

† I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IS ABOUT the downfall of the kings and kingdoms of this earth and the rising of the one everlasting King and Kingdom of Christ our Lord.

The kings and kingdoms of this world seek more — more wealth, more territory, more might. But the coming of Jesus into the world ensures that all kings and kingdoms of this world have a limited shelf-life. There is only one King who will endure and reigns over the earth — and the heavens — and that is Jesus, Son of God, born of Mary.

All things are unraveling such that only his will, his ways, his kingdom shall remain. The kings, kingdoms, empires of this earth are being brought low, coming to an end. We just don't quite have the eyes yet to see how his rule is unfolding — and so we trust him by faith.

CHRISTMAS EVE gave us a glimpse of God's will and his ways, when we saw that Caesar's census is the very thing that brought about the fulfillment of the Christ being born in Bethlehem. As Caesar sought to see just how much he could amass in taxation, just how much military might he had, just how far he could expand his kingdom, this brought about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

CHRISTMAS DAY gave us a new creation story. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus — the infant whom the angels announced and the shepherds worshipped — is the one through whom the world was made, the one who is Light, the one who is Life. And the coming of this Light into the world guarantees the end of darkness in this world — for light shines forth and illuminates the darkness, and the darkness can be dark no longer. His coming into the world marks a new beginning, a new creation, one full of light and life.

The coming of the Light of the World means that the Darkness of this world will come to light. And that is what we heard last week, on the FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, about the little boys whom Herod slaughtered, as he sought to murder Jesus. Little boys, aged two and under. This disturbing, unsettling story reveals just how horrific the kings and kingdoms of this world can be, just how dark darkness is.

What kind of king would order the execution of infants and toddlers? What kind of men would carry out that order? What kind of kingdom that approves the slaughtering of infants and toddlers could hope to endure?

Bethlehem should have been a safe haven for the baby Jesus and for those innocent boys. But it wasn't. America isn't either. Every place on earth should be a haven for babies, for infants, for toddlers, for children, for families — but that was not the world of Bethlehem, and that is not the world of today.

This world of death is opposed to life. We see the influence of Satan in the slaughtering of infants in this passage and in our world. We see that he wanted to destroy the Christ; we know that he wants to destroy all that is God's. We see how twisted, dark, evil this world is. We see the obvious need for the Savior.

These little martyred boys no longer languish in the throes of death. Because they gave up their lives for him, our Lord Jesus was able to go to his death for them—and for you and for me. They are with their Savior, Jesus.

Whatever dark and evil things that have taken place in this world, cannot help but to be unraveled, cannot help but be undone. Those who mourn and grieve and weep *will be* comforted. Those who have endured great evil *will be* comforted.

This is the beauty and goodness of Christmas — the coming of the baby Jesus into the world is the guarantee of the end of Satan's tyranny, the end of evil, the end of death. It is about the downfall of the kings and kingdoms of this earth and the rising of the one everlasting King and Kingdom of Christ our Lord.

THIS MORNING, ON THIS SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, WE HEARD that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple when he was forty days old.

Jesus, on his eighth day of life, was circumcised, according to the Law. Now, according to the same Law, two things had to happen: (1) Jesus had to be redeemed; (2) Mary had to be purified.

Immediately, before getting into some details, I want us to think about a contract. A contract has terms and conditions — to receive a salary, for example, you generally have to demonstrate some work. Or, to receive payment for services, you generally have to provide the actual services. There are conditions required; terms that need to be met. Luke, in this Temple visit passage, is letting us know that the required terms are being met — that Mary is being purified, that Jesus is being redeemed.

In order for Jesus to be the Christ, in order for him to be the King, in order for him to inherit the promised blessings, he must meet all terms and conditions, he must fulfill the law. Jesus could not be the Christ, if he only fulfilled *some* of the law. Jesus would not receive the blessings of God's promises, if he only fulfilled *some* of the law.

And so, when Luke tells us that these two things — the purification of Mary and the redeeming of Jesus — were fulfilled, Luke is telling us that the Christ story—the rise of the King—is still on track. Jesus will receive all the blessings of God's promises to his people, because Jesus is fully keeping God's law. No breach of contract here.

Now some details. Jesus had to be redeemed. It seems an odd thing to hear and to say, but Jesus had to be redeemed because he was the firstborn male of Mary:

[14] And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. [15] For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' (Exodus 13:14–15, ESV)

Since the Exodus, every single firstborn male is the Lord's. Ever since the slaughtering of the lambs — that first Passover — to save the firstborn of Israel and Egypt, every firstborn male must be redeemed. And so, Mary has brought her son Jesus to the Temple to redeem him.

It is wonderfully ironic, isn't it? The thought of redeeming Jesus when he is the very one who has come to redeem his parents and his people and us? And yet, none of this is ironic, because the slaughtering of lambs for Passover was always going to be about the deliverance of God's people from sin and from death through Jesus — the Perfect Lamb.

Mary had to be purified. Encountering blood or death always required purification. Because Mary had given birth to a son, she was to wait forty days, and then make an offering for her purification. And so, Mary and Joseph offered two birds.

This was bloody. The one for a sin offering, the one for a burnt offering. The priest making the offering would eat some of the sacrifice of the sin offering; the burnt offering was burnt completely on the altar.

And so, having fulfilled the requirements of the Law, Mary was purified and Jesus was redeemed.

Notice just how rich a tapestry these laws provide — the shedding of blood requires purification; the deliverance from Egypt required redemption of the firstborn. These two together point us ahead in the life of Jesus to Holy Week, where we are reminded why Jesus ultimately was born of Mary, so that he could purify her with his blood, so that as a firstborn lamb, he could redeem the sins of the whole world.

Luke includes more than just the ritual fulfillment of these laws — laws, which, are ultimately about the Cross. He tells us of two encounters the Holy Family has — one with a man named Simeon, and one with a woman named Anna. And so, let us look at the fulfillment of these laws from another viewpoint.

Fulfilling these legal requirements — given a thousand and more years ago to Israel in the wilderness — meant that Jesus — the Son of God — would visit his people in his Temple at forty days old.

That's the story that Luke tells through Simeon and Anna. Our Lord Jesus, as our hymn *Angels from the Realms of Glory* has in the fourth verse, has descended to visit his people in his Temple. On his fortieth day of life, he visits.

What does he find? He finds two of the faithful — (notice again how this is Jesus already being the Good Shepherd, finding and gathering his people) — Simeon and Anna. Both proclaim God's salvation through Jesus.

Simeon is, seemingly, just an ordinary man — but a man who is faithful to God and upon whom God has poured out his Spirit. He knew that he would meet Jesus *before* death, which is an absolutely wonderful gift. And so, when he saw them, he gathered Jesus into his arms, blessed God with a song, blessed Mary and Joseph, and prophesied to Mary. His prophecy to Mary echoes our Christmas theme:

*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed
35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

What do our thoughts reveal? What does he find in us?

Our Lord Jesus brings about the fall and rising of many, that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. The haughty will be brought low; the humble will be raised.

How does this take place? The Cross. Our Lord Jesus —the most—the only—humble man — is lifted up on the cross, revealing his stunning and absolute glory, so that all who put their hope in him may indeed be saved. Those who put their hope in Jesus will rise with Jesus in his eternal kingdom. All who put their hope in anyone or anything else will not.

We turn to Anna. She is a faithful woman, a prophetess, and an extremely long-suffering widow, who sees Jesus, gives thanks, and proclaims the redemption of Jerusalem:

And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Fittingly, as Mary is purified, as Jesus is redeemed, Anna & Simeon proclaim the purification and redemption of Israel and the Gentiles.

The story of Anna and Simeon are of two of the faithful, who wait in great patience, who trust that God will fulfill his promises, and who receive a glimpse of God's salvation in Jesus. The story of the Holy Family is of faithfully stewarding Jesus, fulfilling his obligations to be the Christ.

THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS is now coming to an end. The season about the mystery of the Son of God incarnate as the baby Jesus, the coming of the baby Jesus into the world is the guarantee of the end of Satan's tyranny, the end of evil, the end of death. It is about the downfall of the kings and kingdoms of this earth and the rising of the one everlasting King and Kingdom of Christ our Lord.

We have seen the pressing need for the light and life of Christ to enter every human heart and to flood this weary world. We have seen the pressing need for the kings and kingdoms and empires of this world to fall and for Christ to return in glory to bring an end to all that is wrong, the end of all suffering, all evil, all grief — all that is opposed to the will of God.

WE BEGIN TO LOOK FORWARD to the **SEASON OF EPIPHANY**, where we recall the glimpses of Jesus that this world saw of our Lord — beginning with his Star appearing to the Magi and his Baptism. We will continue to see that Jesus is the Christ, the King, and the inheritor of all God's blessings.

Christ the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**