

Thoughts From Other Minds:

The second point which demands our attention in this passage, is *the name by which our Lord was called, by God's special command*. "His name was called Jesus, which was so named by the angel, before He was conceived in the womb."

The word Jesus means simply "Saviour." ... The Son of God came down from heaven to be not only the Saviour, but the King, the Lawgiver, the Prophet, the Priest, the Judge of fallen man. Had He chosen any one of these titles, He would only have chosen that which was His own. But He passed by them all. He selects a name which speaks of mercy, grace, help, and deliverance for a lost world. It is as a deliverer and Redeemer that He desires principally to be known.

Let us often ask ourselves what our own hearts know of the Son of God. Is He our Jesus, our Saviour? This is the question on which our salvation turns. Let it not content us to know Christ as one who wrought mighty miracles, and spake as never man spake – or to know Him as One who is very God, and will one day judge the world. Let us see that we know Him experimentally, as our Deliverer from the guilt and power of sin, and our Redeemer from Satan's bondage. Let us strive to be able to say, "This is my Friend: I was dead, and He gave me life: I was a prisoner, and He set me free." Precious indeed is this name of Jesus to all true believers! It is "as ointment poured forth." (Song of Solomon 1:3.) It restores them when conscience-troubled. It comforts them when cast down. It smooths their pillows in sickness. It supports them in the hour of death. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov. 23:10.)

The last point which demands our attention in this passage, is *the poor and humble condition of our Lord's mother, the Virgin Mary*. ... the offering which Mary made was specially appointed to be made by poor people: "If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons." In short her offering was a public declaration that she was poor. (Lev. 22:6.)

Poverty, it is manifest, was our Lord's portion upon earth, from the days of His earliest infancy. He was nursed and tended as a babe, by a poor woman. He passed the first thirty years of His life on earth, under the roof of a poor man. 'We need not doubt that He ate a poor man's food, and wore a poor man's apparel, and worked a poor man's work, and shared in all a poor man's troubles. Such condescension is truly marvellous. Such an example of humility passes man's understanding.

Facts like these ought often to be laid to heart by poor people The simple fact that Jesus was born of a poor woman, and lived all his life on earth among poor people, ought ... to encourage every poor believer in all his approaches to the throne of grace in prayer. Let him remember in all his prayer that his mighty Mediator in heaven is accustomed to poverty, and knows by experience the heart of a poor man. Well would it be for the world if working men could only see that Christ is the poor man's friend!

J C Ryle, Expository Thoughts on Luke, Vol. 1, pp. 62-64.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge 25 December 2016

Sermon: "The coming of the Lord – to save sinners" (text: Luke 2:21-40)

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 2:21-40

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Our 'leading up to Christmas studies have brought us to Christmas day, but not to Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, rather, to things that happened to him and his mother after his birth.

Some might think circumcision and purification are not suitable topics for Christmas Day—but Jesus' birth was a means to an end, and circumcision and purification point to that end. Although he was holy, he was associated with sinners!

1. His appearance—a sinner

Circumcision is a very controversial topic in western societies; a doctor wrote 'Never has so much been written about such a small piece of skin.' Circumcision, the surgical removal of the foreskin from the penis, is opposed as a routine procedure on surgical and ethical grounds.

It is said that the risks of routine circumcision outweigh the benefits; that as it is not treating an illness parents cannot consent on behalf of the child. In 2012 a German court ruled that circumcision for religious reasons amounts to bodily harm, and contravenes the "interests of the child to decide later in life on his religious beliefs".

Peoples that practise circumcision were outraged. Christians may practise circumcision, but not on religious grounds; Christ's death has made it redundant (Gal 5:6). The court's ruling is one of the reasons for objecting to the baptism of the children of Christian parents—and baptism is its New Covenant equivalent (Col 2:11).

Objectors say 'Surely it is better to wait until the child is old enough to make his/her own choice'; but the Lord disagrees, for he gave circumcision to Abraham as the sign of his covenant with him, and told him that every male child of his offspring was to be circumcised at the age of eight days (cf. Gen 21:3-4, of Isaac).

This was a covenant of salvation for sinners, and circumcision was an outward sign of this salvation, of submission to the Lord and the heart cleansing and separation from sin and evil that come from this covenant; the gospel command is circumcise your hearts (Deut 10:15-16); the promise is that the Lord will do it (Deut 30:6).

Circumcision was a sign of covenant with God (like baptism); this means being obligated to keep his law—but as sinners, they are liable to death, the curse of the broken law. The Lord killed all the first-born of Egypt—but the first born of Israel also deserved to die; God spared them and claimed them as his own (Ex 13:11-13).

As a first-born male Jesus must be redeemed and the sacrifice prescribed by the law for purification offered (Lev 12:1-8). After childbirth, a woman was unclean and

excluded from worship; after her days were completed, she was to bring a sacrifice in keeping with her means—a burnt offering and a sin offering.

This is part of the Old Covenant's picture language, teaching that we are morally and spiritually defiled not by our environment but by what comes out of us (cf. Jesus, Mk 7:2-23). Under the Old Covenant emission of blood or other bodily fluids 'defiled' a person so they must be purified before they could worship God.

In childbirth there was also that the mother had given birth to a sinner. While the law only mentions the purification of the mother, Luke has 'their purification' (i.e., not Joseph and Mary, but Mary and Jesus; it appears that the child is also included as also defiled by the process of birth and as also in need of purification).

One bird was offered as a 'whole burnt offering'; this was wholly consumed by fire, apparently representing consecration to the Lord; the other was a 'sin offering'; it was to make atonement, to propitiate God's wrath as to secure forgiveness, both consecration and forgiveness being necessary to serve the Lord.

2. The reality

Jesus' rites appeared the same as those of other first-born sons, the circumcision and offering of a sinner who needed purification to serve God—yet he was not a sinner, but holy, separate from sin. Other children were sinners, but he was no ordinary child; the Holy Spirit had come upon Mary, and he was holy, the Son of God.

Luke hints at the reason for his undergoing these rites when he tells us that he was named 'Jesus' (Saviour); but the fuller explanation comes from Simeon and Anna, who represent the generations who had waited long for Messiah, but had not seen him; they waited long, and the Lord privileged them to welcome him.

What an example and encouragement and a rebuke to our busyness, our prayerlessness, our 'this worldliness'; no doubt her prayer and fasting was for the coming of Messiah; Simeon was waiting for him. He is coming again—do we love the day of his appearing? (2 Tim 4:8) 'What if the reality of our faith was tested by this love?

Simeon was also a prophet and a witness to Messiah's coming (vs. 25-32). Anna, perhaps overhearing what he had to say, "began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.' Here is a child who was holy, yet treated as a sinner and honoured as Saviour.

Simeon knew that this salvation was to be by the Saviour's suffering (vs. 34-35) - but living after the fulfilment of his prophecy we understand better than he the mystery; that although he was holy, sent by the Father to represent us and save us he took our place as a sinner obliged to obey the Law of God, and to suffer our death.

Many people hope to be good enough for heaven—but it is a fatal mistake, like that of the Jews who trusted in their circumcision. One sin is enough to deserve hell; relying on good works brings God's curse; Jesus redeemed us from that curse so that we may know ourselves saved from sin and death and hell through faith in him.

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it that while the Lord commanded that every male child within his covenant people be circumcised (Gen 17:9-14; 21:3-4) circumcision no longer has any valid religious significance (Gal 5:6).
2. Read and reflect upon Deuteronomy 10:15-16 and Deuteronomy 30:6; what paradox is evident when these are compared? How does are these reflected in New Testament teaching about the gospel?
3. Why was it that first-born males of Israel had to be redeemed? (Ex 13:11-13). Read and reflect upon Leviticus 12:1-8, comparing it with other Old Testament laws regarding defilement by bodily emissions; what do these laws teach? (cf. Mk 7:20-23). Why was purification by burnt offering and sin offering?
4. What do we learn from the example of Simeon and Anna about waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises? How should this shape the way we wait for the day of his appearing? (2 Tim 4:8)
5. Read and reflect upon Galatians 3:10-14; what does it teach about hoping to be good enough for heaven and God's way of salvation?