

CONSECRATION OF CHRIST

In the traditional church calendar, the last of the 12 days of Christmas is called "Epiphany" which means the manifestation or revealing of the Christ Messiah, the long-promised Son of God come in the flesh. Christmas focuses on the realities of God entering human existence in the human form of Jesus Christ. The miraculous work of the incarnation now settles into a very human routine of life, because while Jesus was fully divine, He was also fully human. And He must grow up to become our Savior.

1- IDENTIFICATION - Luke 2:21 records, "*And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*" Jesus is the English word for the Greek "*iesous*" which in Hebrew is "Yeshua" and means "Jehovah the LORD saves." The Son of God was given this name because He came to save His people from their sins (Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25, John 1:29, Galatians 4:4). It's part of the mystery of the incarnation, becoming flesh. The eternal Son of God comes to earth as an infant male child, who would perfectly observe and keep all of God's Law and commandments, so that He could become the perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross.

Conceived in the womb, birthed in a manger, Jesus is now presented at the temple. Devout parents carried out all the instructions of the Mosaic law. As we saw with John in Luke 1:59-80, this ritual emphasizes the child's name, as the angel said, "*You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*" (Luke 1:31 and Matthew 2:21,25). The name Jesus points to His divine mission. This was a common name, but only this Jesus, the Christ, would completely fulfill it's meaning.

2- CIRCUMCISION - The Bible reveals that God created all things in six days, rested on the seventh day, and prescribed circumcision for the eighth day. Some 2,000 years before Christ, God introduced the practice to Abraham (Genesis 17). The word "covenant" in Hebrew derives from a root word which means "*to cut.*" In His promise to Abraham, God used the ancient practice of "cutting a covenant" which involved passing between animals which had been cut into two parts, to signify the ultimate level of commitment to the solemn agreement, as "*this is what will be done to the one who breaks this covenant.*"

But God made a unilateral promise, taking all the burden of the covenant upon Himself. And He made circumcision the sign of the covenant, as cutting the male organ of procreation signifies consecration to God. Specifically, this is a reminder of God's promise through Abraham of an offspring who will be the Christ. At His birth, Jesus bore this same sign of the this same covenant, that He had come to fulfill.

3- PURIFICATION - Then 33 days later, 40 days after His birth, Jesus was again brought to the temple (v22) for a ritual of purification. Leviticus 12 explains the process and the sacrifices, as Jesus' parents act out their submission to the holy God and His holy law. The normal offering was a lamb and dove, but Joseph and Mary gave two doves, which was allowed for the poor. Like any Jewish firstborn son, Jesus was presented to God (and the world) at the temple in Jerusalem. We read in 1 Samuel 1:22-24 and Exodus 13 "*every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.*" In this way Jesus was consecrated to God, acknowledging God's holy claim on His life, and His mission to fulfill His covenant.

Jesus was circumcised and consecrated as part of His life and ministry, which perfectly kept God's law, so that in the fulness of time, His sacrifice of Himself would perfectly pay the penalty for sin. Fully human yet fully divine, only Jesus the Christ could perfectly fulfill all of God's promises. And He is the perfect fulfillment of "*the offspring*" promised through Abraham and David (Galatians 3:16,26-29, 4:4-7).

4- CONSOLATION - Up to this point, the presentation of Jesus was pretty standard Jewish practice. But in Luke 2:25 we read, "*now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*" Simeon consciously kept God's law, and held on to the hope of the Christ. Isaiah 40 and 57 refers to God bringing "*paraklesis*" comfort and deliverance to His people, through His Christ.

RC Sproul notes, "the Jews who groaned in times of bondage, wept in times of exile, who now were oppressed under the heavy burden of the tyranny of Rome, looked to heaven for their release from suffering. It is people who experience constant grief, frustration and pain, who want to be consoled." The true consolation comes through Christ, and now in the fullness of time, it had come!

5- BLESSING - In the Old Testament, and before Pentecost, God gave the Holy Spirit to people for a momentary time of manifestation, for mighty deeds or words. But Luke says the Holy Spirit was "*abiding with*" Simeon. God had also revealed to Simeon that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. What a promise! It is well put, "No matter how distressed from oppression, he could not even die to escape it, until God manifested the Lord's Christ, promised for thousands of years."

Are you like Simeon, waiting a long time for God's promise in your life? Can you hold on a bit longer? Jesus promises, "*I am with you always*" and "*I am coming quickly.*" The day of promise came for Simeon that very day, like any other day, until he took up the child Jesus in his arms and blessed Him, delivering the third hymn of prophecy in Luke, the "*nunc dimittis*" which we'll look at next time, as the amazing true story of God's salvation unfolds! ☐