

December 31, 2023

Luke 2:22-40

# “So What Does Jesus Mean To You?”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Without Jesus, Christmas is truly meaningless. In that statement we have effectively removed from the Christmas season everything except for that which we know and believe about Jesus from the Bible. **So What Does Jesus Mean To You?**

Our gospel lesson is not an easy one. There are many things going on in this text that require a lot of explanation since we often fail to take the Old Testament seriously. What we see in our gospel lesson is the fulfillment of certain laws that pertained to the birth of a firstborn son in Israel. Jesus was a firstborn. So, everything in this account gives meaning to the baby born in Bethlehem. **So What Does Jesus Mean To You?**

Jesus should mean to you what he meant for Mary and Joseph. They performed everything that pertained to Jesus that was required by the law of Moses, because they knew that Jesus was to fulfill the law for us even as an infant. They presented him before the Lord and offered a sacrifice. Jesus should mean to you what he meant for Simeon who held him in his arms and could then depart from this world in peace. Simeon says: “my eyes have seen your salvation.” Jesus should mean to you what he meant for Anna. She gave thanks to God and spoke of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

What Jesus means to us should correspond to what Scripture teaches about him. That requires from us a willingness to grow in our knowledge - to do the hard work of reading and studying. It requires the work of the Holy Spirit to create that willingness and to guide us in such a way that we not only correctly know about his person and work, but that we believe in who he is and all that he has done and continues to do for us! Therefore, on this *First Sunday after Christmas* we pray that the Holy Spirit would make Christmas truly meaningful to us as it was for Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna.

We first turn our attention to Mary and Joseph. In the case of Mary who brought Jesus into the world, there was really no need for purification, since the child she had given birth to was not conceived in sin, but was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Her baby boy is the Son of God in the flesh, untouched by sin and perfectly clean. And yet, we see the holy family obediently complying with the law. This means a great deal, for as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 5:12, it was for our sake that God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” By faith in him, we are declared pure.

The holy family offered the sacrifice for purification. The sacrifice that Mary and Joseph offered was a pair of turtle-doves, which was the burnt offering for the very poor. This also has great meaning. You have heard what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” And that’s not all. There’s more!

Another important purpose of the sacrifice was that it was offered for the buying back of the firstborn in Israel who belonged to the Lord. In short, since the tribe of Levi had been chosen by God to serve as priests, every other firstborn had to be redeemed from this work. But, for Jesus, there was no need for

such a sacrifice of redemption, for he is the redeemer himself. He is both the victim and priest. He sacrificed himself for all our sins. Moreover, he is a forever priest in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus is the righteous king who rules us with the forgiveness of sins and salvation. It was already said of him in the Old Testament “Behold I come ... I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart (Psalm 40:7-8).” So, there was no need for him to redeem himself from the service of offering sacrifices.

So what does this mean for us? All of this is for our comfort. God demands perfection from us. No one is perfect. We cannot be perfect before God by our own good works. Jesus did all of the good works for us from infancy, and continued in that obedience under the law throughout his entire life. He did everything right so that we might receive his righteousness by faith and so enter into his eternal kingdom. This is what we find in Christmas. We find the perfect Son of God, who as our representative, met every demand so that we might be counted as righteous and be with him forever. This he was able to do because he was the Son of God in flesh. **So What Does Jesus Mean To You?**

Now, when the parents of Jesus brought him to the temple for his presentation, they were met by an aged man by the name of Simeon. We are told that he was a righteous man. That means that he believed in the righteousness of the coming Savior and was counted as pure before God. He had received a special revelation that he would see with his own eyes the Son of God in flesh. What a precious promise this must have been to him. But we also have the promise of seeing our Savior with our own eyes!

And it was revealed to him that the baby had arrived in the temple. And he took up Jesus in his arms and blessed God. He breaks forth with these beautiful words: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” Simeon may now die in peace because he has seen his salvation that is for the whole world! Can you imagine that? He may die in peace! What a blessing gift to die in peace - to die in the forgiveness of sins!

According to Simeon, the meaning of Christmas, as we are to see it in Jesus, is God’s answer to humanity’s greatest evil - our sin. Jesus is the payment of the penalty which we owe because of our transgressions. In other words, we are to understand and believe that the baby born in Bethlehem has come to take unto himself all of our sins so that we may not be condemned and punished. From even at the time of his infancy, Jesus took all of our transgressions of the law, our troubles and sorrows, our infirmities and diseases, our death and hell, and nailed it to his cross that these things may never be the final word on our forever. **So What Does Jesus Mean To You?**

Yes. What did you find this Christmas season? Our greatest need is forgiveness and salvation. We need to depart in peace. It is here that God has incredible mercy on our pitiful condition. Though we are lost eternally in sin, the baby comes into this world to be the payment for all our sins so that we might have paradise!

Anna reinforces this. Luke writes: “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.*” Those last words are

extremely important. That word “redemption” captures everything in our whole gospel lesson. Listen to this definition of “redemption” from the *Lutheran Cyclopaedia*: “To ‘redeem,’ literally, means to ‘buy back.’ Redeem as well as redemption are used ... for the act of setting free a captive by paying a ransom or redemption price. In Christian theology the terms stand for our recovery from sin and death by the obedience and sacrifice of Christ, who on this account is called Redeemer.”

So, what was the money that was used to buy us back from sin and death. Luther nails it when he writes:

Jesus Christ ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; *not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death*, that I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

**So What Does Jesus Mean To You?** Just what is Christmas all about? This is the real meaning of Christmas: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Is that the Jesus you found this year? Blessed are you if you did! He is the everything of our life. He is prayerfully for you what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 73:

“Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott