all their beauty and wonder is restored for us in the vivid color of the retelling. Those are very familiar, very familiar stories.

Far less familiar, however, is the account that we're about to read in Luke. And for that we are the poorer, frankly. As a kid growing up, I have memories of just about all of the elements of the Christmas story that I've mentioned to you. In fact, I was in a number of Christmas pageants which sort of find a vivid place into your mind, often because your mother took pictures and keeps showing them to you through the years. And so the memories are kind of cemented. We are familiar with things I've mentioned, the wise men, the shepherds, and Herod, and Bethlehem and all of that.

But perhaps not familiar with two names with which we should be familiar, Simeon and Anna. I don't really remember, as I look back in my childhood, ever giving thought to them, or hearing anything about them. And yet they play an absolutely critical part in the whole scene of the arrival of the Son of God and the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are far less familiar to us. And their story doesn't get told very often and rarely ever gets repeated around Christmas season. It seems like the wise men are more dramatic and the shepherds and angels are more dramatic and certainly the story of Herod is dramatic and deadly. But what we see here from verse 21 to verse 40 is drama at its highest level. It is impactful. It is critical, essential testimony to the identity of Jesus Christ.

There is a principle that is woven into the fabric of our lives. And it starts out in the Bible back in Deuteronomy and it's this principle: Any testimony should be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Even today in the jurisprudence of western civilization, a story corroborated by two or three witnesses is considered to be credible and believable and true. That goes back to that biblical affirmation, that testimony had to be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. And the testimony of Luke has been that Jesus has been born "Son of God, Son of Man, Son of Abraham, Son of David." The testimony has been borne that Jesus came into the world as a child of a virgin, having no human father, being fathered by God Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit, being planted in Mary's womb without a human father, thus the child born of a virgin. And Luke has given testimony to the fact that this child is God in human flesh, that this child is the eternal King who will reign on the throne forever and ever, that this child is the Savior of the world. This is the child who will save people from their sins. This is the singular and the greatest child ever to be born in the history of the universe.

That testimony needs to be confirmed. And so Luke in this section brings in the testimony of witnesses. First, there is the testimony of Joseph and Mary, the parents' testimony. Secondly, there is the testimony of a man named Simeon. And thirdly, there is the testimony of a woman named Anna. And finally, there is the testimony of God Himself. Four testimonies are given: The testimony of His parents, the testimony of Simeon, the testimony of Anna, and the affirmation and testimony of God Himself as to the identity of this child. And so the passage confirms the credibility of Luke's account that this child is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, the anointed Christ, and the Savior of the world.

Now there's something you want to know about a witness. There's something you want to know about someone called to testify. You want to know that they're honest. And so you want some indication of their character. Luke is careful in this passage to let us know that the witnesses that are called to give affirming testimony to Jesus Christ are righteous people. They are credible witnesses because they are righteous. Their testimony we can believe because of the character of their lives. And so we find here that Luke majors on letting us in on the character of all of these witnesses.

The first thing we find out about has to do with the parents of Jesus. Now we already know they are righteous because in Matthew 1:19 it says, "Joseph, being a righteous man." That is to say he was right with God. That's what Scripture means. He was right with God. Joseph was one of a small remnant in Israel. He was just a boy thirteen, fourteen years old when he...when he came together to take Mary as his wife after she had given birth to the child and Mary was just a girl of thirteen or fourteen. But Joseph was righteous. It says it in Matthew 1:19 he was a righteous man.

Now in Israel the righteous were a very small remnant, a very small remnant. There were liberals, theologically, in the nation Israel, having been influenced by the Sadducees who didn't believe in a real resurrection and didn't believe in angels. They denied the supernatural and they were the...the theological liberals of the time and they had great influence on a lot of people.

And there were the legalists as well as the liberals. They were the Pharisees and everybody they influenced who believed that they could work their way to heaven by their own righteousness and their own adherence to Jewish ceremony, that they could be good enough on their own. And those legalists commanded a large following.

And then there were those that we could say were the politicizers, the people who had reduced Judaism to a political thing. They were nationalists. They were zealous for the preservation of the nation Israel and its political autonomy and independence and their goal in life was to overthrow Rome and get back their autonomy as a people and they're often identified as Zealots, sometimes called the *sikarii* because they carried little daggers and stabbed Romans. They were the terrorists.

There was another group of Jews that one could adhere to and those would be the Essenes who were ascetics, they were hermits. They lived out in the...in the wilderness and they were out there in a monkish kind of life, isolated from all society contemplating their theology. And in the midst of this mix in a...in a nation that had fallen far away from God, there was a very, very small remnant, a very small remnant, in fact even after the three-year ministry of Jesus, after His death and resurrection when all the believers of Jerusalem gathered in the Upper Room there were only 120 of them.

But there were in Israel some. There was a remnant of righteous ones. Zacharias and Elizabeth, the father and mother of John the Baptist, introduced to us in chapter 1 verse 6, are introduced as being righteous. They were a part of that remnant. God was working the coming of His Messiah and the forerunner to the Messiah, the prophet, John, He was working that all out through righteous people, people who belonged to Him, who believed in Him, who were right with God because they had come to grips with their sinfulness, knew they couldn't save themselves and repented of their sins and cast themselves on the mercy of God. And God had forgiven them and saved them from their sin. They were the righteous remnant.

And it's important to have testimony from righteous people. First of all, we find that Joseph and Mary were righteous and the evidence of that comes because it is said of Joseph... Joseph that he was righteous, Matthew 1:19. And secondly, we know that Mary was righteous because of what came out of her mouth in chapter 1 verse 46, she said, "My soul exalts the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior." God was her Savior. She too was a righteous girl.

Their commitment to God, the devotion of their lives is indicated. Let me show you how it's indicated. It tells us in verse 21 here that they circumcised Jesus, now that according to the law, that according to the law of God. They followed the law. It tells us in verse 22 that according to the law of Moses they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. I should say, according to the law of Moses she had her purification, it says in the beginning of the verse, "When the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem." Verse 23 says, "It is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Verse 24 says, "To offer sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord." Down in verse 27 it says, "When the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for Him the custom of the law," again the law of the Lord. Verse 39 says, "When they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own city of Nazareth." Five times it mentions that they were committed to the law of the Lord.

You know, James, I guess, has a good insight into this. James says, "Faith without works is (what?) is dead." And true saving faith shows up in obedience. And these people were obedient. They were compliant with the law of the Lord. They delighted in the law of the Lord and they did the will of the Lord, as revealed in His law.

So here is a righteous young couple. They're just...they're just kids by our definition, but they were righteous before God. They were saved. Their sins had been forgiven and they were devout and they were committed to the obedience of the law of God as an expression of their love and their worship toward God. And they are incredible witnesses.

And then in introducing Simeon to us, we'll see him next week, but in introducing Simeon to us, Luke takes great pains to establish how righteous he is. And then introducing Anna to us, the way Luke introduces Anna, we can't imagine that there was any woman in all of Israel who was as righteous as Anna was. And, of course, the fourth testimony is given by God who is righteous in His nature.

So what you have here is confirming testimony by parents, Simeon, and Anna. And then a final word from God Himself is indicated here. Incredible witnesses to Luke's account that this in fact Jesus, Son of God, Savior of the world.

Now the setting here is tied to two things. It's tied to Mosaic law because you're in the temple. And what's going to go on here is all connected to the Mosaic law and to temple sacrifices and temple offerings. Also, this entire passage borrows richly from the writings of Isaiah. That shouldn't surprise us because from chapter 40 of Isaiah through 66, Isaiah unfolds the Messiah. So you're going to see a very Jewish background, very Jewish setting for the scene that unfolds. It is tied to the Old Testament law and prophets, Mosaic law and the prophecies of Isaiah. Righteous people giving testimony to the identity of Jesus Christ. This is critical so that His assertions concerning Christ are confirmed in the mouth of two, yes three witnesses who are righteous and trustworthy.

For this morning, let's look at the testimony of Joseph and Mary. This is the testimony of His parents. Verse 21, "When eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now you read that at first and maybe you can't quite catch the depth of it, so let me unpack it a little bit for you and show you the treasures that are inside. Five times, as I mentioned earlier, the law of the Lord is mentioned in reference to the behavior of Joseph and Mary. Their devotion to obey the will of God is clear. They wanted to do what God had revealed for them to do and they did it with joy and faithfulness. The whole passage really features their dedication, it features their obedience. And as I said, in Luke's continuing effort to mold the reader's understanding of who Christ is, he shapes his narrative around the testimony of these uniquely righteous people. And, first of all, Jesus' earthly family lead out in giving testimony.

Now they give testimony to the identity of the child as the Messiah and Savior of the world in two ways: One, at the circumcision and naming; two, at the purification and presenting. We're going to see the circumcision and naming in verse 21, the purification and presenting in verses 22 to 24. These two ways become testimony from Joseph and Mary and validates the claim that this is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Let's look at verse 21, here is the first, circumcision and naming. Now we all understand that the

eighth-day circumcision was what was prescribed by Mosaic law. It is clearly recorded that this is to be done. Leviticus chapter 12 verse 3, which we'll look at in a moment, says on the eighth day the child is to be circumcised. Every male child born into Israel was to be circumcised on the eighth day. The circumcision was introduced by God to Abraham. In Genesis 17:1 to 14, Abraham was circumcised, he, however, was circumcised as an adult when God identified him as the father of the race. He was circumcised as an adult. And then every male that came from him and from those who came from him throughout all of the Hebrew people, every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day. That was the sign and symbol of God's covenant. Back in chapter 1 verse 59 regarding John, the prophet born to Zacharias and Elizabeth, "It came about on the eighth day they came to circumcise him." That was just standard operating procedure on the eighth day.

Circumcision, just to give you a brief recap, circumcision was a sign of God's covenant. It was a sign of God's covenant. It identified a Jew. But God was saying something in circumcision. In the cutting away of that skin, God, first of all, was...was doing something physical, He was protecting the Jewish man from passing on infections and bacteria to his wife. That's why in ancient times, not today because we have so much hygiene, but in ancient times Jewish women had the lowest rate of cervical cancer in the world and it was better when men and women came together circumcised in terms of cleanliness and protection than not. And therefore God preserved His people that way. He was definitely committed to preserving His people since they are the center of redemptive history clear to the end of the world. And so God protected them and that was one way physically that God protected them from illness. He also protected them, of course, by giving them monogamous laws and calling for their purity and sanctifying one man-one woman for life so that they were not subject to the devastating plagues of venereal disease which destroyed whole peoples.

But circumcision was more than a physical protection. It was a symbol of a need for spiritual cleansing. And that's why the Bible talks about circumcise your hearts. God was showing them through this symbol that they needed to be cleansed because they not only passed on sin potentially physically they passed on sin heart to heart, soul to soul. When they had a child they got a sinner because they were sinners. They needed a cleansing at a deep, deep level of their souls. That's why God said circumcise your heart, circumcise your heart. Every circumcised male child then, every time that operation took place, it was a symbol of how deeply sinful people were and how greatly they needed a heart cleansing.

If you look at Judaism, just look at Judaism, the message that God was sending to His people was about their sin. You could take the law of God and all the law of God did was, break them and crush them. The law of God laid out before for the Jew rendered him a sinner. And last Sunday night we talked about the Sabbath. The Jew would look at the Sabbath which is the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." And when he looked at the Sabbath in the middle of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, he would focus on that Sabbath. He would not work. He would not leave his house. He would not cook anything, not carry a load, not do anything. But he would sit, he would contemplate that day. And as he looked at the law of God and as he considered the worship of God, what he would become aware of was that everything above the fourth commandment, one, two and three, had to do with God. Everything below had to do with man. And he would look at that day and he would remember that day in the middle of the Decalogue, look up and see how he had violated all the laws against God. Look down and see how he had violated all the laws against man. In other words, he had sinned against God; he had sinned against his fellow man. So the Sabbath then became a contemplation point for violation of the law of God.

He would then look at the whole complexity of the law that sort of came out of the Ten Commandments and would realize how he had violated that law as well. The Sabbath day then became a day for man to contemplate his sinfulness.

On top of the Sabbath day, every seventh day, there were Sabbaths and Sabbaths and Sabbaths, all kinds of Sabbaths. Every time there was a feast of Passover, every time Yom Kippur came, the Day of Atonement, Rosh Hashanah, every time there was a Feast of Lights, every time there was a Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, every time there was Pentecost, there were many other things. There...all of those Sabbaths came and came and just cluttered the calendar, were times to contemplate God and in contemplating God and His commandments, you contemplated your own sinfulness and how you had broken the commands that related to Him, and broken the commands that related to men. And then life was just filled with that contemplation.

On top of that, life was a bloody mess because all those violations called for sacrifice. That's why we've said that priests were nothing but butchers. They were, you know, chin deep in blood slaughtering animals, because sin just kept coming and coming and with it came sacrifice and sacrifice. And the whole of Judaism, the whole of Judaism was one massive effort on God's part to call those people to a recognition of how sinful they were. Every time a baby was born into the world, circumcision on the eighth day was a reminder of the depth of sin, that they were so deep in sin they needed a cleansing at the deepest level.

Everything that happened in their life... I mean, you just take Judaism, lay it out and what you've got is a system designed to make people feel the burden of their sinfulness. By the time you get to the time of Jesus, you've got only a few honest righteous Jews who are willing to think like that. And the rest have fired off into one or another direction. You've got the liberal ones who don't even want to think about the letter of the law. You've got the Pharisees, the legalists, who have exchanged the heart for the head and it's all external and none of it's internal. You've got the politicizing Zealots who have just abandoned all of that and gone for a political end. And you've got the Essenes who are out there contemplating their navel, trying to think themselves to a higher level and are not concerned with the obedience to the law of God in Scripture.

Same thing today; you've got a very small little group of righteous Jews today. Most Jews are either what you call liberal Jews or quote-unquote conservative Jews, or reformed Jews, very few orthodox who are careful and thoughtful about the law of God. And there are among them very few who really believe God and know God through their Messiah. But the whole Jewish system...I know why there are liberal...were liberal Jews then. And I know why there are reformed Jews and conservative Jews today, because they want to get rid... They want to keep the traditions of Judaism they're comfortable with, but you can't keep Judaism in its biblical form without constantly facing your sin. That's why it's not popular. It's fine to be a traditional sort of ethnic Jew, but let's not get carried away. If you buy the whole system, you're literally swept away in your sinfulness. That's its intent. Now you can avoid it a lot of ways. You can become a Pharisee and content yourself with your externals. That doesn't please God. Or you can just run from it, become liberal like the Sadducees did, bail out all together and question whether the Scripture is even the Scripture.

There's a lot of popularity in hanging around to the ethnicity and some of the cultural aspects and traditions of Judaism. But I can understand why they want to shed Judaism as a system because it's relentless in hammering home the sinfulness of sin. And so babies were circumcised. That was just one among many signs of the need for cleansing of the heart.

Now the question could be asked, but why circumcise Jesus because He didn't need His heart cleansed? That's right, He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, it says in Hebrews. He didn't need His heart cleansed from sin. He was sinless. He was numbered with the transgressors, it says in Isaiah 53:9, even though there was no deceit found in His mouth.

In fact, when He died on the cross He was bruised for our iniquities, punished for our transgressions. He is called in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "Him who knew no sin." He is absolutely sinless. So why was He being circumcised?

There's one answer, very good answer: Because that's what the Law of God required. And Galatians 4:4 says, Paul writing, "Jesus was born of a woman, born under the law." Whatever the law of God prescribed in the covenant at that time, He would do.

I mean, I could understand if His parents said, "You know, this is God in human flesh." And I wonder what it was like, I wonder if you...I mean, you certainly care for a baby just because he's a baby. But if you knew your baby was God, you might have a discussion that said, "I don't know if we ought to do this circumcision. What if something goes wrong here? What if some bleeding...what if some infection... This is the Son of God, this is the virgin-born, this is... And plus, if this is God in human flesh, is this necessary?"

I mean, I could understand that kind of thinking. I mean, I've thought often about the thought...raising Jesus as a baby. I mean, how you would have treated Him. Talk about being protective... But no, His parents came the eighth day and they had Him circumcised. And I'm sure God prompted their hearts to do that and the reason was because Jesus was born under the law and Jesus was going to obey every aspect of God's law whether He obeyed it as a baby passively or whether He obeyed as an adult actively when He went to the river Jordan and He said to John, "You need to baptize Me." And John said, "I don't need to baptize You, You've got to be kidding me. You need to baptize me." And John was saying, You don't need cleansing so why the symbol? And Jesus responded in Matthew 3:15 and said, "I must fulfill all righteousness. Whatever the law requires, I do that. I do that."

And I've told you why that's the case.

I'll give you a little scenario just to help you remember. It would have been conceivable that the Father could have said to the Son, "Now You have to go down and redeem humanity. And I know that's a tough thing, but I really only need You for a weekend. You know, go down there. Go down Friday morning, they'll crucify You Friday evening, actually You can come out of the grave Sunday morning, be back late Sunday afternoon, I really only need the weekend."

This is true. I mean, that is the issue, isn't it? It's the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ that purchases our justification. The Father could have said that and you ask the question, well why the thirty-three years? I mean, if you only need a weekend, what's the thirty-three years of being mocked and resented and embattled with the Pharisees and hated by the Sadducees and all the fuss and hassle? And His own brothers don't believe in Him and He has to deal with a bunch of blockheads called the disciples and... Why all that? Why does He have to... Why does He have to be there thirty-three years? And besides, we don't know anything about Him. All we know about His whole childhood is in verse 40, that's all we know...one verse, "He grew." That's all we know.

Became strong, increased in wisdom. That's all we know. That's His whole childhood. And when He gets to be twelve and reaches, you know, twelve when He's a son of the law and He's entering in adulthood, He's a twelve-year-old now. He's in the temple and He's asking questions of the doctors and then the story ends and we never hear anything again until He's thirty years old. What happened to all the years in between? What was going on by the time...between twelve and thirty? That's eighteen years. What was that all about? And there's no record of that, that's pretty...that seems to me to be a pretty interesting story to tell. I don't know what was going on, but I have a pretty fertile imagination. What would it be like to be the brother of God? Would you like to have a perfect brother? That could get a little irritating. How would you like to be the father of a perfect child? That would be a little hard to cope with. I mean, what went on? I mean, when Joseph was making a table over here, was Jesus over here, "Table." Did He ever have to remake anything?

That's interesting to think about. I...I can't give you any answer cause there's no record of it. So you say, "Why all these thirty-three years? What's it for? You don't even report on it, don't even tell us anything about it, why is it there?"

Answer, listen carefully: Because He had to live an entire righteous life. He had to come into this world and live as a child, a young person and as an adult under the law so that He could live a perfect life, an entire perfect life into His adulthood, an entire perfect life.

Why did He have to do that? So that perfect life could be credited to your account. You see, in the doctrine of substitution, on the cross God treats Jesus as if He lived your life so He could treat you as if you lived His. And there has to be a perfect life to be put to your account, and His is it. That's why He was circumcised and everything else.

He was born of a woman, born under the law. And His parents took Him and they had Him circumcised. Now at the point that they had Him circumcised it says, "His name was then called Jesus." Apparently it was the circumcision that they did the official naming. They called Him Jesus. That wasn't a hard choice to make. That was the name given by the angel before He was ever conceived in the womb. You remember that Joseph was approached by an angel and the angel says, "When the child is born," Matthew 1:21, "call His name Jesus for He'll save His people from their sins." Mary is approached by the same angel, Gabriel, and she is told the very same thing. Chapter 1 of Luke verse 31, "You're going to bear a Son and You are to name Him Jesus." You know what Jesus means? It means Yahweh saves, God saves, God saves.

We saw that naming and circumcision went together when John was born back in chapter 1 verse 59 to 63. Here we see it again. That was the Jewish custom that that occurred at the same time. And so they gave Him the name "Yahweh saves." The Old Testament equivalent is Joshua. You can read Numbers 13 around verse 16 where it says Joshua's name was changed from Hoshea to Joshua and he was named "Jehovah saves." And it's that same name. Joshua was a deliverer, wasn't he? He led the people of Israel into the conquering of the Promised Land. But this is a greater deliverer than Joshua. This is the Savior. Jehovah saves. This is God in human flesh.

I resent the fact that some people think that God is a reluctant Savior. He is not at all. He is by nature a Savior. God, our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. God is not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance. God, who is a Savior of all men, especially those that believe; it is not foreign to the nature of God to save. And one of the great travesties that's perpetrated upon the world of Christianity today, has been perpetrated through

the centuries by the Roman Catholic Church in saying this: They say that God is reluctant Savior, God is a tough guy, God is a hard guy, He's full of justice and wrath and vengeance and fury and anger, etc., etc., etc., and you don't want to go to Him, you don't want to go to God, you don't want to ask God for salvation because He really might refuse you. Jesus is not quite as tough as God, but He's still pretty tough; you really don't want to go to Jesus because, you know, Jesus can be very firm and very, very strong and He too pronounced judgment; but if you really want salvation, there's one soft person, one tender, gentle, meek, soft person you can go to. Who's that? Mary, see, and the idea is you go to Mary and Mary just...you know, she just falls in line because she's gentle and sweet and she's easily entreated and you go to Mary. And then you tell Mary this. You say, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, plead for us sinners now and at the hour of our need." And so you get Mary on your side and she goes in and she's trying to soften up Jesus and the theology is that Jesus can't resist His own mother so He caves in and He pleads with the Father and God finally caves in and you can maybe get to heaven that way.

But you won't know until you die, and then you might find yourself in purgatory because not enough pleading has been done. So while you're in Purgatory, some people up here can light candles and they can keep begging Mary who keeps begging Jesus who keeps begging God until finally after eons have gone by and maybe somebody else's treasury of merit, some good deeds from somebody else have been stuck in your account, you might get to heaven. And the whole picture is predicated on the fact that God is not by nature a saving God and that's not true.

Jeremiah 13, you see God, tears running down the eyes of Jeremiah and Jeremiah is weeping the tears of God over Israel's unbelief. And you go into the gospel of Matthew and you see Jesus sitting over the city of Jerusalem and He's weeping the tears of God as they run down His cheeks and He's saying, "I wanted to gather you but you wouldn't do it." There is no religion in the world with a Savior except Christianity. All the gods of the nations are either apathetic or hostile. Our God is the kind of God depicted in the prodigal son story. When the sinner comes home, when the son comes back, the father doesn't say, "Hey, you're not getting in here that easy. Are you kidding me? Look what you've done, you've been out there messing around doing all that stuff, wasted your opportunity, don't expect to come back here and get what you might have had if you had been obedient." That's not the way it goes at all. What happens is the son is coming, the father sees him afar off, runs out there as fast as he can, falls on his neck, starts kissing him, calls for the ring to put on his finger, the best robe to put on his body and the biggest party they've ever had. That's the attitude of God toward a repentant sinner because God is by nature a Savior. Jehovah saves and if you don't...if you have any question about that then remember Jesus' words, "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost." That's the nature of God.

And so you name Him Jesus because that's His nature to save. They knew who this child was. They circumcised Him because that's what the law required and they named Him because that's what the angel required. And they therefore give testimony to the fact that this is Jehovah who saves, God in human flesh. They knew He was the Son of the Most High God. Mary had been told that by Gabriel. They knew the child was God in human flesh and they knew He was the Savior and that's how they named Him. And there is affirming testimony to who this child was by this righteous young couple.

There's a second part of that testimony. It starts in verse 22 and goes to verse 24. This is really fascinating. "And when the days for their purification, according to the law of Moses, were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord." Two words there, "purification" and "present."

The first testimony came in circumcision and naming. The second comes in purification and presenting. This is a fascinating thing. This too is according to the law of Moses or as it's called in verse 23 the law of the Lord, verse 24, the law of the Lord and verse 39, the law of the Lord. They were just functioning according to the law and beyond, as I'll point out.

Now it says, "When the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord." Two things had to happen in Jewish law. First of all, a mother who had born a child had to go through a purification ceremony. Secondly, any firstborn child had to be given to the Lord. Didn't have to go to the temple to do it; that was over and above, and I'll explain that. But those two things had to happen. There had to be a purification and a presenting. And there were some days that had to be completed before the purification and presenting could actually happen.

Let's go back, and this is so fascinating, to Leviticus chapter 12 and let me... Let me read you the first five verses. They go by very quickly but they're very important. This is the Lord speaking to Moses.

Now remember, you had, as I pointed out last Sunday night, you had the law of God summed up in two statements, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself." That was the sum of it. Then you had it expanded in the Ten Commandments. And then you had it expanded even more into the full Mosaic law. That's the full law, summed up in ten commandments, summed up in two commandments. As you get into the full expression of the law you find yourself in Leviticus here and here is the law of God as it applies to the woman who has a child. So the Lord talks to Moses and He says, "Tell everybody in Israel when a woman gives birth and bears a male, then she shall be unclean for seven days." This is a ceremonial kind of uncleanness. This is indicative of the fact that she is set apart from the temple. She can't go to the temple. She can't touch anything that's sacred or holy. Again, it's just another... You know, people were having babies all the time. This was another good way in a very joyous moment, a very wonderful moment, to remind people that they were still sinful, the woman was sinful, she had produced a sinful child; that the child being circumcised was in the case of a boy sinful and would pass on his sin to the next generation. Everything that happened in their life had these kinds of things attached to it to keep throwing in their face the sinfulness of sin to drive them to the place of penitence where they'd fall on their face before God and seek His forgiveness. And so she had to go through this.

She was set apart from worship for a seven-day period, as in the days of her impurity, or her sickness. Like the time of menstruation, there was also a time... God used menstruation as a symbol of uncleanness also and so this would be similar to that. She had a seven-day period when she was ceremonially unclean. On the eighth day, according to verse 3, that's when the circumcision took place, another symbol of the need to purify. And then at the...after the eighth day she should remain in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. So there's a certain impurity that she bears for thirty-three days. And she shouldn't touch any consecrated thing, enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification were completed. So forty days this woman, having had the greatest event in a woman's life, she had just given birth to a child, not just a child but a male child which means she can perpetuate the family, there's a son to pass the estate on to. This is all wonderful. There's a future. There's a...there's a progeny there. This great joy of a mother with all of its richness is...is immediately struck after seven days of joy, you're immediately faced with the fact that the child is

sinful, the mother for forty days carries on a disassociation with the holy things of the temple sanctuary and so she's reminded again that the...even in the time of her greatest joy and the highest privilege of humanity which is to produce a life, she is still aware that she needs purification. And she...she by all rights should be cut off from a holy God. She has no access to God at all.

And in verse 5 it says if she bears a female child, has a girl, she shall be unclean for two weeks, similar to her time of the month and remain in the blood of her purification sixty-six days. Now if you have a girl, you're unclean for eighty days. Now some people could really get carried away with that and make some kind of judgment on the quality of women. But I don't want to do that, I don't think that's the intent of it. You ask the question: Why does it get doubled if you have a girl? There are two possible answers and maybe both are part of the answer, but the Scripture doesn't tell us. So let me...let me just share with you what the two possible answers are.

Answer number one, if a male child was born, there were two immediate dramatic indications of sin. One was the forty-day purification of the mother. The other was the circumcision of the son. But in the event of a birth of the woman, of the birth of a girl, there was no circumcision. It may well be that for the sake of emphasis, the Lord chose another forty days to sort of make up for the symbol of circumcision by adding another forty days of impurity to the woman. So if you had a girl you really were cut off from association with the holy things and with the temple for eighty days. And now that is a long time, that's nearly three months when you obviously would have fellowship with the people and all that, but you couldn't go to the court of the women, you couldn't go and engage yourself in the worship. You were sort of stuck there, aware of the fact that...that you were ceremonial un... It doesn't mean you had to abstain from relationships with your husband, that has been taught by some people and that is ludicrous. That is not the intent of the text. It's simply intends to say you have to realize that sin has cut you off from God. And that was the situation. And so Mary has had a male child.

So forty days have passed, back to Luke 2, and she's now ready for her purification. She's done the circumcision; it's thirty-three days later. She goes back to the temple for the time of purification. By the way, the second reason that you might suggest as a footnote to the eighty days for the women, is because women did bear even under God a stigma because it was Eve who led the race into sin. And the woman would be, according to the words of 1 Timothy 2:14 and 15, delivered from that stigma by childbearing. The woman, Eve, led the race into sin. A woman can have a child and raise that child in a godly way and be saved from that stigma by rearing a godly child according to 1 Timothy. Perhaps because of that stigma of having led the race into sin, there's an extra forty days. You can take either of those choices. I lean toward the fact that maybe the extra forty days takes the place of the circumcision that the girl doesn't have, to find another way to emphasize the sinfulness of sin.

Now, Mary comes and comes for their purification. "Their" is used simply because the little family comes. And they're a part of this, too, because it's changed their life. Obviously Joseph is impacted by this forty days of Mary's impurity and so they're all together coming to the temple for this wonderful occasion of her purification. All three of them are there.

At the time they come, they come according to the law of Moses, I just read it to you in Leviticus 12, they also brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. Now they didn't have to do that. Well, certainly they would bring Him. She is nursing Him at this time, this is just forty days after He's born, He's a month and ten days old and they would have brought the little fellow along. But you

didn't have to bring Him to the temple to present Him to God. You did have to present Him to God, however. Look at verse 23, "As it is written in the law of the Lord," again you see the fastidious devotion they have to the law of the Lord, they came and brought Him to present Him to the Lord, because it's written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.'" That's Exodus 13. In Exodus 13 God said, "I want every firstborn male devoted to me. I want you to take that firstborn male and I just want you to offer him to Me."

What does that mean? It didn't mean the priesthood because you couldn't be a priest unless you were in what tribe? Levi. And this is the tribe of Judah. Joseph and Mary came out of the tribe of Judah, David's tribe. And so, this is not presenting Him to be a priest, but rather to take this child and just devote his life to God, just give him to the Lord. That's what was done with the firstborn. The classic Old Testament illustration of that was whom? Hannah and she brought Samuel to give him to the Lord. Well, every firstborn was to be devoted to the Lord, it was just that you said, "This child, Lord, is Your child, whatever You want to do in this child's life I'm devoting this child to You. You do with this child whatever You will, whatever way You want this child to honor You and glorify You and serve You, I give You this child, the firstborn child."

There's another interesting part of this law. There was a price that had to be paid if the child was not a Levite, five shekels. You can read about this in Numbers 18, Numbers 18 verses 15 and 16. You don't need to look it up, let me just tell you how it went. All the... All the male children in Levi became priests and they basically ran the country. It was a country run by priests, it was a theocracy. God was the King and the governmental senators and congressmen and representatives and everybody were priests. They ran the theocracy. They ministered. They carried on all the work among the people. And so every child, male child, born to Levi in the Levitical tribe became a priest. But all the rest of the tribes were freed from priestly duty. But in order to be freed from priestly duty, they had to be ransomed, or redeemed. In other words, instead of giving your son into priestly duty, you paid five shekels to support the priesthood. And it's actually called a ransom or a redeem...redeeming price.

Interesting then what Joseph and Mary would have done. They would have come to the temple and according to the law they were to offer their firstborn to God. They did not have to go to the temple to do that, that was not required that they go there to do that. In fact, that is over and above, that is over and above like Hannah did over and above when she brought Samuel. But, you see, they know who they've got in their arms there. This is not just another child. They could have said, "You know, this child is going to be devoted to the Lord. We're... Lord, we're giving Him to You." They could have said that the night He was born in Bethlehem. They didn't need to go to the temple to say that. They could have paid their five-shekel redemption tax and taken care of that to a priest who would be an agent of the government. They didn't have to go to the temple to do that. But they go beyond what would be the normal because they know they've got a child who in a very special way does not all belong to them, and Joseph knows He doesn't belong to him, for sure. This is God. This is the Son of God. This is the Son of the Most High God. This is the God of the universe in a human body. This...

The mystery of that must have been literally overwhelming to them 24 hours a day. But they know what they have there and they bring this little baby with them. And Mary's coming because she has to come because it's her forty-day purification and, of course, she's bringing the little child along, nursing the child. And she comes in and she can only go as far in as the Court of the Women, and so she's coming in and Joseph is there with her. And they go beyond what they need to do and they come with the little child, I think, ready to offer that child to the Lord in the temple because they know that this is not just like any other child. There's going to be some little ceremony they're going to do

there. Lord, if ever there was a child who belonged to You, it's this child. If ever there was a unique child to be uniquely presented back to You, it's this child. Accomplish Your will in the child's life.

And so, verse 23, they did exactly what the law said. Anytime the womb opens and a male comes out, he's to be called holy to the Lord, separate to the Lord, belongs to the Lord. And this was the firstborn. Chapter 2 verse 7 it says she gave birth to her firstborn. So this presentation was done and it involved a redemption. Only Levi's family were required to give their sons for a priestly duty... All the rest were redeemed out of that priestly responsibility by five shekels of silver. That's a lot. That would have been equivalent to many days' wages. Now you've got to remember these people aren't wealthy. They're not destitute but they're not wealthy and several days' wages when they probably exhausted a lot of the money they had when they first came down there to Bethlehem to register for taxation, and then they've been there and they've had a baby and now over a month has passed and they're still down there and they haven't gone back to have a livelihood and they had to come up with the five shekels. Isn't it interesting to think about that even the Redeemer was redeemed? Even He went through a picture of redemption. Isn't that wonderful? I mean, He fulfilled everything to the letter of the law. He didn't need to have a symbol on His own body of the cleansing of sin as if He were a sinner. He didn't need to be baptized by John as if He somehow needed to be cleansed. And He certainly didn't need a redeemer. He was one, but He went through all the pictures because He fulfilled the law to the letter. And He fulfilled the law that He might having fulfilled it have a fully righteous life in perfect, perfect duty, fulfilling every feature of God's Law that might be credited to your account. And that's what God does in the transaction of justification.

Now, how much did Mary and Joseph know? This whole thing is unfolding and one of the wonderful things about this chapter as we march through to verse 52 is that the whole thing begins to dawn. The Sun of righteousness is rising and at first they can see a little glimpse and as the Sun of righteousness gets higher and higher in the sky, the whole thing is just absolutely astonishing to them.

So they did more than the law required. The law didn't require that they bring the baby and offer the baby to God in a unique way, but they did that; devout, righteous, godly parents.

Now back to the sacrifice that Mary had to offer for her purification in verse 24. Verse 23 is an interlude, a little parenthetical statement. Most Bibles have parenthesis there. But she came not only to bring the child and offer Him to the Lord as a firstborn, and to redeem Him, and even more, do it at the temple, but she came necessarily because she had to offer the sacrifice for purification. Verse 24 tells you what it was. At the end of the forty days she's got to come and make a sacrifice. Now stop right here.

Did you see what this all did? Here's this woman, she has a baby and immediately she is squarely faced with the fact that she has just produced a sinner. The circumcision of any Jewish mother's baby was an indication that sin was continuing to be passed on, except in the case of Jesus, of course. And the next thing, she had forty days when she couldn't go to the temple, she couldn't touch anything sacred or holy, she was ceremonially unclean and she's facing her sinfulness. And the only way she can end that is by offering what? A sacrifice. And God was saying in another way, the only answer to your sin and your alienation from God, and what separates you from God is a sacrifice. And all of this is picturing the final sacrifice. And when the final sacrifice was offered on the cross, what happened to the veil in the temple that separated men from God? It was ripped from top to bottom and the way to God was opened because the final sacrifice was made and never again was

there any such thing as ceremonial uncleanness. And so, now in the New Covenant God says, "Draw near to Me," draw near to Me. In the Old Covenant God said, "Stay back; keep your distance until blood has been shed." In the New Covenant He says blood has been shed, come on.

So she's got to make a sacrifice. You can see if you understand the whole culture, that this stuff dominates their lives. So here she comes and she's going to do this, sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. Now you had an option there because turtledoves were migrating birds and they weren't always around. Everybody knows pigeons are always around. Turtledoves came from spring to fall. There could be a time when you couldn't get a turtledove, never a time when you can't find a pigeon. So you had to have a sacrifice.

Now there were three levels of sacrifice. I'll do this rapidly. The first required sacrifice... Let's go back to Leviticus 12, right where we left off in verse 6, still talking about this woman who had the baby, the male child or the female. "When the days of her purification are complete," Leviticus 12:6, "for a son or a daughter," whether it's the forty days or eighty days, she's going to bring to the priests at the doorway of the Tent of the Meeting." She's going to come to the edge. She can't go in. She can only stay in the Court of the Women. He's going to go inside where the...the altar is. And she brings a lamb. Usually they could buy the lamb at the temple. We know that, Jesus cleansed the temple, you remember, because they were cheating people in the purchase of sacrificial animals. They could also... They could bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. Two animals...burnt offering was a sin offering, sin offering was a sin offering. Again, here they are, realizing Mary's going to have to go in and say, "I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner, I'm a sinner. I've been forty days cut off from God." This was the symbol of the sinner's alienation from God. "Now a sacrifice is going to be offered in my behalf by which I'll have access to God again." This pictures Christ in His wonderful, final sacrifice.

So she comes. She has...she has some options. She can bring a lamb and one bird, a pigeon or a turtledove, for a sin offering. Now that was for people who had a lot of money, who had the resources. It might be that she didn't have that much. Verse 8 says, "If she can't afford a lamb, take two turtledoves or two pigeons." You can just have two birds if she can't afford a lamb, one for the burnt and one for the sin offering. And the priest takes them, makes atonement for her, from then she's clean. Clean simply...doesn't mean her sins. It doesn't mean that her sins are washed away by the blood of the sacrifice. It simply means it's ceremonially, if her heart is right and she's confessed those sins and asked God for forgiveness, it's depicted in that, which really was a prefiguring of the sacrifice of Christ which alone can actually take away sin.

When her sins were forgiven, this sweet, believing girl, when her sins were forgiven it was because Jesus would die for them on the cross. And God already accounted that to her behalf. So she comes and she does that.

Now notice it says that she brings the birds. Now you could, according to Numbers 5, I think verse 11 and following, if you were really poor, you could bring one-tenth of an *ephah*, and an *ephah* was equal to about six gallons. So one-tenth of six gallons, whatever that is, if you were really...flour. The poorest of the poor brought flour. Sort of the middle class brought birds and the upper class brought a lamb and a bird. We know from that two things: One, they weren't wealthy; they weren't totally poor. They weren't wealthy. Now remember they've already spent several days' wages on the five-shekel redemption tax, and they are going to have to purchase birds in the temple, probably at an inflated price. But they're not so poor they bring flour.

The second thing we know about them is they hadn't seen the wise men yet. The question always comes up in the Luke account, "Where does the wise men story come in?" because Luke doesn't tell us. We know one thing for sure, that if they had gold, frankincense and myrrh, they would have had enough to bring the lamb and they would have been required by their own consciences, devoted to God to use what they had to purchase the lamb. You know they gave the best they could give. This tells us then that the whole story of the wise men and Herod and all of that happens after this. And I'll explain all of that as we go through the text. But that's what we learn from what isn't there. You didn't see that there, did you? No, because it's not there. But...but it's important to know when that story happened because I know some of you are saying, "What about the wise men, when did that come, where was that?" Well, now you know it hadn't happened yet or they would have had the money and been required by their conscience, and their wealth would have been great at that point with gold, frankincense and myrrh, to provide a lamb. But they did what they were required to do.

They offer — isn't it interesting? — a sin offering for Mary. Now Mary is confessing here that she's a what? That's right. Don't ever forget it. Mary was not immaculately conceived, nor did she lead a sinless life. Mary needed a Savior. She called God her Savior, and here she offers a sacrifice for sin. She was in need of forgiveness and redemption and a substitute who would die in her place.

So this is testimony to the...to the person of Jesus Christ from this...this wonderful young couple, Joseph and Mary. They were so obedient to the Law of God, they were so devout. They named Jesus the name that He was told...that they were told to name Him by Gabriel. They named Him Jesus because they knew He would save His people from their sins. They come and they present Him to God. They offer Him to God in the temple which they didn't have to do. They had to give Him to God, devote Him to God, but not go to the temple and do it. They did that because they knew in a special way He belonged to the Lord. They knew that because He was the Son of the Most High. They found out even more about that later when they found Him in the temple again at age twelve and they said, "What are You doing here?" And He said, "I had to be doing My Father's business." They knew who He belonged to.

So the first wonderful, confirming testimony is given by Joseph and Mary. And if you think that's fascinating, wait till you meet Simeon next week. Let's pray.

Oh Father, what a...what a great story this is. What a wonderful, wonderful record of truth it is. How we rejoice in the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Son of the Most High God, Son of David to reign on an eternal throne, the anointed of Israel and the Savior of the world. Oh Father, how Your Word gives light, how it fills our hearts with joy. How grateful we are that we're not in Judaism anymore with all of its repetitious Sabbaths in which we sit and contemplate our violation of the Law and our guilt, with all of its repetition of blood sacrifice, and all of the...of the restrictions that keep us from You. Can't touch the holy place, can't ever come into the Holy of Holies, have to stay away fearfully from You presence because You're a consuming fire and we're unworthy. Oh God, how we thank You that we don't have to keep making sacrifices to remind us of our alienation but the one sacrifice of Christ has ripped the Holy of Holies veil from top to bottom and thrown wide open Your presence and You've called on us to come and to draw near. We thank You, Lord, that You have given us the privilege of New Covenant life. We thank You for our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

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