

The Presentation of Jesus in the temple is connected with the Mosaic Law. In Leviticus, we read, “when the [40] days of her purification for a son or for a daughter are fulfilled, [a mother] shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a yearling lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a turtledove for a purification offering ... If, however, she cannot afford a lamb, she may take two turtledoves or two pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a purification offering” (Lv 12:6,8). Jesus is born into humble poverty and Mary and Joseph can only afford to offer the doves as they present their child in the temple.

Given Jesus’s destiny in Jerusalem, this story at the onset of his life is a foreshadowing of his passion, death, and resurrection. As an adult, John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. John said, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1:36). Jesus the Lamb of God will offer his life to purify the human race. He will shed his blood as part of the New Covenant. We hear echoes of this from Jesus’s own lips. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” (2:19). And indeed, Jesus rose from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. He who was pure and without sin descended into the darkness of death to liberate the captives and set them free.

In our Christian faith, we do not present a child in the temple, but parents do bring a newborn into the church for Baptism. “Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission” (CCC 1213). We do not ascribe any conscious sin to an infant. “Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth” (CCC 1250). Church tradition testifies explicitly to this practice from the second century on. And we know that when the apostles received entire households through baptism, infants were most likely part of the tradition from the very outset of Christianity.

Baptism purifies from original sin (and for an older child or adult ... all sins). Through Baptism, we are made a new creation. “We become an adopted son [or daughter] of God, who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature,’ member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1265). The sanctifying grace that one receives helps a person “to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him” (CCC 1266). God helps us through the gifts of the Holy Spirit to grow in holiness and choose what is right and just.

At the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and blessed God (Lk 2:28). At the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, “Heaven was opened and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21b-22). Through Baptism, we are adopted into the royal family of Jesus and the Father is well pleased.

We know that Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). With Baptism, we receive the promise of eternal life. It is incumbent on us to live a life worthy of our Christian dignity. The faithful Christian who has ‘kept the seal’ until the end, remaining faithful to the demands of his Baptism, will be able to depart this life ‘marked with the sign of faith,’ with his baptismal faith, in expectation of the blessed vision of God - the consummation of faith - and in the hope of resurrection” (CCC 1274).

Before he ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, Jesus commissioned the Eleven. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20a). With the great gift of baptism we receive, we are given the responsibility for sharing the Good News with others and helping them to come to know and love Christ in return.