

Sermon for The Purification of Mary The Presentation of Our Lord

Date: February 2, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: 1 Samuel 1:21–28

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 2:14–18

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22–40

Sermon Text: Luke 2:22–40

Sermon Title: A Pinnacle Day

Introit: Psalm 48:1-3,8; Antiphon: Psalm 48:9

Hymns:

LSB 783 – Take My Life and Let it Be

P&W 77 – Jesus, Name Above all Names

LSB 519 – In His Temple Now Behold Him

LSB 712 – Seek Ye First (*Offertory*)

LSB 937 – Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace

Distribution:

LSB 461 – I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Luke 2:22–40

After the days required by Moses' Teachings to make a mother clean had passed, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem. They took Jesus to present him to the Lord. They did exactly what was written in the Lord's Teachings, "Every firstborn boy is to be set apart as holy to the Lord." They also offered a sacrifice as required by the Lord's Teachings, "a pair of mourning doves or two young pigeons."

A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He lived an honorable and devout life. He was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel. The Holy Spirit was with Simeon and had told him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, whom the Lord would send.

Moved by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courtyard. Mary and Joseph were bringing the child Jesus into the courtyard at the same time. They brought him so that they could do for him what Moses' Teachings required. Then Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God by saying, "Now, Lord, you are allowing your servant to leave in peace as you promised. My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people to see. He is a light that will reveal salvation to the nations and bring glory to your people Israel."

Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is the reason that many people in Israel will be condemned and many others will be saved. He will be a sign that will expose the thoughts of those who reject him, and a sword will pierce your heart."

Anna, a prophet, was also there. She was a descendant of Phanel from the tribe of Asher. She was now very old. Her husband had died seven years after they were married, and she had been a widow for 84 years. Anna never left the temple courtyard but worshiped day and night by fasting and praying. At that moment she came up to Mary and Joseph and began to thank God. She spoke about Jesus to all who were waiting for Jerusalem to be set free.

After doing everything the Lord's Teachings required, Joseph and Mary returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was with him.

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pinnacle days often start out in the most usual and regular of ways, but when they're over things will never be the same again. September 11, 2001 was one such day that changed our world. January 22, 1973 was a pinnacle day for our nation, with the Supreme Court ruling on Roe vs. Wade. There have been pinnacle days in each of your lives that meant things would never be the same. For our family it is Friday the 13th. On Friday July 13, 2018 we has two children added to our family and they've been the best thing that could have ever happened to us, but it has surely changed our lives forever.

Well the Gospel reading you heard spoke of one such day, a pinnacle day. It took place 40 days after the birth of Jesus, when Mary, Joseph and Jesus arrived at the Temple. It was the day set for Mary's purification after childbirth, and for Jesus' presentation, according to the Torah Law of God.¹

It started out in the most usual and regular way. It all looked pretty normal, with business and life as usual. Just another family, just another sacrifice, just another presentation, but after this day, things would never be the same.

Things would never be the same for Simeon, who had finally received what he had been promised and as a result, he was now ready to die. He had seen the Messiah, the Holy Christ of God, and as he held baby Jesus in his arms he says he is ready to die. He is ready to "depart in peace."² Surely a pinnacle day for him.

Things would never be the same for Anna, that elder widow who had been living in the Temple for so long, "worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day."³ After so many years she is given the privilege of seeing her Savior and as a result she cannot stop speaking about Him to all who were there. That was a pinnacle day for her.

Things would never be same for Mary and Joseph. How could they be after seeing all of these things take place, after hearing those words from Simeon. They knew who their Son was, but still to hear these words! That Jesus was "appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel."

Simeon, Anna, Mary and Joseph, those are the folks we usually think about when we read this account from the Bible. People whose lives were changed that day. Still there is one more person for whom this day was a pinnacle day. One more person whose life was changed, and for whom things would never be the same.

1 Leviticus 12:1-8
2 Luke 2:29
3 Luke 2:27

That person is you. Now maybe that sounds a bit odd because you weren't actually there. You weren't even alive, but this day was a pinnacle day for you because of what Jesus did for us that day. He came as our substitute and on that day Scripture tells us about Jesus' fulfilling the Law of God. It is a pinnacle day for you because it teaches us about what Jesus is still doing for us still today.

Notice where all of this takes place. It is in the Temple. Where do you go to find the presence of God in the Old Testament? If you are going to present your first-born son to Him, in accordance with the Torah Law, then you go to the Temple. That sounds pretty ordinary, except for this fact: God had never come to this Temple visibly. He had come to the other Temples, but never to this one.

When the Tabernacle was built by Moses in the wilderness at God's command, God came to that Tabernacle visibly in the cloud of glory that filled the place, and God was there present for His people.

When King Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem, God came to that Temple visibly in the same cloud of glory that filled the place, and God was there present for His people.

Solomon's Temple, however, is not the Temple in the Gospel reading for today. Solomon's Temple was destroyed and a second Temple was built by the exiles who returned to Jerusalem, but God's cloud of glory did not fill that place.

It didn't because God had something else in mind. This time He would not come in a cloud of glory, but in flesh and blood. With Jesus' presentation at this Temple God had finally come visibly to this Temple and was there present for His people, in the flesh and blood of Jesus. Yet this Temple would not remain. In about 70 years it too would fall. It would fall because God was going to build the next Temple Himself. His new Temple would be His Church.

For us our Holy Place, where we go to find the gracious and available presence of God, where we go in times of trouble or pinnacle days, is not to a building or a place. We go to the flesh and blood of our Savior. We go to His Holy Supper and there are fed and strengthened. He has come to us, through His new Temple found in the Means of Grace. We go to Holy Baptism and there we are washed clean. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near.⁴ Here is where God is present for you in flesh and blood, in grace and forgiveness, in comfort and in hope.

The second thing that happens on this day in the Gospel reading is the purification of Mary. According to Torah Law, a woman had to be ceremonially

4 Isaiah 55:6

cleansed after childbirth and that cleansing would take place with an offering. The offering specified was a lamb one year old and either a young pigeon or turtledove. If however the people were too poor to afford the lamb then they could offer two pigeons or two turtledoves. Mary the mother of our Lord, and Joseph the foster father, were too poor to afford the lamb. They offered only two birds for the sacrifice.

Now, there is something very significant and unusual about that. This purification of women after childbirth was not required because childbirth somehow made them sinful or unclean. It was a reminder of original sin which so deeply affects and stains our very nature that we are utterly sinful from the moment of our conception.⁵

The question is: why did this concern Mary? This was not the case with Jesus! He did not inherit original sin because He was not conceived in the usual way,⁶ but was, as we confess in the Creed, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, [and] born of the Virgin Mary,” and therefore perfect and sinless. So why was this purification necessary?

It was not necessary for Jesus, but it was for you. Because you are the one born in original sin. You are the one who need purification, and without that purification you would be condemned. Once again we see Jesus here as your substitute. Taking your place under the Law to rescue you from your sins. To cleanse and purify you, just as He was circumcised for you, and baptized for you, and crucified for you.

Do not underestimate the significance of that little phrase “for you.” In times of trouble or pinnacle days of calamity people often wonder where God is. We know the answer. He is not just our Sovereign, He is our substitute. He is always with us, just as He has always been with us, and will always be with us.⁷

The times when He seems the farthest away are actually when He is the closest. That’s worth repeating. The times when He seems the farthest away are actually when He is the closest. Not punishing us, but purifying us. Not detached and aloof, but active and saving. Near! As near as the water of your Baptism. As near as His body given and blood poured out for you. As near as His Word of forgiveness and promise. All of these testify that your Savior is here, “for you.” To hear, to touch, to taste, to feel, to save.

The lamb was not offered. Strictly speaking, we could say that was simply because Mary and Joseph were broke poor, but couldn’t this be the work of the

5 Psalm 51:5

6 Luke 1:35

7 Matthew 28:20

Holy Spirit who wants us to see the Lamb who will be sacrificed not just for some sins, but for the sin of the world?⁸ Jesus the Lamb of God is here being presented at the Temple, but the time for His sacrifice had not yet come, so the lamb is not yet sacrificed.

When all was accomplished He would be sacrificed, on the altar of the cross, to redeem you. To pay the price for you. To purchase you for His Father, for Heaven, for eternity, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death.”⁹

Knowing that should give you enormous confidence and hope. Knowing that our Savior has taken care of our sinful past, and has provided us a sure and certain future, gives us the confidence and ability to live in the present. To live without fear of times of trouble which always come. To live without fear of pinnacle days of tragedy which often come. To live without fear that this day may be your last, so you better make sure you have everything in order. No, everything is in order, but not because of you, but because of Jesus, because of your Substitute, because of His death and resurrection.

This is what we sang in the last verse of the Sermon Hymn. They are very significant words:

Jesus, by your presentation,
When they blessed you, weak and poor,
Make us see your great salvation,
Seal us with your promise sure;
And present us in your glory
To your Father cleansed and pure.¹⁰

In other words, Jesus’ presentation was a pinnacle day which points us to the one last and final pinnacle day. The day when we stand weak and poor before the Father. Have no fear! On that day it will be Jesus doing the presenting, as He carries us to His Father, cleansed and pure, and with all the rights, privileges and inheritance given to children¹¹ of the Father.

That pinnacle day will be a day after which nothing will ever be the same again. That day will bring the eternal day of Heaven,¹² when our weak and poor bodies will be changed into glorified bodies.¹³ That is the promise that you have

8 John 1:29

9 Martin Luther’s Small Catechism – The explanation of the second article of the Apostles’ Creed.

10 LSB 519 v.3

11 1 John 3:1

12 Revelation 21:23

13 Romans 6:5

been given, and therefore it is a day to which you can look forward with anticipation.

In Jesus' name. Amen.