

Luke 2:22–32
Purification of Mary/
Presentation of our Lord
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
February 2, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

This evening we commemorate the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, forty days after our Lord's birth at Christmas. In Leviticus 13 you can read about the Jewish ceremonial laws for purification after childbirth. There, God told Moses to tell the people that a woman would be unclean for seven days after giving birth to a male child. The next day, the eighth day, would be the circumcision of the boy. That's why we celebrated the Circumcision of our Lord on January 1st, eight days after Christmas. For another 33 days, the mother would refrain from entering the sanctuary. But then forty days after the birth, the mother would bring a one-year old lamb to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting for a burnt offering and a pigeon or dove for a sin offering.

Marriage and the bearing of children are, of course, blessings from the Lord. God did not give the laws for purification after childbirth because having children is an impure or dirty thing in itself. The reason God commanded certain postpartum procedures in the Old Testament was, on the one hand, to safeguard the woman's health, to allow her adequate time to rest and care for the new baby. You can see similar practices of setting apart the first 40 days after birth in cultures across the world. In the Christian West, the return of the new mother to church is called "churching." On the other hand, God also wanted to teach the people about original sin. Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, both original sin and the promise of a Savior were passed down from parents to children, from generation to generation. The impurity of childbirth was a

reminder of Eve's curse in Eden. And the sacrifices accompanying childbirth were a reminder of the sacrifice God would make to save His people from their sin.

As true God, Jesus was born pure and holy, without any sin. Otherwise He Himself would have needed a Redeemer, and could do nothing to save anyone else. So if Jesus is sinless, why did He need to be presented at the Temple, like any other Jewish child? Why would a sacrifice need to be made? Did the holy Christ child make His mother impure? The answer, of course, is no. But Jesus submitted Himself to the Law for our sake. As God, Jesus was above the covenant of circumcision, yet He allowed Himself to be circumcised. As God, Jesus had no need of Holy Baptism, yet He entered the Jordan River with sinners to fulfill all righteousness. So it is at our Lord's Presentation at the Temple. Jesus's birth was sinless, yet as our substitute, He undergoes the usual ceremonies on behalf of those He came to save.

Our Lord's presentation at the Temple was not just about the ritual purity following childbirth. There is another reason Jesus was brought to the Temple: He was the firstborn son. In Exodus 13, the LORD said to Moses: "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." God required all the firstborn because the firstborn of Israel were spared when the angel of death passed through Egypt. The firstborn of Israel were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb painted on the doorframe while the firstborn of Egypt were killed. From then on, every firstborn male would be set apart from the Lord by way of a sacrifice.

And so our Lord Jesus Christ comes suddenly to His Temple (Mal 3:1) to be offered as the firstborn son of Mary, being at the same time the Firstborn Son of God. At Christmas, the Virgin Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger (Luke 2:7). In Colossians, Paul calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God, the

firstborn of all creation” because all things in Heaven and on Earth were created by Him, through Him, and for Him (Col 1:15–16). Jesus is called the Firstborn because He truly is the Firstborn of the Father, the Son of God in all eternity. He is the firstborn of Mary and the Firstborn of God, the God-man come to earth to save His creation from the ravages of sin.

Jesus is also called the Firstborn because He is the firstborn of all the dead (Rev 1:5). Yes, there are other examples of those who died and were raised to life again. The prophets Elijah (1 Kings 17:17–24) and Elisha raised the dead (2 Kings 4:18–37; 13:20–21). Jesus raised the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11–17) and Jairus’s daughter (Luke 8:40–56) from the dead. Lazarus is perhaps the most well-known of those who Jesus brought from death to life (John 11). There were also the saints raised from the dead when Christ died and rose again (Matt 27:52) and several examples in the Early Church, in the book of Acts (9:36–43; 20:7–12). But Jesus is the *Firstborn* of all the dead. Paul continues in Colossians 1: “He is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.” Jesus is called the firstborn from the dead not because He was the first to rise from the dead, but because Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and stay alive forever. All the other saints who were raised from the dead ended up suffering death a second time. Not Jesus, though. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father until He returns on the Last Day. Jesus truly is the firstborn of the dead, the first one to rise from the dead, never to die again.

And where Christ is, there will you be also, dear Christian. Christ is the head of His Body, the Church and where the head is, the body is soon to follow. Martin Luther once said: “where the head goes and abides, there the body with all its members must necessarily follow and abide. As in the birth of man and all animals, the head naturally appears first, and after this is

born, the whole body follows easily” (AE 28:110). Jesus is the head and whoever believes and is baptized is a member of His body. Where Jesus is, there you will be too. When you die, your body will be placed into the ground like a seed. And when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, what was sown perishable will be raised perishable, what was sown in dishonor will be raised in glory, what was sown in weakness will be raised in power. At the final trumpet call, the dead will be raised imperishable, never to die again, and our mortal bodies will put on immortality (1 Cor 15). Jesus is the Firstborn from the dead, and you, dear child of God, will join Him in eternal life. Soon it will be your turn to rise from the dead to live in your Father’s house forever.

So Jesus was the Firstborn son of God, the firstborn of Mary, and the firstborn of the dead. As you can see, our Lord Jesus Christ fits the description of “Firstborn” more perfectly than anyone else. He is the firstborn in an eternal sense and so His presentation in the Temple forty days after His birth fulfills everything spoken about the Firstborn in the Old Testament. All the firstborn sons offered to the Lord in the Old Testament were a picture of the true Firstborn Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The offering of the firstborn recalled the redemption by the blood of the lamb of the firstborn in Egypt. But the redeeming of those firstborn sons also pointed ahead to the true Firstborn, who would come to redeem all mankind in His death and resurrection. Jesus came to His Father’s house, the Temple, not to be purified from sin, but to purify us from our sin. He is the true Firstborn Son, presented to God in the Temple that He might be presented to God on the cross as a pure and acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world, and then to rise again from the dead as the firstborn of all creation, that you, too, might join Him in the eternal dwellings of our heavenly Father. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.