**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #5**

**Jesus: The Law, the Gospel, Prophecy, Grace and Growth**

**Luke 2:21-52**

**The Circumcision of Jesus**

***Luke 2:21****When eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child Jesus; this was name given to him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

**Jesus Encounters the Knife of the Law**

St. Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD) writes,

“On the eighth day Jesus is circumcised and receives his name, for then, even then, were we saved by Him and through Him, ‘*in Whom we were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands in the putting off of the fleshly body, but with Christ's circumcision, having been buried together with Him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with Him’* (Col 2:11). His death, therefore, was for our sakes as were also His resurrection and His circumcision. For He died that we who have died together with Him in His dying unto sin, may no longer live unto sin: for which reason the apostle said, ‘*If we have died together with Him, we shall also live together with Him*’ (Rom 6:5).

And He is said to have died unto sin, not because He had sinned, ‘*for He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*’ (1 Peter 2:22), but because of our sin. Like as therefore we died together with Him when He died, so shall we also rise together with Him.

Again, when the Son was present among us, though by nature God and the Lord of all, He does not on that account despise our measure, but along with us is subject to the same law, although as God He was Himself the legislator. Like the Jews, He is circumcised when eight days old, to prove His descent from their stock, that they may not deny Him. For Christ was expected of the seed of David, and offered them the proof of His relationship.”

- *Homily 3:16 on the Gospel of Luke*

**Jesus born Under the Law**

***Luke 2:22*** *When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* ***23*** *(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.”*

**Notes:**

1. Purification: according to Leviticus 12:2-8, the mother of the child is considered unclean for 40 days. The time was doubled for a female child. During this time the mother could not enter the Temple Court. A one-year-old lamb was offered by the priest as a “Burnt Offering” or a young pigeon or a turtledove.
2. *“To present him to the Lord”*: just like Samuel in1 Samuel 1:22-24, *Yahweh said to Moses, “consecrate to me every first born…”* (Exod 13:1-2). The first-born son was to be redeemed by five sanctuary shekels (Num 3:47-48; 18:15-16)
3. The first-born is called holy, which means consecrated to the service of God.
4. ‘Holiness” means something consecrated and [the word] can’t be used at all except for what it was “*consecrated for*” as in Exodus 29:21, [describing] priests and their vestments, everything that comes into contact with the altar, the worship utensils, and any sacrificial material (Exod 29:37; 30:29; Lev 6:11), or any article used for the sanctuary (Deut 22:9).
5. “*God is holy,”* means “shows himself to be holy” by manifesting his unique and unchangeable divine holiness before Israel (Exod 29:43) and the nations (Ezek 20:41; 28:22, 25; 36:23; 38:16; 39:27).
6. Something can be described as “*holy according to the law of worship*” such as the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Exod 20:11).
7. The sense of “*be made holy*”; be holy/consecrated or “is sanctified” as someone is consecrated (Exod 19:22; Lev 11:44; 20:7). God “*shows himself to be holy*” (Ezek 38:23) because God consecrates himself to save Israel. Humans bring themselves into the condition of consecration or purity without any mention of the particular ritual (Num 11:18; Josh 3:5; 7:13; 1 Sam 16:5) or “*is sanctified*” (NRSV “*keeping themselves holy*,” 2 Chrn 31:l8).
8. “*To make holy, consecrate, offer, surrender to God as a possession*” (Josh 20:7; 1 Chron 23:13; 2 Chron 29:19; 30:17). God can declare something or someone to be consecrated to him (Num 3:13; 1 King 9:7). One can “view something/someone as holy” (Num 20:12; 27:14; Isa 29:23).

**Simon the Elder foretells that the Gospel will reach the Nations**

**Luke 2:25-32**

***2:25****Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.* ***26*** *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.* ***27*** *Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law.*

**The Song of Simon (Nunc Dimittiis)**

***28*** *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,* ***29*** *Lord, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;* ***30*** *for my eyes have seen your salvation,* ***31*** *which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,* ***32*** *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*

**Notes: St. Cyril comments on Symeon**

1. “Christ therefore was carried into the temple, being yet a little child at the breast: and the blessed Symeon being endowed with the grace of prophecy, takes Him in his arms, and filled with the highest joy, blessed God, and said; "*Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word, for mine eyes have seen your Salvation, Which you has prepared before the face of all the nations, the Gentiles' light for revelation, and a glory of your people Israel."*

For the mystery of Christ had been prepared even before the very foundation of the world, but was manifested in the last ages of time, and became a light for those who in darkness and error had fallen under the devil's hand. These were they "*who serve the creation instead of the Creator*," worshipping moreover the dragon, the author of evil, and the impure throng of devils, to whom they attach the honor due unto God: yet did God call them the Father to the acknowledgment of the Son who is the true light. Of them in sooth He said by the voice of Isaiah, "*I will make signs unto them, and receive them, because I will ransom them, and they shall be multiplied, as they were many: and I will sow them among the nations, and they who are afar off shall remember Me.*"

For very many were they that were astray, but were called through Christ: and again they are many as they were before; for they have been received and ransomed, having obtained as the token of peace from God the Father, the adoption into His family and the grace that is by faith in Jesus Christ. And the divine disciples were sown widely among the nations: and what is the consequence? Those who in disposition were far from God have been made near. To whom also the divine Paul sends an epistle, saying, "*Now you who some time were afar off have been made near in the blood of Christ.*" (Eph 2:13)

And having been brought near, they make Christ their glorying: for again, God the Father has said of them, "*And I will strengthen them in the Lord their God, and in His Name shall they glory, says the Lord.*"

This also the blessed Psalmist teaches, speaking as it were unto Christ the Savior of all, and saying, "*Lord, they shall walk in the light of your countenance, and in your Name shall they exult all the day, and in your righteousness shall they be exalted: for Thou art the glorying of their strength*." And we shall find also the prophet Jeremiah calling out unto God, "*Lord, my strength and my help, and my refuge in the day of my evils, to Thee shall the heathen come from the end of the earth, and say, Our fathers took unto themselves false idols, in which there is no help.*"

- St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary of Luke 3:16*

2. “*Light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”* Isaiah says, “*you will be a light to the nations, salvation to the end of the earth*” (49:9).

**Warning to Mary in a form of a prophecy**

**Luke 2:33-35**

***2:33****And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.* ***34*** *Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed* ***35*** *so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

**Notes:**

1. Jesus is set for the fall of the unbelieving who will crucify him later on. But he is for the resurrection of those who will believe in him.

2. The sign is the cross, and since then many have denounced the cross but others believed and saw in the cross their salvation and the revelation of the love of God.

3. The sword that will go into the heart of Mary, according to Origen of Alexandria, is the “sword of doubt, when she saw him being hanged on the cross.” (Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 17:5)

4. The “*thoughts*” in verse 35 are the intentions of human hearts that will be revealed as a result of preaching the Gospel.

**The Sword is more than the ‘Sword of Doubt’**

St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD) comments:

“*Simeon said likewise, ‘you will remove the sword.’”* Mary removed the sword that protected Paradise after the fall of Eve (Gen 3:24). So, “*you will remove the sword”* means the sword of denial. For the Greek text says clearly that the inner thoughts of a great number of those who will hear the Gospel will be revealed, that is the thoughts of those who have doubt. Simeon said, “*You will remove the sword.*” Indeed, you too Mary will doubt, because this Mary imagined after the resurrection that Jesus was the Gardener (John 20:15). Mary wondered at his birth, it is said, and at his conception. She recounted to others how she had conceived, and indeed how she given birth. Those who had doubted it were comforted by the wonderment of her sword.”

- *Commentary of the Diatessaron*, 2:17

**A Letter from Philemon**

**The Virtue of Doubt**

Brother George,

May the good shepherd our Lord Jesus lead you to the green pastures.

Learning is a gift that you must use for the glory of our Lord who gives his life to us daily that we may grow up and mature.

My beloved brother,

Faith is a journey, and the articles of the Creed that we learn must be like a diagram for our discovery. Doubt is good if you use it as a guide for your discovery. Doubt means that there is a lack of knowledge; I mean the knowledge that is given by the Holy Spirit to help us to cope with the deep mysteries of God.

We have more than one kind of knowledge. Blessed is the one who can trace all the branches of his knowledge and sort them out.

Mary had our Lord as a baby in her womb, and she gave birth to him. She fed him and washed his dirt. Her ordinary human knowledge of natural life must have raised too many questions, how can this be God the Creator of the Universe. Don’t we hear questions like how can it be that Jesus is God and sleeps and eats and washes his body and submits to the calls of the needs of our humanity? But Mary, who went through hard times with Jesus, particularly at the cross, had received into her heart the “sword” that Simeon foretold her.

Those who hate Jesus are those who see in him a life that is different from their lives, and hear a teaching that condemns their deeds and their inner thoughts. Hate is another source for doubt.

Seek the wisdom of love and you will discover everyday more good knowledge that is enough to make your doubt part of your eternal journey of discovering the eternal sweetness of the love of the Lord.

May the Lord Jesus be your teacher of truth?

Philemon

Pray for me

Jan 29, 1966

**A Woman foretells the Gospel**

**Luke 2:36-38**

***2:36****There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel (face of God), of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage,* ***37*** *then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.* ***38*** *At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

**Jesus grows as all humans**

**Luke 2:39-40**

***2:39****When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.* ***40****.The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

**Jesus as a Bar-mitzvah**

**Luke 2:41-52**

***2:41****Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.* ***42*** *And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.* ***43*** *When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.* ***45*** *Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.* ***45*** *When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.* ***46*** *On the third days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.* ***47*** *And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* ***48*** *When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”*

***49*** *He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* ***50*** *But they did not understand what he said to them.*

***51*** *Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.* ***52****And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*

**Notes:**

1. Every year Jesus goes with his parents, some MSS added with Mary and Joseph.
2. The name of the feast, “Passover,” comes only from the LXX. It begins with sundown on the 15th of Nisan (March-April). A lamb was slain and roasted (Deut 16:11), and eaten with the family in the evening at sunset. Before that all bread prepared with yeast must be removed for the meat must be eaten with unleavened bread. The feast continues for seven days (Exod 12:17-20). Passover “became for the whole week seven or eight days, (Deut 16:1-4; Ezek 45:21-25)
3. According to Jewish customs (Mishnah, M. Niddah 5:6) any Jewish boy becomes obliged to observe the Torah and to keep the Law at the age of 13 which was called later ***Bar miswah*** or the western way of speaking Bar mitzvah (son of the commandment). According to the Jewish historian Josephus Samuel began his prophetic life at the age of 12 (Jewish Antiquities 5:10, 4).
4. Joseph and Mary stayed for the whole week. Jesus disappeared and both parents thought that he was with other travelers. This gives as a hint that Jesus was very social and mixed with other people. They went looking for him for a long distance, “*they went a day’s journey*” (verse 45)
5. Jesus was found on the 3rd day, a hint to the resurrection (Acts 25:1; 28:17). The third day has a special place in Luke (9:22; 18:33; 24:2,21, 46 and Acts 10:40).

**Jesus grows up even in grace**

**St. Cyril of Alexandria**

To say that the child grew, and became strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him, must be taken as referring to His human nature. And examine, closely the profoundness of the plan of salvation: the Word endures to be born in human fashion, although in His divine nature He has no beginning nor is subject to time: He Who as God is all perfect, submits to bodily growth: the Incorporeal has limbs that advance to the ripeness of manhood: He is filled with wisdom Who is Himself all wisdom.

And what say we to this? Behold by these things Him Who was in the form of the Father made like unto us: the Rich in poverty: the High in humiliation: Him who said to "receive," Whose is the fullness as God. So thoroughly did God the Word empty Himself! For what things are written of Him as a man show the manner of the emptying. For it were a thing impossible for the Word begotten of God the Father to admit ought (things) like this into His own nature: but when He became flesh, even a man like unto us, then He is born according to the flesh of a woman, and is said also to have been subject to the things that belong to man's state: and though the Word as being God could have made His flesh spring forth at once from the womb unto the measure of the perfect man, yet this would have been of the nature of a portent: and therefore He gave the habits and laws of human nature power even over His own flesh.

Be not therefore offended, considering perchance within thyself, how can God increase? Or how can He Who gives grace to angels and to men receive fresh wisdom? Rather reflect upon the great skill wherewith we are initiated into His mystery. For the wise Evangelist did not introduce the Word in His abstract and incorporeal nature, and so say of Him that He increased in stature and wisdom and grace, but after having shown that He was born in the flesh of a woman, and took our likeness, he then assigns to Him these human attributes, and calls Him a child, and says that He waxed in stature, as His body grew little by little, in obedience to corporeal laws. And so He is said also to have increased in wisdom, not as receiving fresh supplies of wisdom – for God is perceived by the understanding to be entirely perfect in all things, and altogether incapable of being destitute of any attribute suitable to the Godhead – but because God the Word gradually manifested His wisdom in proportion to the age which the body had attained.

The body then advanced in stature, and the soul in wisdom: for the divine nature is capable of increase in neither one nor the other, seeing that the Word of God is all-perfect. And with good reason he connected the increase of wisdom with the growth of the bodily stature, because the divine nature revealed its own wisdom in proportion to the measure of the bodily growth.”

- *Commentary on Luke 5:1*

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