

December 27, 2020

Luke 2:21-38

The Sunday after Christmas

The reading this morning is an insight into first century Jewish parenting. The reading tells of the infant Jesus's circumcision eight days after His birth. The sacrifice that is due in the temple as a sin offering. All of this is set out in Leviticus 12: 2-8. Mind you this reading is properly placed in the liturgical year. Many other churches place this reading on February second, Candlemass, to conclude the forty days of Christmas. The placement of this morning's reading is chronologically correct.

The first few lines of the reading talk about the days of purification as they regard Mary. After giving birth to a male child, the mother is considered unclean for seven days after. It is two weeks if you have a girl. So Mary would go to the temple and take a bath in the Mikvah. This was a ceremonial bath in the synagogue that was used to make people pure again. It was used for all manner of things. Women used it after a menstrual cycle and men used it after a nocturnal emission. It was used for leprosy and used generally before Yom Kippur. I suspect the bath had a practical function at first and the religious reasons developed later. Not everyone at this time had access to running water or plumbing into their homes. A place that did was the gathering hub of the community. This helped to spread the faith. Early Christian churches had baths in the basements for baptisms. Moslems ritually

clean themselves before prayers in the Mosque. Baths were important in this part of the world and that was why Joseph, Mary and Jesus went to the temple.

While at the temple strange and wondrous things would transpire. They would meet a man named Symeon, which in Greek means the God receiver. As if that is not interesting enough. His words would be very prophetic and would be repeated daily by Christian clergy for two thousand years later. Symeon is described as a man waiting for the consolation of Israel and that the Holy Spirit was upon him. He is waiting with joy for the coming of the Messiah and the peace He would bring.

Symeon's words in verses 29 to 32 are called the Canticle of Symeon or the Nunc Dimitis in Latin. His words are prayed daily at evening prayers in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran churches. I found it in the Cranberry Book on page 324. Symeon's words are a contemporary confession and experience of all worshipping Christians. These words remind us that Christ is the salvation God prepared for all peoples, the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.

Symeon's words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are a prophetic prelude to who the child in his arms was and would be revealed to us to be the Son of God. His words would be repeated daily for two thousand years to remind us of this encounter in the temple. This event may give rise to more questions. How do we receive the Christ and would we recognize Him today as Symeon did then? He told us that He was coming back. Are we as moved and lead by the Holy Spirit as Symeon was? Do we trust in the Spirit as he did? One cannot say

that Jesus is Lord unless they are led by the Spirit. The Spirit is still moving among those who believe.

God Bless and take care and may 2021 be more normal than the past year only wished to be. Pastor D