

IN NOMINE IESU

THE SIGN SPOKEN AGAINST IS THE CRUCIFIED JESUS

Hear again the Word of God for this Wednesday of the Nativity, with our thoughts centered by the following translated verse:

Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary the Mother of Him, "Behold, this One is appointed for (the) fall and resurrection of many in the Israel, and for (a) sign spoken against.

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This is the ninth day of the Christmas season in the Church. As the song goes, today is the day to give your true love "nine ladies dancing." While such a gift may seem entertaining, there might be a churchly explanation for the gift for today. While this explanation may or may not stand the test of history: the ladies can be said to refer to the seven fruits of the Holy Spirit. Now, if that is the meaning that you chose to place on the gift, then you would certainly be right in telling others of the work of God this Christmas day. The gifts for the ninth day of Christmas then are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (c.f. *Galatians* 5:22-23).

This day follows two which emphasized our Lord receiving the Name given Him by the angel, "Salvation," or Jesus. We heard of Him shedding "first-blood" in the war against Satan, sin in the cosmos, and our own sinful natures. We were reminded that we have been given the Name above all names as our family name with the water and Word of Holy Baptism. Going back another day, we

heard that we have hope in Christ in the midst of all the loneliness in this fallen world. We were called to remember that Christians have God's antidote for loneliness – our Christian family in the local congregation. All of this is ours, for certain, because the God is the One Who continues to give gifts to His children.

We can be sure, that for many in our culture, thoughts have turned away from gift-giving, spiritual or otherwise, and even from partying on New Year's Eve. Even so, celebrating the birth of the Savior of the world was long ago determined to be a twelve-day season. Those twelve days, except for you who have been here over the past week and a half, have, for many, surely given way to attempts to keep New Year's resolutions.

In any event, this ninth day of Christmas finds us assembled by the Holy Spirit, Whose nine fruits God wills to grant to the assemblies of God's sinner/saints in any Christian congregation that remains faithful to His Word. In the pure Word and rightly administered sacraments, we can be sure that we are God's Holy family. This morning, in our readings, we have heard God's gift of family, and the inheritance that is ours as He dwells with His chosen ones.

Each of the texts read here today speaks of God's everlasting presence with His people. As you may recall, in our hearing today the place or location God displayed His Real Presence first moved from the heavens to the Tabernacle Tent. Then, in time, He moved His Glory into the House King David's son built for Him.

We heard that, in the fullness of time, the Real Presence of God moved into the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the time of all men, the Real Presence of God moved from the womb. He rested for a while in a feed trough in a manger in Bethlehem. Then, He moved again, carried into the Temple on the fortieth day. That is where the Gospel reading for this morning leads us.

And when they were fulfilled, the days of their cleansing according to the Torah of Moses, they went up into Jerusalem to stand alongside the Lord.

That was the time of Mary's purification. Forty days had passed since the birth of the Christ. Thirty-three days had passed from the circumcision and naming we heard about over the last two days. The sinless Christ Jesus had been placed under the Torah, even as an infant. To that end, Mary and Joseph were keeping the Torah. They were fulfilling it at the same time.

Think about this: in the short introduction to this section of the Gospel, the Old Covenant Law is cited at least four times. Did Mary and Joseph really need to sacrifice? Our reading from Galatians leads to the answer to that question:

And I say, the heir, as long as he remains (an) infant, is no different than (a) slave, (even though) he remains lord of all, but (he) remains under guardians and stewards until the appointed day of the father.

All the people of the Old Covenant era were beheld as infants in God's sight. To guide and guard them, He had given Torah – the Law and Gospel

that pointed to His coming to live and die for them. Mary and Joseph had begun their faith lives as Old Covenant believers. Then, in time, due to the Real Presence of God, they were becoming New Covenant believers. Since they held the Lord in their arms, they no longer had need of the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

But, because of those who were still awaiting the coming of the final sacrifice, Jesus' Presentation was necessary. That was true even to the completion of the biblically prescribed sacrifices. Most importantly, the Presentation gives opportunity for the Real Presence of the Lord again to enter the Temple. (That Presence had been missing since the time of Ezekiel. In a vision, he had seen the Presence depart the Temple (c.f. *Ezekiel* 11:23). Later, in another vision, he had foreseen the time when God's glory would again enter the Temple (c.f. *Ezekiel* 43:1-5). Though the Glory of the Lord had departed from ancient Israel, they had kept the sacrificial system going – for the faithful it was for the time when God's Glory would again fill the Temple.

Old Testament Law required either the sacrifice of a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or dove for a sin offering at the time of the mother's purification. Further, to show God's mercy for the poor, a second pigeon or dove could be substituted for the lamb whole burnt offering.

The offerings of Joseph and Mary show you, the faithful, two primary facts. The first is that they were of humble estate, for they sacrificed the two birds.

This displays that God reverses, again, the expectations of the world, for He comes to save by taking an humble estate upon Himself. This Lord is no Child of worldly wealth. He is an infant of low birth, whose family has meager means.

The second primary fact is that, we behold that, in Jesus' case, no lamb of sacrifice was needed! That is because, at forty days old, the infant Jesus was already the Lamb of God brought for the first time to His Temple for sacrifice.

All of this we learn because Blessed Mary followed the Law. She did so not that she needed to, but because Jesus' time of self-sacrifice for her sins had not yet come. He who was her Son would one day become her Redeemer, shedding His blood to buy her back from sin, death and hell as surely as He did for you!

The word-picture of this section of the Gospel is familiar to people who know the narratives of the Old Testament. Jesus' travels would have become clear as fulfillment of prophecy when the Holy Spirit had been poured out. We who are now in Christ are free to behold what has happened in the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This was mentioned earlier: the Glory of the Lord goes from the right hand of the Father, to the womb of Mary, and now, into the Holy City and into the Holy Place. Jesus' presence in the Temple sanctifies all things there, for He fulfills the Torah, as our text continues:

Just as it was written in (the) Torah of (the) Lord: every man to open (a) womb, holy to the Lord He will be called.

Those words are not an exact quote from either the Greek nor primary Hebrew Old Testament books. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, two words are added to the accounts recorded in the book of Exodus (13). Those two words are translated, “holy,” and “He will be called.”

Dr. Luke, in being led by the Holy Spirit to use those words in the description of the Old Covenant text, separates Jesus’ being “set aside, consecrated” for God’s purposes, from that of all other Jewish firstborn male children. By coupling the “He will be called Holy” to the text, Dr. Luke’s words recall to mind the proclamation of the Lord’s angel to Mary at Jesus’ conception.

The Gospel reveals that Simeon, in his song which has for centuries in the Church been called the Nunc Dimittis, “sees” this same Lord in His Temple. He quotes the Old Testament at least five times in this central section of this chapter of Luke. Simeon’s vision is real; for He beholds the Glory of the Lord, the salvation of the peoples, in his arms. Simeon then sees Jesus as the One who opens eyes to the truth that Jesus has come to “buy back,” ransom, all people who are had been bound captive by Adam’s sin into sin’s darkness.

Simeon’s inspired words in the Nunc Dimittis display God’s fulfillment of prophecy. He proclaims that NOW is the time of God’s salvation. He states he is prepared for that which is found in this prayer that may be used by

all Christians: *Grant that, when my last hour shall come, I may fall asleep in firm faith in Thee and Thy sacred blood...* Our text continues,

Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary the Mother of Him, "Behold, this One is appointed for (the) fall and resurrection of many in the Israel, and for (a) sign spoken against."

Following his song, Simeon records the second divine "sign" in the Gospel of Luke. (The first was the infant in the manger). This time, the sign given is that the Child will be spoken against. Here, today, in Simeon's blessing of Mary and Joseph we find the first Passion statement of St. Luke's Gospel.

Jesus and His coming cross are the "sign spoken against." As the Church Year unfolds, we will hear Jesus spoken against repeatedly. This was especially true of those who were the religious leaders of the people of Israel.

Following the testimony of the first witness of the re-entrance of God's Real Presence in the Temple, comes the account of Anna, an aged widow. Her words are not recorded. Yet she, like the shepherds who had heard the message of the angels, heralded the revelation of the mystery of God. Anna, a faithful woman, had dedicated herself for many years to the Old Testament service of God – fasting and prayers in the Temple. She was given the gift that she would witness the proclamation of Jesus' Passion by Simeon. Her testimony was then added to his.

Together, their witness would stand up to Old Testament Law – this message about the infant Savior is true. Jesus’ mission of death and resurrection are firmly established on the testimony of the two in the Temple. All of this took place only 40 days into our Savior’s life outside the womb!

That sign of the Real Presence of God hanging accursed on the wood is still spoken against today. That is true even where the Real Presence is found in the House of God. There are those who claim to be in the Household of the Lord, yet reject the Lord’s own words about His Presence in the means He chose. Those who would firmly hold to the Real Presence of God in the feed-trough for animals still reject the Real Presence of God in the food of the Lord’s Table.

There are those who would object to the proclamation of the cross at this Christmas time of year. That is so sad, yet for them, the wayward and erring, we still pray. This sign, Jesus and His cross, still brings about the fall and resurrection of many. It will stand as a testimony to God’s Real Presence among His people until He comes again.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Christmas I (*LSB* One-year series)
II Samuel 7:1-16; Galatians 4:1-7; Luke 2:33-40
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Soli Deo Gloria