

The Fourth Day of Christmas: Two Presentations in the Temple

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Welcome back. Over the course of the Christmas period I'm looking at some symmetries and echoes in the stories of the Nativity and Infancy of Christ. I'm trying to show that these events are not just stand-alone events, but they connect with broader patterns of God's work in history, both Old and New Testament.

To this point we've looked at some of the connections between the birth of Christ and his second birth, his rebirth from the dead, the death and resurrection being connected to the birth of Christ.

In Luke's Gospel. In the second day I looked at some of the connections between 1st Samuel and the beginning of Luke's Gospel and then moved on to look at Luke and Acts and how that triad of texts, 1st Samuel, Luke and Acts, help us to see more clearly what is going on.

I want to return to some of those connections today and look at the connections between Luke and Acts. At the beginning of Luke, one of the events that you have in Christ's infancy is the presentation in the temple.

This is a significant event for various reasons. It occurs 40 days after the birth of Christ according to the law of Leviticus 12. The law of Leviticus 12 was 8 days after the child's birth.

[1 : 1 6] The child had to be, if it was a male, had to be circumcised and then the woman had to continue in her uncleanness for 33 days. So altogether, a period of 40 days.

And at that point she would go to the temple, she would sacrifice a lamb for a burnt offering and a turtle dove or pigeon for a sin offering or a purification offering would be a better way of putting it.

It's not that she's committed a sin, but she needs to be rendered clean and included back into the full worship of the people of God. The purification offering was very much built around the reality of the tabernacle.

And so it's not just sin in a generic sense, it's sin as it's related to that tabernacle order. And so it's a purification offering that has to be offered at this point. And then the child and the mother are brought into the context of the tabernacle.

What we see within the story of Luke is this presentation occurs and there is a sacrifice that's involved. They bring two pigeons or turtle doves and the two turtle doves or pigeons are the offering that's made by the poorer person.

[2 : 3 1] Not the most poor person who would bring a grain offering, but for that person who is slightly poorer. And in that case, what they would bring is these two turtle doves.

And these two turtle doves or pigeons would be offered, one of them presumably as the burnt offering and the other presumably as the purification offering. And then the child and the mother would be purified and enter into the temple context.

The fact that this occurs 40 days after the birth of the child, and we've already connected the birth of Christ with the second, the rebirth of Christ and his death and resurrection, suggests a possible other connection.

40 days after Christ's death and resurrection, he tarries with his disciples, teaching them concerning the kingdom of God. And then he ascends into heaven, into the heavenly temple.

Now, could there be a connection here? I think that there is. The connection is between the child that needs to be purified. There needs to be a purification offering that's given for the uncleanness of the woman and for the child to enter into the temple.

[3 : 38] Christ, 40 days after his death and resurrection, his new birth, enters into the heavenly temple. And that, I think, is significant.

Now, what else might be drawn out from this? A further connection is the setting in the temple. At the very beginning of Luke's gospel, there are a couple of instances of a focus upon the temple, something we've already seen within 1 Samuel in the case of Hannah and Eli, being situated in the temple.

But here we see a further connection. There's Zacharias in the temple, but then there's also the presentation of Christ in the temple. And that presentation in the temple, I think, should be connected to the events of Pentecost, which occur in a temple context, presumably.

They continue in prayer in the temple, and that's where they are constantly. And this, again, recalls some of the things that we see in the context of Luke 2, where Simeon and Anna are people who are caught up within the temple context.

Anna, in particular, is constantly in, it says, did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And at the end of Luke, we read, And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

[5 : 12] And later on, in Acts chapter 1, we read, These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

And that, I think, is very significant. It's significant because this temple context is something that is brought out in the context of the presentation. The presentation of the child in the temple is part of the birth ritual.

It's part of something that continues the event of the, that fulfills the process of the birth. That the birth occurs, and then eight days after that, there's the circumcision, and then 40 days after the birth, there is the presentation in the temple, there's the sacrifice that is made, the burnt offering, and the purification offering.

And then there is the setting apart at that point of the firstborn child. And that, I think, helps us to understand part of what Pentecost means. That Pentecost is associated with the dove.

The dove who brings purification, who sets us apart as a clean people. A people who are given the Holy Spirit so that we might stand in God's presence.

[6 : 28] And I think that is connected with the dove of the purification offering. In the same way, the 40 days after Christ's death, he ascends into heaven, he ascends into the heavenly temple, and there is this sacrifice of the purification offering.

And that is associated with the church entering into that holy temple too, and being a participant within the worship of the divine assembly, the worship of the higher temple.

What else can we see? I think there are further connections here in the characters that I mentioned. Simeon is someone who gives a significant message at this point, and he is described as filled with the Holy Spirit.

By the Holy Spirit, he comes into the temple, and he is someone who is connected with the Spirit. And in the story of Luke, this is something that seems to be ahead of its time in some sense.

The connection between the Spirit and the temple is something that we expect later on. It is something that we particularly associate with the events of Pentecost, perhaps. But here we see it almost in advance of that time.

[7 : 42] This Holy Spirit is acting upon this person, this character of Simeon. And then we see that something happens. He gives a proclamation concerning this one who has come, concerning this one who has been born, and the significance of his life, of his coming, for Israel and also for the Gentiles.

That's the first clear message we've had concerning Christ and the Gentiles and his mission to them. And I think there's a further connection here. Simeon. What other characters do we find in the New Testament called Simeon?

Peter is called Simeon. In Acts chapter 15, and also at the beginning of 1 Peter, Peter is described as Simeon. That's his name.

Simon. Simon Peter. Cephas. Or Simeon. And Simeon is connected, I think, with Peter, this one who is in the temple, this one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, this one who delivers the message of this one who has arrived and describes the significance of this birth, whether that's the birth of the resurrection or the birth of the first birth of Christ.

And he's the one who also speaks about the spread of the Holy Spirit to all flesh and the significance of this one as a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.

[9 : 06] I think this is something that connects these two events. Peter is the one who gives the sermon at the day of Pentecost. Simeon is the one who gives the sermon, as it were, in the presentation.

What else is going on? The focus upon women in the context of Pentecost is significant, that they wait in the temple and they're continually in the temple with the women and the mother of Jesus.

That's the last reference to Jesus, Jesus' mother, within Luke's account. We don't have any further reference to Mary. But yet, she is mentioned in the context of Pentecost.

I think that's significant. The connection that I've suggested between the birth of the child and the presentation in the temple and Pentecost, I think, helps us out here.

That that event within Leviticus is an event for the child and it's an event for the mother as well. And we see that, I think, in Pentecost. There is the one who ascends, the child who ascends into heaven to begin priestly ministry in the heavenly temple.

[10 : 08] And we also have the mother and the community that joins with the mother and the women to wait for the spirit. And that focus upon the women at that particular juncture, I think, is significant.

Mary has already been associated with the sort of Pentecost at the beginning of Luke's gospel. At the beginning of Acts, she is at the heart of that community again. She is at the heart of the community because it's another event that's associated with birth.

It's entrance into the heavenly temple. It's something that is about participation within the worship of the divine sanctuary. And so this woman who has just given birth, this church, this body of people, this representation of Israel is 120 people.

Again, it's a significant number suggesting a connection with Israel. And the significance of the emphasis upon the woman at this point is, again, helping us to see that Israel is represented by two key images in various places in Scripture.

For instance, in the book of Exodus, we have the women struggling in birth and then we have the firstborn son. And both of those images capture something about what Israel is. And here at the presentation and also later on in the Ascension and Pentecost, we have those two aspects of that image.

[11 : 32] The woman who's waiting and the woman waiting in the temple for the gift of the Holy Spirit and then who enters into the temple on the 40th day and the earthly temple and then we have the son, the firstborn son, who enters into the heavenly temple on the 40th day.

And those two events are connected and they help us to see this twofold aspect of Israel's identity coming to the fore. Again, we've mentioned before and I think it's worth returning to here the significance of the character of Anna.

84 years of age, 12 by 7. Again, significant numbers, significant because they represent Israel. And she's someone who is constantly praying in the temple.

Again, these are things that are associated with the disciples later on. It's something that prefigures what's going to happen in the case of the disciples.

This woman that waits in the temple, that waits for Israel's redeemer to come. And then when she sees the Christ who has come, she gives thanks to the Lord and speaks of him to all who are looking for redemption in Jerusalem.

[12 : 45] Again, a similar event to what we see the church doing, the bride, at the day of Pentecost. And so drawing these two events together helps us to see, once again, some of the deeper patterns and the musicality of God's work in history.

That Pentecost and the presentation in the temple and ascension, these are connected events. That there is an entrance into an earthly temple, an entrance into a heavenly temple. There is a connection between the spirit and the temple at these points.

There are key characters like Simeon and Peter who are connected. And the church gathered with the women and Anna. And these figures all help us to see something of what is taking place.

When we look through the Old Testament, we will see events where there are two-fold events, a significant event that occurs first to one person and then to the wider body of people.

And so I've given the example of Moses going through the events of the deliverance out of the water and then later on Israel being delivered out of the water.

[13 : 52] Christ is baptised and then his people are baptised with the Holy Spirit. They receive the Holy Spirit. And in the birth accounts and the nativity and infancy accounts, we see something similar.

There are key events described that have their parallels that help us to see more clearly what takes place when it occurs for the whole church. There is a new birth that has occurred.

The woman who has given birth, this new Israel is now present within the temple. The Holy Spirit associated with the purification offering, the dove, descends upon the church and that blood, as it were, is applied to the church.

And so they are purified for worship. They are purified to enter into God's presence in the fuller way. And with all these connections, we are able to understand something more about how glorious this is, how deep these patterns go.

And there are many more things that I could mention here, but I hope this gives you a bit more of a sense of what is taking place here. Lord willing, I'll be back again tomorrow and discuss some further things.

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Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing, see you again tomorrow. God bless.