

"Jesus' first Temple Trip" Luke 2:33-40 Sunday within the Octave of Christmas 2023

As we come to the close of another year and the embark on the year 2024, it's only natural for people to take look back at what the last 12 months have all entailed. And maybe you're thinking, "2023 – what a year it has been!" I certainly feel that way. This year has been filled with many firsts for my family and for our church family as we've gotten to know one another better - COVID certainly slowed my integration into our congregations. Maybe you look at the last 12 months and you think about all that you have personally experienced – additions to your family through births or marriage, new friends, new jobs, special events that you've celebrated –birthdays, baptisms, confirmations, graduations, retirement, and then maybe some of the hard things – loss of a loved one, diagnosis of disease, surgeries or sickness. When you stop and think about it, "What a year it has been!"

I can only imagine that as Mary and Joseph made their way from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, they may have had a similar conversation, "What a year it had been!" Just think, 12 months ago, Mary and Joseph were maybe engaged and starting to plan their wedding and looking forward to beginning their married lives together. Then those plans were abruptly interrupted by an angel who delivered some startling news – pregnant by the Holy Spirit, a baby, the Son of God, Savior of the world. Mary had spent 3 months with her relatives Zechariah and

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Elizabeth, and then returned home to Nazareth where she and Joseph began to prepare for the birth of their son. Then came the mandate of the Roman government that forced them to make the 70 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Mary had given birth to Jesus in less than ideal circumstances. Yes, Mary and Joseph may have looked at one another and with a slight smile on their face thought, "What a year 4 BC had been for them and their family!"

It wasn't a very long trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, right around 5 miles. Jesus was already over a month old. A verse just before our reading says, "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived" (Luke 2:21). The humble faith that Mary and Joseph had already demonstrated in so many different ways in the time leading up to Jesus' birth, we continue to see here. They simply did as God asked of them and that continued as they now traveled to the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus was 40 days old and this was the first of many memorable trips that Jesus would make to the temple in Jerusalem throughout his 33 years of life. Mary and Joseph went to the temple in Jerusalem for two reasons. We're told, "When the time came for the purification rites

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required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him [Jesus] to the temple to present him to the Lord" (Luke 2:22). The purpose for Mary and Joseph going to the temple was two-fold.

First, They went to present Jesus to the Lord. The Lord told his Old Testament people that the firstborn male of every family belonged to him. That child could either remain in the service of the Lord helping the priests, or the parents could pay a small amount of money (a few dollars), to redeem that child, freeing that child from that obligation.

The second reason that Mary and Joseph went to the temple was to offer a sacrifice as payment for purification. This might seem a bit foreign to us who are so far removed from the Old Testament, but for those who lived before Jesus came, it was a rather regular part of their lives. You see, there were many things that God said made a person "unclean." One of those things was any form of shedding of blood. In order for a person to be purified from that uncleanness, a sacrifice needed to be made, a price needed to be paid. This payment for purification was a constant reminder of their relationship with God and what was required for it to be repaired. These were pictures that reminded people of their sin which makes them unclean before a holy God. In order to be purified from sin, a sacrifice needed to be made, a

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price had to be paid. The countless sacrifices made by people like Mary and Joseph throughout the Old Testament pointed people to the perfect sacrifice that the promised Messiah would make as payment for all sins.

While you and I are no longer required to observe those sacrificial laws with their pictures of sin's effect on our relationship with God, it doesn't take long to find the messy fingerprints of sin in our own lives. The loss of patience with that child or spouse that led us say somethings we wish we hadn't. The decision to use our time watching another TV show or football game instead of talking with a hurting friend or grieving family member. The times we chose recreation over worship, or breakfast over Bible study, sleeping in over Divine Service. As we reflect upon the past year, it's not always so pretty, in fact, sometimes it's pretty messy.

That's why it is so good to see Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. That's why Simeon sang and Anna could not keep from telling people about the baby she had seen. You see, it is right there in that temple in Jerusalem that Jesus is paying the price for our sinful mess, for our purification from sin, our freedom from sin's condemnation, the price for us to be at peace with God. Now you might be thinking, "Hold on for

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just one minute! Did I miss something? I thought that Jesus did that at the cross. This is just baby Jesus!" The only reason that the cross MEANS anything; the only reason the death of Jesus at the cross DOES anything is because of what Jesus is doing right there and then in that temple in Jerusalem. And what exactly is Jesus doing? Jesus is living a perfect life, a life that is in complete compliance of what God demands of us. Jesus is being presented to the Lord just as the Lord commanded his Old Testament people to do. Jesus' perfect obedience of God's will would continue throughout his entire life as the Bible tells us, "And the child [Jesus] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). Jesus grew up, he learned and he lived perfectly in our place. That's why Jesus' sacrifice at the cross is sufficient payment for our sin. The reason the Bible can say, "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), is because Jesus was perfect. As the Apostle Peter would write, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18,19). What Mary and Joseph's sacrifice pointed to, their Son Jesus was doing! He was paying the price for them, and for all, to be purified from sin, to be at peace with God.

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Did anyone get a gift card for Christmas? Maybe a few of you did, especially if you're a little hard to shop for. Did anyone get a credit card for Christmas? Hopefully not. What's the difference? Many of them look quite similar and they both can be used to purchase things. But you know what the big difference is, or you quickly find out. With a credit card, you still have to pay for what you bought. But with a gift card, someone else has already paid for what you bought. You own nothing! Yes, gift cards are so much better than credit cards.

Through faith, Jesus has in a sense given you a "Gift Card" that is payment for every one of your sins. Jesus has paid for your sins with his perfect life and the sacrifice of that perfect life at the cross. Because of that "Gift Card of Christ Jesus" God can never demand payment from you for your sins. Jesus has already paid. That is the "Gift Card of Christ Jesus" that God the Holy Spirit hands out every time that he creates faith in a person's heart. It's the "Gift Card of Christ Jesus" that little children receive through the waters of baptism. Their sins have been fully washed away and they now possess everything that they need for heaven. Why? Because Jesus paid for it all for them.

What peace that brings to us to know that Jesus has fully paid what we once owed. That we are right with God because Jesus did

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everything right in our place, even as a little baby in Jerusalem. That's the peace that you heard the Apostle Paul encourage his fellow Christians to have permeate every part of their lives as he wrote, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace" (Colossians 3:15). That's my prayer for each of us as we begin this new year, that this might be a year where the peace of Christ rules in our hearts. How does that happen? We're told, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Colossians 3:16). That peace needs empowering. And where does that power come from? The message of Christ Jesus. Therefore, I would encourage you this next year to recommit yourselves to worshipping with your fellow Christians on a weekly basis, to growing in your knowledge of the Bible through study of God's Word in a Bible class, personal Bible study plan, Sunday school, family devotions, and an active prayer life. Let gratefulness for the "Gift Card of Christ Jesus" which the Holy Spirit has given to you, guide you to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.