

## Christmas 1

December 29, 2024



*If it had not been foreseen, it would have been unbearable. Simeon spoke of the fall and the sword as if he were saying: "Dear Mary, you have borne a Son. The world, the flesh, and the devil will be against him." What a congratulation this was to offer a mother of six weeks!*

—Martin Luther—

Martin Luther's Christmas Book

### PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

### Exodus 13:1–3a, 11–15

The Lord told Moses to set apart, or consecrate, the firstborn males for service to Him. What God had done in Egypt to save the Israelites from certain death at the hands of Pharaoh, now would be acknowledged by the people by setting apart their eldest male children for God's service. The word "consecrate" in Hebrew is *qadesh*, meaning to make sacred or holy, or to dedicate to the Lord's service.

- *In biblical terms, to "make holy" means to "set apart." In what way does faith in God set our lives apart from those who do not trust and believe in God?*

Obedience to God, in the case of this law (as in many other cases in the Biblical narrative) was a matter of life or death. Just as the Egyptians' children given over to God in death (in a literal sense), the firstborn of the Israelites were also to be "sacrificed" as an offering to the Lord. However, since human sacrifice is not allowed by God, the children that the Israelites owed to God were to be "redeemed" (bought back) by the offering an unblemished animal.

- *Whose life has been given to redeem us? From what have we been "bought back"?*

### Psalm 111

The psalmist asserted that the Lord provides for those who fear him (v.5). This word "fear" can cause great confusion amongst believers.

- *Is it hard to reconcile the biblical God of wrath with the image we have of God in Jesus Christ? Why or why not? Are they the same God?*

The Hebrew word for "fear" is *ya-ray*. It means more than to simply be afraid of the power of God; it is a deep reverence for the one who created everything that exists. When we "fear" in this way, we willingly bow down and worship. There is only one who we bow down to — he is King of kings and Lord of lords.

- *If we "fear and love the Lord," is there any reason for us to be afraid of anything or anyone? Why or why not?*

### Colossians 3:12–17

Remember your very first "professional" job — not the ones in High School where you took whatever employment you could just to have some gas money — the job you hoped and prayed you'd get. Perhaps you needed special clothes

for this amazing opportunity: a suit and tie, or a dress and heels. When you looked in the mirror at your "professional self" did it feel good?

- *How can being dressed up actually make us more confident and professional in our actions?*

Paul urged the Colossians to dress their best as well. He wasn't really concerned with their physical attire, but rather, he was encouraging them to clothe themselves in Christ and the virtues that come directly from a life in him. These attributes would certainly have gotten them noticed: compassion, meekness, kindness, humility, patience, and most of all love. This is what followers of Christ are to "put on" (Greek *ενδύω*: *enduo*). Clothes may "make the man" as they say, but Christ at work in us is what makes us Christian.

- *In what ways can we clothe ourselves with compassion and other positive character traits? Who is the one who actually "dresses" us in this way?*
- *To be clothed in Christ means that when God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of Jesus. Why is that sometimes hard to see when we look at ourselves?*

### Luke 2:22–40

Joseph and Mary made the trip from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to fulfill the rituals of the law that were required of them after their son's birth. There were three religious ceremonies that were required by the Law of Moses:

1. Consecration of the firstborn son to God, by means of a sacrifice of redemption (as described in Exodus 13).
2. Circumcision of the infant Jesus on the eighth day of life (as described in Leviticus 12:3).
3. Cleansing in the *mikveh* (ceremonial bath) of Mary's body after childbirth (as described in Leviticus 12:4).

The couple had very little means when it came to buying an animal for an offering to God. Luke gave an indication of their poverty by mentioning that they were allowed to sacrifice two doves — which meant they couldn't afford the price of a lamb (see Leviticus 12:8).

- *How does the need for redemption by a "pure and spotless lamb" foreshadow what will happen in Jesus' life?*
- *Reflect on the fact that Mary and Joseph could not afford to buy a lamb for the dedication of their infant son. Could we ever pay the price to make our souls clean? Why is God's grace necessary for our salvation?*