

**The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord, February 2, 2020**  
Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **The Firstborn Presented**

Luke 2:22–24

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

*Eph 1:2*

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**When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (vv 22–24).**

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What *are* Mary and Joseph doing?

They’ve only had Him for forty days!

Forty days since **she gave birth to her firstborn son**

**and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger** (Lk 2:7).

Forty days since Christmas.

Forty days and they’re **presenting Him to the Lord** (v 22),

offering Him up, returning Him, giving Him back!

That not how it should be with a gift, *this* gift, the Christ Child.

Forty days after Christmas and how many of your gifts have been returned, broken, taken to the local swap shed, re-gifted?

I know that Mary and Joseph aren’t exactly doing that.

But **to present Him to the Lord** *is* a sort of re-gift.

They received Him from the Lord, and now they’re giving Him back.

They didn’t have to do *that*!

There were things they *had* to do,

things that *had* to be done **according to the Law of the Lord**

**and as it is written in the Law** (vv 22–23).

Like **their purification** and the redemption of the firstborn male.

But they didn’t have **to present Jesus to the Lord**.

Luke tells us that **when the time came for their purification,**

**they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.**

Mary’s purification simply provides the occasion for His presentation.

But even that didn't have to happen *now*.

It *could* take place in the temple as early as forty days after the birth of a son,  
but it didn't have to happen then.

Some women would wait until they were in Jerusalem for an annual feast.  
Some women might even do purification at one time for multiple childbirths.

The Law also established the rite for redeeming the firstborn son.

The Lord said,

**“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”** (Ex 13:1).

**“The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me”** (Ex 22:29).

The firstborn of Egypt died in the final plague,  
but the firstborn of Israel belonged to the Lord  
consecrated and set apart

as a living reminder of God's rescue in every home.

**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.**

**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”** (Ex 13:14–15).

But that redemption didn't have to happen in the temple or in Jerusalem.

It could've been done with any priest in the land,

a small payment to redeem the firstborn *from* the Lord.

Luke doesn't even mention the payment to the priest.

His focus is on the presentation.

That's why Mary and Joseph have come.

Not to redeem Him—He's the Redeemer!—

but **to present Him to the Lord.**

For the sacrifice, they bring what's required of the poor.

Not a lamb, but **a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons** (v 24).

It's almost like they knew their small offering wasn't enough.

That they needed something more, something bigger, to present to the Lord.

They didn't have a lamb, but they had Jesus.

So they present Him.

Like Abraham, who took his only son Isaac up to the top of Mount Moriah.  
The same exact place where Mary and Joseph present Jesus.

Abraham told his son,

**“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering”** (Gen 22:8).

Now the lamb is presented, the lamb provided by God.

Mary and Joseph might as well put Jesus right on the bronze altar,

a sacrifice for sin and guilt, a whole-burnt offering,

a thank offering, a peace offering, a vow offering.

Jesus, the sacrifice, to whom every lamb pointed.

What *are* Mary and Joseph doing, presenting Him to the Lord like this?

Didn't they know what it would mean for Jesus?

When thankful Hannah presented her son Samuel to the Lord,

after he was weaned,

he stayed at Shiloh

to learn from and serve beside Eli the priest at the Lord's tabernacle.

Samuel was the Lord's—

for the Lord's service, for the liturgy,

for doing the Lord's work on behalf of the people,

not just once, but continually, day after day and year after year.

Now Mary is doing what Hannah did.

Her son is another Samuel, given back to the Lord, re-gifted to Him.

In the days of Samuel, the Lord had said,

**“I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest,**

**who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind.**

**And I will build Him a sure house,**

**and He shall go in and out before My anointed forever”** (1 Sam 2:35).

A priest forever.

Not from the line of Eli or the line of Aaron or the line of Levi.

A priest after the order of Melchizedek,

that strange priest who has no beginning or end in Scripture.

Jesus, the priest, to whom all priests pointed.

But what is God going to do with this firstborn, this sacrifice, this priest?

With the One He gave to Mary and Joseph,

and whom Mary and Joseph were now giving back to Him?

What will the Lord do with the re-gift of Jesus?

Those who've been waiting have some idea.

There's Simeon, faithful Simeon, **righteous and devout** Simeon,  
**waiting for the consolation of Israel** Simeon,  
**and the Holy Spirit was upon** Simeon (v 25).

What's revealed to Him isn't His own.

**That He shouldn't see death before He'd seen the Lord's Christ** (v 26).

And what He says aren't His words but the Holy Spirit speaking through Him.

**And He took Jesus up in His arms and blessed God and said,**

**"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word,  
 for My eyes have seen Your salvation,  
 that You prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
 a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
 and for glory to Your people Israel"** (vv 29–32).

What Simeon held in His arms, you receive in your mouth:

the salvation of the world,

the true body and blood of the Savior, the Light, the Glory.

That's why we sing Simeon's words after Holy Communion.

We're ready to die with Simeon, at peace, in faith, having seen the Lord's salvation.

Mary and Joseph weren't expecting this.

They **marveled at what was said about** their son (v 33).

Simeon is given a glimpse of *how* salvation will happen.

To Mary, he says,

**"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"** (vv 34–35).

A sword for Mary, a piercing sword, pain, grief, sorrow, her Son's death.

That's what it means **to present Him to the Lord**.

And there's Anna, **advanced in years** Anna, **widow** Anna,

**not departing from the temple** Anna,

**worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day** Anna (vv 36–37).

**And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God**

**and to speak of Him — Jesus — to all who were waiting**

**for the redemption of Jerusalem** (v 39).

The redemption takes place through Him.

Jesus doesn't need to be redeemed.

He *is* **the redemption, holy to the Lord**.

And He has redeemed me and you, lost and condemned people,  
 purchased and won us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil,  
 not with gold or silver,  
 but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death,  
 that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom,  
 and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Mary and Joseph did everything **according to the Law**,  
 so that the Lord could do all this according to the Gospel.

They **presented Jesus to the Lord**, re-gifted Him to His Father,  
 so the Father could present Him to us, re-gift Him to us.

**God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son** (Jn 3:16).

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation** (Col 1:15),  
 of whom **He says, “Let all God’s angels worship Him”** (Heb 1:6).

For you, the Father presented His Son on the cross, both priest and sacrifice,  
 and to you today He presents His Son and all that He’s done  
 in baptism, in the word of forgiveness, and in this holy communion.

The Father takes the firstborn whom Mary and Joseph present,  
 and presents Him to you.

**For those whom He foreknew**

**He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son,**  
**in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers** (Rom 8:29).

The firstborn of many.

Through baptism, you have been born like Him, born from above, born in His image.

**Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared,**  
**but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him,**  
**because we shall see Him as He is.**

**And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure**  
 (1 Jn 3:2–3).

And now what? What does the presentation of Jesus mean for you?  
 What difference does it make?

It means that you have an older brother in the fight against sin, death, and the devil.  
 He is **a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God** (Heb 2:17).  
**He is able to help those who are being tempted** (Heb 2:18).

And so you are **not to present your members—**  
 your body and soul, eyes, ears, and mouth, hands and feet, sexual organs,

heart and mind, reason and senses, imagination—  
**do not present them to sin as instruments for unrighteousness,**  
**but present yourselves to God as those have been brought from death to life,**  
**and your members to God as instruments for righteousness (Rom 6:12).**

Now why would you do *that*?

Because He has redeemed you. Because you are not your own.

Because you were bought with a price. Because your Brother has your back.

And now, **I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,**  
**to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,**  
**which is your spiritual worship (Rom 12:1).**

Your body—not just your thoughts, but your body—a living sacrifice,  
 re-gifted to you each day in Jesus,  
 that you might present yourself to your neighbors in love,  
 all that you are, all that you have.

I know you've often failed. So have I. All is forgiven. I mean "all."

Each day is a new start, including *today*,  
 as He presents Jesus to you again, forgives you again,  
 gives you not just an idea  
 but the body and blood again,  
*that* living sacrifice who lives for you.

For Jesus Christ, whom Mary and Joseph presented in the temple,  
 whom Simeon and Anna rejoiced to see,  
**He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5),**  
 the first of many.

And when He comes again in glory,  
 He will present *you* to His Father pure, spotless, and unblemished,  
 because of His own death and resurrection.

**To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood**  
**and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father,**  
**to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev 1:5–6).**

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ  
 Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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