

SERMON NOTES

Presentation of the Lord

Synaxis Gospel

Luke 2:41-52

DEDICATION

INTRODUCTION

February 14th is forty days after the birth of Christ according to our Armenian calendar. This is a fixed feast and “even if the feast coincides with the fast of Catachumen (sic), or Great Lent, on that day the forms of penitence and mourning are dispensed with.”¹ The feast celebrates the presentation of our Lord in the Temple by Joseph and Mary according to the Law of Moses.

According to the Jewish Law, in memory of the Israelites exodus from Egyptian slavery, originally every first-born male belonged to the Lord, whether of man or beast.² But the LORD decided to take one tribe, the Levites as a ransom instead of the firstborns of the other eleven tribes. These Levites would serve Him as a vocation. The cattle of the Levites were taken to replace the firstborn of the cattle of the other tribes.³ The Levitical priests were to be supported by the offerings of the people to God.

Now all the firstborns were owed to the priests. However, God provided that the parents of children should redeem their one month old firstborn by a special offering—five shekels in silver. This payment went to the priests in return for their perpetual service to the LORD.

Another required a woman who had given birth to a male child to offer a sacrifice of purification thirty-three days after the child was circumcised, that is, on the fortieth day from birth. If she could not afford a lamb, then two turtledoves or two young pigeons would be accepted.⁴ In Luke 2:21-40, the reading for this morning’s Matins, we read that Mary and Joseph went to the temple in Jerusalem with the baby Jesus to fulfill these laws. They were too poor for the lamb offering.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple, they met two devout persons, a man, Simeon, and a prophetess, Anna. To the astonishment of Mary and Joseph, both of

¹ Malachia Ormanian *A Dictionary of the Armenian Church*, translated by Bedros Norehad (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1984), p. 7. “This feast usually is called *Dyarnuntarach*, and through popular contraction, *Derendas*.” Ibid.

² Exodus 13:2,12-13; Numbers 3:13

³ Exodus 13:15; Numbers 3:40-41.

⁴ Leviticus 5:11; 12:8

the aged saints recognized, by the Holy Spirit, the infant Jesus as the Christ, the promised Savior. Both Simeon and Anna praised God, thanking Him that they had been allowed to see this Child. Simeon, in his blessing of the Child, recognized Him as God's Salvation, A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel. Anna continued "speaking of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."⁵

Immediately after the record of the Infant's presentation in the temple, Luke fast-forwards twelve years, to another visit to the temple by the Holy Family. It is the last and only account we have of Jesus' youth before He appears again at around age thirty to be baptized by John the Baptist. Our reading for Divine Liturgy on this Presentation of the Lord Feast is the record of that visit to the temple.

SYNAXIS READING

Luke 2:41:-52

And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; And as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

And His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him.

And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions.

And all who heard Him were amazed at his understanding and His answers.

And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

⁵ Luke 2:28-38

And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

NOTES

And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

We know from Matthew's Gospel that immediately after the visit of the wise men in Bethlehem, Jesus and His family fled to Egypt and did not return to Nazareth until after the death of King Herod the Great in 4 B.C. (There was an early mistake in the calendar dates; Jesus may have been born as early as 6 B.C).

Luke has omitted the time in Egypt and jumps immediately after the presentation of the Infant in the temple to the return of the family to Nazareth. After Mary and Joseph reestablished their home there, it would be their custom as reverent Jews to visit Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.

Jerusalem was on a mountain, so one always *went up to Jerusalem*.

Passover celebrated the liberation of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses from Egyptian bondage.

That Luke refers to Joseph as one of Jesus' parents should not be thought remarkable. Though Joseph was not His biological father, he was Jesus' legal father.

And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast;

At the age of twelve, a young Jewish male was considered a *son of the covenant* and had the privilege of reading the scroll in Synagogue and being counted as one of a *minyan*, or quorum of males, needed to hold a prayer service. Today this age is usually thirteen.

On this visit to Jerusalem, Jesus had come of age. All Jews, if they were able, were required by Law to attend Passover in Jerusalem.⁶ (It was during the Feast of Passover many years later that Jesus was crucified.)

⁶ Exodus 23:14-17

And as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

The complete feast, beginning with the Passover meal, included the Feast of Unleavened Bread that continued for seven days.⁷

And His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

For safety's sake and no doubt for the fellowship of family and friends, people travelled together if possible. Thus, the family had joined the caravan of worshippers returning home. In the crowd with its hustle and bustle, Joseph and Mary supposed that Jesus was with some of the others, and they did not notice that Jesus was not with the group.

It may have been at the time for the evening meal that they first missed Jesus and began searching for Him.

And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him.

No doubt the caravan had set out in early morning and the sun was probably setting. Possibly the worried pair may have travelled all night to return to Jerusalem.

And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions.

Retracing their steps the anxious parents searched everywhere they thought He might be—for three long days.

Usually, the custom was for the teacher to sit and the students to stand. Here we are told Jesus was sitting in the middle of the group of rabbis. Possibly for three to five days—if one counts the day of travel away from Jerusalem and the day of travel back as additional to the three days of search—Jesus had been enjoying a lively discussion with the learned teachers at the temple.

And all who heard Him were amazed at his understanding and His answers.

In the Gospels we know that as an adult, in His discussions with the religious leaders, no one could match Him in knowledge and insight into the Holy Scriptures. We see here that even as a twelve year old, His ability was amazing. The rabbis were astounded.

And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, “Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.”

It was the parents turn to be astounded. Possibly worried that something tragic had happened to Jesus, they could not believe their eyes when they saw Him in discussion with the temple teachers.

“Son”, τέκνον, literally, *child*, is an affectionate address to a son.

“Why have you treated us this way” is literally, “Why have you done this to us?”

⁷ Leviticus 23:1-8

By using the term, *Your father*, Mary was no doubt using the terminology she normally did when they were at home. It would have been awkward to do otherwise. But Jesus gently corrected her in His response.

The term translated *anxiously* has the connotation “to be in great distress; to suffer acutely in body or mind.”⁸ Mary and Joseph had endured days of great distress. Mary could not understand why Jesus had put them through this torture.

And He said to them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house:”

For three days at least Jesus had been discoursing with the rabbis. If asked a question, one had the opportunity to respond with a question. If the second question was answered, the first question would then be addressed. Perhaps Jesus was still responding as a rabbi when He asked Mary this question in response to hers. We are never given the direct answer to her question because she did not answer His.

However that may be, actually His answer was in His question. He was addressing their anxiety. He had expected His mother to understand that His interests were those of His Father and she should have known exactly where to find Him—in His Father’s *house*, the temple (Actually, the word *house* is not in the Greek text; it simply reads “Did you not know that in my Father’s must I be? The term translated *had*, or *must*, has the sense of compulsion or necessity—it was an absolute necessity that He be where He was.) She should not have been tortured with worry looking in all the wrong places.

Moreover, from His words during His ministry as an adult, we know that Jesus *never* acted apart from His Father’s will and direction. We must assume, therefore, that in this case as well, He was in the temple for the sole reason that His Father wanted Him there to discuss with the learned men of that day. Seen in this light, Jesus was not so much saying that she should have known that He was in the temple, but that wherever He was, it was at God’s direction and she should then have been unconcerned for His safety---He could not have been safer.

And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

This is the first instance, of many to follow in His life, that Jesus’ words were not understood. But when questioned further, He always made His meaning clear.

Luke is making an interest contrast—the learned teachers could not fault Jesus’ understanding of the deep theological issues that they discussed. On the contrary, they had been beside themselves with amazement at *His* understanding. Yet even His blessed Mother did not understand Him.⁹

Possibly no one really understood until after the Resurrection. We are still in amazement.

And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them;

One always ascended to Jerusalem and went down from Jerusalem, even if the originating point were on a higher elevation

Nazareth was in the territory of Galilee, where Joseph and Mary made their home and Jesus grew to manhood. His presence there also fulfilled the Scripture that foretold:

⁸ Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor A Grammatical analysis of the Greek New Testament, (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), P.181

⁹ This was the mistake Mel Gibson made in his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Gibson insinuated that Jesus was mentored, and spiritually guided and helped by His mother. Jesus was only guided by His Father, no one else. He required no other mentor or help.

Galilee of the Gentiles,
The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine upon them.”¹⁰

Although, in the custom of the Jews, He was now considered to be of age with regard to moral responsibility, and though He was far wiser than they, He chose to subject Himself to His parents, because this was His Father’s will for Him at this point in time. He fulfilled all righteousness and the command that said: “Honor your father and your mother.”

and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

According to Luke, he carefully researched the facts of his Gospel. This episode in the life of Christ was only recorded by Luke; it has been surmised that the details came from the Mother of our Lord, who kept all these things in her heart.¹¹

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

At the end of our Matins lesson for today, in the account of the presentation of the Infant in the temple, Luke writes that “the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”¹² Luke ends our periscope in a similar way, noting His mental and physical growth as well as God’s favor upon Him. But here, Luke adds that as He grew to manhood, He also enjoyed the favor of man. He was a pleasure for all who met Him.

Man’s favor would not last. Not many pages further, Luke records how those very people in Nazareth became so incensed at His preaching in their Synagogue that they attempted to kill Him.¹³

APPLICATION

The presentation of the Infant Jesus was according to the Law a redemption, or a buying back, of the first born son that otherwise must be dedicated to the service of God in the temple. Mary and Joseph did this for Jesus; He was not required then to be a servant in the temple at Jerusalem. This responsibility fell on the Levites, who God had designated to take the place of the other first borns.

The first born sons had another duty in the family. They were given the honor and the responsibility of rulership, upon the death of the father. It was their duty to preside over and care for the mother and other members of the family.¹⁴ Therefore they inherited a double portion of the father’s estate. The title *firstborn* had originally not been tied to a birth sequence, but was given at the father’s discretion and so came to mean not a designation of actual birth position, but as a title held by the ruling one. When St. Paul

¹⁰ Isaiah 9:1-2

¹¹ Luke 1:1-4

¹² Luke 2:40

¹³ Luke 4:28-29

¹⁴ We see that Jesus held that position in the family when He passed responsibility for His Mother to John during His crucifixion (John 19:26-27). Joseph could not have had older sons; the eldest of them would have been designated the firstborn of the family, according to the Law at that time.

referred to our Lord as “the Firstborn of all Creation,”¹⁵ He did not mean that Christ was the first creature born, but that He is the Ruler of all. Paul’s Jewish readers would have naturally understood this meaning.

Service to God was not limited to service in the temple. Those first born sons redeemed from their service in the temple were not freed from their service to God. Nor are we, man or woman, boy or girl, released from God’s expectation that we should serve Him. In our reading, we saw that Jesus, even as a twelve year old, understood this better than anyone. Serving His Father was His reason for existing as a man. He was totally dedicated to God’s will.

This dedication was driven by an inner compulsion to only act and speak under the direction of the Father. Though this faithfulness to God’s will caused Him to sometimes be misunderstood by others—even His own dear Mother—He never swerved from obedience to the Father’s direction. He completely fulfilled the purpose for which God had sent Him into the world, even though that purpose was the Cross.

As we consider this reading and the example of our Lord and Savior, it would be fitting to examine anew our own dedication to God and His expectations for us. He expects our desire to serve Him to flow from the inner compulsion of our love for Him. We saw that Jesus, as an infant and as a child, was constantly growing, and the favor of God was constantly upon Him. May this be our story as well, may our love for Him be constantly growing as our understanding and faith grows, always living in His favor, dedicated to Him.

¹⁵ Colossians 1:15-18.