

Name of Jesus and First Sunday of Christmas

NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES, BUT NOT ABOVE THE LAW

Luke 2:15-21, 22-40

Name of Jesus and First Sunday of Christmas Analysis by Mark Marius

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.] – name of Jesus

22When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

25Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation

of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the Law, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

30for my eyes have seen your salvation,

31which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel."

33And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37then as a widow to the age of eighty- four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39When they had finished everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Author's Note: Do you still have your manager scene up? Or have

you moved the holy family to a house? Of course, if you're like my family, the Magi and camels are still making their way to the scene. But like most depictions, the magi will still end up at a manger before Epiphany. But I am getting ahead of myself because that is still 6 days off. Yes, even before this "Gentile" Christmas happens the Law breaks into our celebration. Unexpectedly during Christmas we can't escape the Law and bloodshed (Holy Innocents and Circumcision of Jesus). As many try their best to create a reality distortion field of a clean, cozy, joyful and peaceful Christmas, Law-gospel preachers will gently put that out of focus. (Anybody have a nativity set with a mohel?)

The baby Jesus is a perfect gift. We don't want anything to destroy the image of the "no crying he makes." But even during circumcision? Why would Jesus have to be circumcised anyway? He is truly divine. (Next week we can ask why he has to be baptized?) Yet as good and faithful Jewish parents, Joseph and Mary subject the baby Jesus to the Law. The Angel only told them that Mary would give birth to God's Son but gave no further instruction how to raise God's Son. Do you think they even questioned it?

DIAGNOSIS: The Law Gets No Holiday

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *The Law Decides*
This God-Child is born only to be laid in a manger. Why? Because unwed pregnant girls aren't given access to the better places this world has to offer. First glances judge this couple to be Law breakers, and Law breakers are put on the outside, in cold and dirty places. But even with all the revelations as to what Child this is, the parents still dutifully bow to God's Law. As they should. So 8 days after the crib is filled, they leave the

hay behind and head to the temple with God Incarnate. It's what is required under the Law. And to this point in history trusting God's Law is the only way we can be insiders. Even with God among us, we still haven't escaped the Law judging who is in and who is out. Who is worthy and who is unworthy. So we have society using the Law to decide that this family is on the outside of God's favor and we have angels proclaiming and his parents insisting that Jesus grow up on the inside.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Christmas Is Not Enough*

What problem could we possibly have with the baby Jesus? So perfect, so gentle and mild. But not perfect enough to warrant not circumcising the child. But this baby was named even before it was conceived (Luke 1:31, 2:21). Why still go through proper channels when God's own messenger has already made a declaration about this Child? Even as shepherds are glorifying and praising God for what they have seen and witnessed (v. 20), we can not trust a God who operates outside of his very own Law. We could not trust Jesus if he was merely a renegade and lived independent of the Law. The angel voices are not enough, we must also listen to the mohel. The mohel gives God's word, even to God's Word (to borrow from John 1, logos). Despite the fact that the Christ child was born we are still bound to the Law. It is not escapable. Do we expect Jesus to shed his first blood as the Law demands? This gift is not enough in its present state. If we accept that it is, we reject God's Law and in effect we reject Christ. (In the life of the church, Christmas has always needed the Triduum, whereas the Triduum has always been able to stand alone. After all, it has 3 legs.)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Gift Return*

But do we end up trusting the gift as God gives, even when it is the Baby Jesus. We must follow this child from manger and see where he leads. But could it be that this child grows up

faithful to the Law in order to fulfill the Law? If we listen to the gospels we will see how easy it is to reject this gift. His teaching of the Law will cut us to the quick. His actions will have us scratching our heads as to why this insider is so concerned with those who are on the outside. How can he push the boundaries of the Law like no other? But it won't even take many of us that long to turn this gift from God into something else. When we want to keep Christ in Christmas-but only in the manger-we end up keeping ourselves from receiving God's gift, God's invitation. And we end up with a hollow holiday that quickly fades away. And we too will fade away just as quickly when God's Law judges us. It pinches; takes away our flesh.

PROGNOSIS: The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus' Exchange Is Our Gift*

Today it's a little blood, a holy name, and a life to live under the Law. But, as Simeon (2:30) and Anna (2:38) testify at the temple, this Child will be salvation and redemption. And it takes more than circumcision, and the sacrifice of two turtledoves. Jesus, our gift at Christmas, will turn himself in, and exchange his life for ours. He will sacrifice all his blood, as required by the Law, in order to free us from the Law. This is what will be necessary of this Christ child and gives his life (and ours too) meaning, or as many proclaim the "reason for the season." Jesus goes from the outside to the inside and from the inside to the outside in order to assure salvation and redemption. And unlike Anna and Simeon who were permitted to die in peace, we who are on this side of the resurrection are invited to join Christ in paradise. To live and not die.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Real Name Changer*

"When they had finished everything required by the Law of the

Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (vv. 39-40). Jesus has finished everything required by the Law, starting with circumcision and ending with his self-sacrifice. This allows us to bask in Jesus' fulfilling of the Law, which is life changing for us. We are not baptized into the baby Jesus but in the name of the risen Christ. This is where we get our wisdom and receive our faith. We grow strong by trusting this gift. This is the only way we find God's favor. Not by what we do, or how we celebrate Christmas, but by what Christ has done for us. His willingness to be born into humanity, to live under the Law, and save and redeem the world changes our name to children of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis: (External Solution) : *Do You See What I See?*

So our Christmas can be more than just gift exchanges and living by the letter of God's Law. We aren't interested in who is celebrating Christmas properly, where nativity scenes are or aren't. Our Christmas can be found in proclamation. Like the shepherds on Christmas Eve, like Anna and Simeon today, we reveal Christ to the nations. We explain who this Jesus is, and what his name can do for us. We use that name to bring peace to those outside of God's Law, people looking for redemption, people in need of salvation. We can help other see it with their own eyes.