



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

SERIES I

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE AND ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Lesson 5 Commentary Luke 2:21-40

Lesson 6 Questions Luke 2:41-52

THE CHILD JESUS: NAMING, PRESENTATION TO GOD AND MATURING Luke 2:21-40

I. INTRODUCTION

Beginning here, Luke adds a new dimension to his Chapter Two. In the last lesson (Luke 2:1-20) Luke showed us how Jesus' birth was related to Judaism, the Greco-Roman world, the life of the church, and the Gospel Mission. This week, we read verse 21-40, when Luke develops Jesus' relationship to Israel's hope for salvation, a hope based on a historical and prophetic promise which reached out even to the Gentiles. "The name Jesus was given the child" (Luke 2:21). Jesus was given His name in heaven; the Father sent Him as a gift to the world, a savior of all (Luke 1:31).

He also shows how salvation would entail suffering for those who were associated with Jesus' origins, first for His mother, for the disciples, and for the world they would address. So we see the fulfillment of the Biblical promise from Abraham on, and a promise of the Messiah's salvific passion, future persecutions and struggles.

II. JESUS' CIRCUMCISION AND PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

A. The Jewish Naming and Legal Status of the First-Born (Luke 2:21). From Abraham on, the Jews followed a rite common among other Semites—that of foreshadowing the importance of a boy-child to the tribe, to the Chosen People, in the sense of leadership and progeny—by cutting the foreskin of the male organ. At the same time, the baby was named. This ceremony, according to some scholars, could have been performed by Joseph, at home, or possibly in a synagogue or in the Temple.

B. Jesus Comes to Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-24). True to his style of presenting his story in scenes as in a stage play, Luke frames the events in Jerusalem by the journey to (verse 22) and from (verse 39) Jerusalem.

1. The Presentation in the Temple. The two separate ceremonies are entwined in Luke's account. The first is the Consecration of the first-born to the Lord (verse 21). Exodus 13:2, 12 give us the origin of this. The presentation and redemption of the first-born son was required, because the first-born sons "belong" to the Lord, for

He saved them when the Egyptian first-born were destroyed at the Passover.

2. The Purification of Mary. The second ceremony was the mother's purification. Leviticus 12:1-8 describes the ceremony for the ritual purification of the mother forty days after giving birth. On this occasion she was to offer a lamb and a pigeon or a turtledove, but a poor couple was permitted to bring only two pigeons or doves. Mary and Joseph offered doves.

Through Mary and Joseph, Jesus fulfilled the Jewish law just as he had fulfilled the law of Rome (Luke 2:1-5). What was true of Jesus' origins would be equally true of the Church.

III. AN END AND A BEGINNING

A. The Presentation in the Temple. The emphasis in Luke's account is decidedly on the presentation of Jesus in the Temple dedicated to the true God, where Jesus will receive a more official recognition as the promised Savior of Israel. The temple symbolizes for Luke the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

We saw in Chapter One the announcement of the definitive act of salvation in the temple, when Zechariah heard the angel's announcement (Luke 1:11). In this gospel Luke will show Jesus teaching in the Temple (Luke 19:47), and the disciples continuing to worship in the temple well into the new Christian age (Luke 24:53 and Acts 2:1). In Jesus' advent, Israel's life and mission found its ultimate fulfillment. Through the witness of Simeon and Anna, Israel itself acknowledges the end of a long period of history and the beginning of a new era. Transformed into a new and universal Israel, the old Israel could depart in peace, in the person of Simeon.

In terms of Israel's own life, the fulfillment, for both Israel and the Gentiles, far transcended the promise.

Simeon's reflections spring from the Holy Spirit, who provided him with a special revelation (Luke 2:26), and moved him to go to the temple at the moment Jesus' parents brought in the child. He recognized Jesus as the consolation and salvation of Israel (Luke 2:28-32) and proclaimed him as such, through the Holy Spirit.

Simeon is the last of the Old Testament prophets, a link with the old and the new, as he held the fulfillment of the old and the beginning of the new in his old arms. Luke gives us, in him, a portrait of the Old Testament saints.

B. The Revelation to Simeon (Luke 2:25-35). Simeon presents Jesus as the true restoration of Israel (Luke 2:30-32). In this scene, Mary experienced a foreboding of sorrow as she stood in the Temple with Jesus as an infant. Later, Jesus wept in sorrow as he looked down on Jerusalem and the temple, saying, "If only you had known the path to peace..., but you have completely lost it from view!" (Luke 19:42).

The old prophet also sees the universal extent of what salvation will bring (Luke 2:30-31). He learned from Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 this coming prediction and recognized the fulfillment through the infant he held. He mentions that Jesus is a "revealing light" to all peoples (Gentiles), and "the glory of Israel." The words "light" and "glory" are frequent in the Gospel of John (John 8:12, 12:46, and 1 John 1:5-7). In the Book of Exodus, the great Moses could not enter the presence of the Ark of the Covenant when the glory of the Lord descended upon it (Exodus 33:18-20), but Simeon, having seen the glory, could die peacefully. It is as though the Old, former Covenant died peacefully in the presence of a gentle child, God-made-man, who would carry the Judaic greatness on through history through His new Covenant.

C. Simeon's Witness to Mary. The sword which pierced the soul of the mother of the first-born also had pierced that of the church, the

mother of all who share Jesus' life. Here we again have the shadow of the cross, crossing the early pages of Luke. "He is destined for the fall and the rise of many," says Simeon (Luke 2:34). He is probably referring to an idea found in Isaiah 8:14. The goals and the goodness of the Messiah, which He preached and lived, force all of us to face up to our great sinfulness (our "fall"), as it did to the people of Jesus' time. This knowledge can completely destroy, as it will the proud; or it can prompt the humble to turn to the Messiah, Christ Jesus, and through Him rise to new life. The Greek word Luke uses for "rise" he always uses elsewhere for the resurrection from the dead (Luke 14:14, 20:27).

Jesus once said to the proud Pharisees, "You are dead in your sins." We know that we have habitual sins of attitude also. This week, ponder yours and try to "rise" out of them.

D. The Revelation to Anna (Luke 2:36-38). Anna proclaims to all who come into the temple looking for the redemption of Jerusalem that it is through the child they see there. She here foreshadows and begins the response that those who believe in Jesus instinctively do: tell others of Jesus as soon as they discover Him.

How do we witness as she did to our faith in Jesus?

Luke, as we saw in the introduction, is careful to note the influence of women and their roles in the Gospel. Here, at the very dawn of the Good News, he shows us Mary showing Jesus to the shepherds, and Anna speaking of Him to all in the Temple.

E. Nazareth of Galilee (Luke 2:39-40).

"And they went back to Galilee, to Nazareth. As the child grew, he was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was with him." The mention of wisdom here is a link to the Old Testament Wisdom literature. We will study these books later in this program. These books often personify Wisdom. See Proverbs 8:22-31, Wisdom 7:22, and Sirach 24:1-7 (Sirach is called Ecclesiasticus in some Bibles—in the New Jerusalem Bible, too).

In this session, we have seen the meaning of two important Catholic celebrations in our liturgy, found in Biblical infancy narratives. Do you know when we celebrate, as a Christian community, the Circumcision of Jesus? The Presentation in the Temple? Have you ever chosen to celebrate these with the universal church?

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- b. Imagine the anguish of Mary and Joseph in this 3-day loss. What were some of their reactions?

- c. What significance for you does this event have?

Day 4 Re-read Luke 2:41-52.

- a. Imagine the zeal of the young Jesus in this event and how it led Him to this action. Comment on this.

- b. What do we learn of Him?

Day 5 Re-read Luke 2:41-52.

- a. What did Mary and Joseph learn of Him?

- b. How significant in Jesus' life is this incident? Is it prophetic? Explain.

Day 6

- a. Luke 2: 51 and 52 sum up nearly 18 years of the God-Man's life; much longer than His Public Life. Does this teach us something about values in our earthly lives?

- b. What were God's reasons, in your thinking, for this plan for the God-made-Man in this Lost and Found episode?