

LUKE 2:22-38

The Purification of The Blessed Virgin Mary and The Presentation of the Lord

Luke the evangelist gives certain insights as part of the infancy narrative that readers do not see in any of the other gospels. The particular details included leave the audience wondering where this information came from or why these things are included here. This gospel still leaves out the majority of Christ's life, but gives a somewhat expanded overview of the infancy, and childhood, of Jesus in relation to the Temple and Jerusalem. It can be understood that the evangelists would only include the most important information in their gospels as they saw fit to the salvation of man: "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Luke chooses to elaborate not just on Christ's ministry and proclamation, but on key events in His early life that shed "light" on what God's visitation to mankind will mean, not just for the Jewish people, but to all the nations. Everything had to be satisfied under the Law, as the Law was the Law of Moses as given by God; this necessitates the prevalence of the Temple as a setting. The presence of prophets is a key element here; it is initially seen earlier in the gospel as the herald of Christ is made known. This is the axis between the Old Covenant and the New. Simeon and Anna are portrayed as the revival of prophetic history, and a reminder of the prophecies of old that are coming to fruition. Isaiah is strongly implemented and calls forth the image of the

suffering savior. Simeon, as moved by the Spirit, informs the mother of Christ that she will share in this suffering. Luke, straight away, informs the reader of how Christ is fulfilling the requirements of the Messiah, and that this will be “a sign of contradiction.” This is not what most have expected, but this is what was prophesied. This salvation is on a much larger scale than that of a political liberation. This meant something significant and beautiful for both the Jewish people, if they were to accept it, and to the Gentiles of whom Luke was numbered and to whom he will assist Paul in delivering this message of hope. This message is not yet complete in its work. It will never be complete until every Jew and Gentile accept it. Though in a time of communication, this seems more possible than ever, the enemy is ever more at war against it. For those who have accepted this message, this should be the driving reason to keep their lights burning, to remain true to the Word themselves, passing this down to their children, and to be examples for those who dwell in darkness around them. Luke 2:22-38 illustrates a message of salvation to the entire world, which is deeply rooted in Jewish Scripture as inspired by God, and comes from the pen of a Gentile who reveals Jesus Christ as Messiah.

God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New. (2) For, though Christ established the new covenant in His blood (see Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), still the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, (3) acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New

Testament (see Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Rom. 16:25-26; 2 Cor. 14:16) and in turn shed light on it and explain it. (Dei Verbum 16)

Luke puts the Old Testament to good use in various ways, and by doing so gives the New testament a firm foundation; the two are inextricably interwoven. Luke's narrative style is what connects all of the pieces for us. The Jewish Scripture is referenced and alluded to. Its scenery is inevitably incorporated because this is a continuation of a story started long ago, that takes place in a very significant setting. Of the characters, there are many new, but the character types are similar. The only genuinely recurring character could be seen to be God Himself, though in the older scriptures, often an off-stage understood Character, He was the most important. In the prophets, He is not playing a secondary role; it is His voice which is most important. Luke's form tends to reflect prophetic literature. God is a genuine character here in the infancy narrative in the role of the Holy Spirit, who directs the whole event. Christ Himself, is also portrayed here as has been foreshadowed by the Holy Spirit through older prophets, in particular, Isaiah, as the figure of the suffering savior. The use of language chosen by Luke is of great importance. This is another way connections can be made to the Old Testament. There are carefully chosen, or inspired (or both) words that the author uses which draw out the message of the evangelist. A textual critique of Luke's writing shows his knowledge of the Septuagint. One can understand the use of his chosen sources in the prophets, and in a historical critique see how his intended audience of those familiar with the Septuagint and Gentiles becoming familiar with it would see things according to how he means.

Mark Walter Koehne uses intertextual narrative interpretation in his study of the Lukan presentation narrative. Luke uses the Septuagintal word “νόμος,” Law, for the Hebrew “תורה,” Torah or teaching. It is used four times in the presentation scene and is what the light metaphor of Luke 2:32 is alluding to in Septuagintal Isaiah. Not merely as an allusion, but in a more direct relation, this word reflects back to the giving of the Law to Moses. Luke 2:22-24 uses the word in regard to the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in accordance with the Law of Moses. Koehne argues that the presentation pericope is not just a narrative technique to bring the holy family from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem, nor is it just historical data; “Rather, Luke 2:22-24 naturally follows from the prescription in Leviticus that required Jesus’ circumcision mentioned in Luke 2:21. In addition, 2:22-24 theologically establishes the following scenes with Anna the Prophetess (2:36-38) and the boy Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41-52)” (37). Luke is showing his audience that pious Israelites, in anticipation to the Davidic messianic reign, must keep the Law of Moses. He also wishes a solidarity among the Jewish people, reminding them of their liberation through the exodus, “and whose foretold emancipation through a new exodus has now arrived. Anticipation and arrival, and promise and fulfillment converge” (38). Second Isaiah (Isa: 40-66) suggests that there will be a new exodus (Koehne 39). Luke cleverly uses the word “εὐλαβής,” which is actually a hendiadys, or two words together expressing one concept, to express “taking-well” or internalised (Koehne 46). Only Luke uses this word in the New Testament. It is not merely a Hellenistic morality expressed to his majoritively Hellenistic audience. Simeon is “awaiting the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25), which is reminiscent of Old Testament faith required by Habakuk (Koehne 46). The Servant Messiah of Isaiah 42:6

is called to be a covenant for the people and a light to the Gentiles in “δικαιοσύνη”, righteousness (Koehne 137). Light is a metaphor for νόμος. Koehne suggests a contextual interdependence on the words “δικαιοσύνη” and “νόμος.” He says a use of the cognate word “δίκαιος” as used in Isaiah 60:21, “Your people shall all be just (δίκαιος), they shall always possess the land, they, the bud of my planting, my handiwork to show my glory” to possibly imply a perpetual presence or an emanation of divine revelation, or νόμος (Koehne 139).

Simeon’s familiarity with the post-exilic texts of Isaiah suggests the Temple is of import in God’s act of consolation and redemption. The Temple and Jerusalem are closely related in significance throughout Luke and can nearly be used interchangeably. Everything significant in Luke either happens in the Temple or on the way to Jerusalem. The Temple being mentioned at the presentation and after the resurrection form an inclusio tying the story together, and render it a narrative focal point (Fay 258-259). From the point of the presentation on, it is shown that the Temple will be important in the ensuing narrative. The prophetic words of Simeon announce the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God, and this is done in the Temple of Jerusalem. The birth of Christ, for messianic reasons, does not occur in Jerusalem, but Luke, unlike the other evangelists, finds it important to include the presentation in Jerusalem. The Temple at Jerusalem was a place where the king and priest were one, in David, the forefather of Jesus.

The characters Luke introduces his readers to can be understood in the framework of his narration. Collectively, all of those portrayed in the presentation scene are under the auspices of the Holy Spirit. Shepherd, referencing John Darr’s *On Character Building*, holds that the reader grasps the divine frame of reference through the Holy Spirit. (Shepherd 42)

The promises of Scripture, as well, bear the Spirit's mark of approval, referred to by Darr as "a pneumatic hermeneutic" (43). Shepherd critiques Darr: "he does not see that in addition to giving confirmation to the words and actions of other protagonists, the Spirit functions as a protagonist as well. "God" may well be offstage; the "Spirit" is certainly not" (44).

"When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (Lk 2:22). It is understood that purification is intended just for the mother, and that neither Joseph nor the Christ child needed purification. The use of "their," "αὐτῶν," is a bit perplexing. Origin's rationality is that "their" refers to mother and child in a general sense (Koehne 49). But the question still remains, was the purification necessary for the mother of God, and if not, why did she do it? It can be understood that a righteous Jewish woman would have fulfilled the requirements of the Law. No matter what theology one can read into it, it would be difficult to surmise that the mother of Jesus Christ would have felt it unnecessary to follow the Law of Moses. In fact, it is likely she would have felt it quite necessary; even if she, understanding her role in the divine scheme, realized she did not need purification, her humility and obedience would have bound her to the tradition. Koehne states "The custom of the law" (τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου) refers to the consecration of Jesus, not the purification of Mary, because of "in regard to him" (περὶ αὐτοῦ) that follows (59). But this is at the presentation and after the purification. Luke states this was done "according to the law of Moses" (Lk 2:22), suggesting she felt the law must be kept. Saint Vincent Ferrer states, Luke "does not say according to her own person, because she does not need it." Citing Leviticus 12, Ferrer explains the law

states that if a woman receives seed, she is not to enter the Temple until her purification is fulfilled. She did not receive seed. Ferrer elaborates with a further examination of Aquinas:

As the fullness of grace flowed from Christ on to His Mother, so it was becoming that the mother should be like her Son in humility: for "God gives grace to the humble," as is written James 4:6. And therefore, just as Christ, though not subject to the Law, wished, nevertheless, to submit to circumcision and the other burdens of the Law, in order to give an example of humility and obedience; and in order to show His approval of the Law; and, again, in order to take away from the Jews an excuse for calumniating Him: for the same reasons He wished His Mother also to fulfill the prescriptions of the Law, to which, nevertheless, she was not subject. III, q. 37, a. 4

Ferrer maintains it is never sinful to bring forth children under matrimony, and attempts to explain the purification law exists because all precepts of the Law are reduced to the Decalogue, which is then sub-categorized into deed, omission, word and thought. Four multiplied by ten is forty. Women remain unclean forty days after birthing a male child. He goes over four ways women commonly sin in childbearing, and thus must experience purification. First, he suggests they sin in conceiving because many conceive not because God had ordered so for the conservation of humanity. "Many are not urged toward it unless like a horse or mule, a dog or pig, according to the sensuality of the flesh, when they ought to have... the intention of begetting children for paradise" (Ferrer). Mary did not sin in this way. Second, Ferrer suggests women sin by omission, as by forfeiting penance, fasting,

prayers and the like, during their term. But as he recounts St. Bernard and Church tradition, her pregnancy was not difficult. She did not bear the stain of Adam or punishment of Eve. Thus “Like a priest, when carrying the Eucharist, is more devout, so the Virgin, who was the custodian of the body of Christ” (Ferrer). Third, he states, women sin in speech while birthing; this is perhaps the least debatable of all his statements. But the Virgin remained sinless “because she gave birth without pain or misery, like the ray of the sun passes through the glass window without breaking it” (Ferrer). Next, he posits that women sin in their suckling. He portrays this sin as one of pride. “They think, ‘Now I have the heir! Now I am the Lady!’” (Ferrer). However, he states they should be thinking otherwise. “O Lord, you have given me a son. What will become of my son? Will he be so wicked a man, that he would kill me; or what evil deed might he do that he would be hung, and finally damned?” (Ferrer). Ferrer says Mary was aware of her Son’s passion, and thought of His naked body on the cross while holding His naked body in infancy. She lay Him down between two beasts as He was to hang between two thieves. Mary did not sin.

Ferrer explains how the Jews observe the custom of the the wealthy women, the poor and simple, and the virgins, would all take separate places within the Temple. Mary must have pondered with whom to associate. She was charitable and noble, of the tribe of David. He suggests she would have given away her dowry and the gold of the wise men and would have lived simply. If she stood with those women, they would have thought her out of place. If she stood with the virgins, though a virgin, they would have certainly thought her out of place. She would have been humble, having taken her place with the poor. “And so Mary says, “Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid,” – she doesn't say “the charity”

or, "the virginity." – "For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed," (Lk 1:48). And this was first humility which today she practiced in fulfilling the law" (Ferrer).

It can be inferred that Christ did not need to be presented, as he was never separate or absent from the Father. It was in the virtue of humility that He was presented, which expresses to us the importance of this virtue. Ferrer gives his audience four reasons of the doctor of the Church, Thomas Aquinas, why Christ was presented in the Temple. The first reason, as mentioned earlier, would be to fulfill the law. In obedience to Leviticus 12:6, the law was followed intended for expiation of sin and consecration of the child. The law here was that an offering was made for sin, and as a holocaust. There was also an understanding that the Lord claimed all the first-born of Israel; as part of their deliverance, the first born sons of Egypt, man and beast alike, were slaughtered. The second reason, was not that Christ needed to be sanctified in the Temple, but that the Temple needed to be sanctified by Him. "By emphasizing the contrast between the modest, humble action of the two parents and the glory of the event as perceived by Simeon and Anna, the Evangelist Luke apparently wants to suggest that the temple itself is waiting for the Child's coming" (John Paul II). Aquinas quotes Scripture: "Yet one little while, and I will move the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will move all nations: and the desired of all nations shall come,... Great shall be the glory of this last house more than of the first' (Hag 2:7-8,10)" (Ferrer). Thirdly, Our Lord was offered for instruction. Aquinas here refers to Athanasius, whom tells us Christ became man and was circumcised, so that we may belong to God and be circumcised in spirit. This happens after the circumcision so that "no one who is not circumcised from vice is worthy of Divine regard' [Bede, on Luke 2:23]" (Ferrer). In the

fourth reason, Ferrer mentions how Aquinas touches upon the significance of the poverty of Christ. The law in Leviticus requires a lamb and a turtle dove to be offered, or if the couple was unable, two turtle doves or young pigeons (Lev 12:6,8). “And so the Lord, who, 'being rich, became poor for our [Vulgate: 'your'] sakes, that through His poverty we [you] might be rich" (2 Cor 8:9) as used by Aquinas and referenced by Ferrer.

What about the offering of five shekels? Numbers 18:15-16 orders the giving of five shekels; if it could not be paid, the first born would serve in the Temple, for the first born, or first fruits, were offered to the Lord. Ferrer gives an allegorical and a moral response. The allegorical is that Christ wished to “be redeemed” by five shekels, as the world would be redeemed by His five wounds, listed as being: circumcision, the flight into Egypt, the scourging, crowning and crucifixion. One could also see the wounds of His hands, feet and side, which are more commonly viewed as His five wounds, as allegorical to the five shekels. The moral reason is since men sell themselves through sin to the devil, they may be redeemed by five shekels: “The first is contrition, with the purpose of not returning to sin. Second is oral confession. Third, the affliction of the body. Fourth, the restitution of what is owed. Fifth, the forgiveness of injuries. And this is verified by the words of scripture, ‘There is one who buys much for a small price, and restores the same sevenfold, (Sir 20:12)’” (Ferrer). According to Koehne, the presentation served as a sign of the Lord’s deliverance of His people out of Egypt (Exod 13:14-16) and this redemption costs five shekels (Num 18:15-17). “Traditionally, then, the presentation to the Lord related to his sparing the life of the Hebrew first-born when he slew the Egyptian first-born” (Koehne 41). He goes on to state that the fee had to be paid at the Temple, but the Mosaic Law did not require a

presentation to redeem the child in the Temple. Ferrer states a third reason for the shekels being the meeting with Simeon. Luke, in fact, does not mention the payment of five shekels. He uses intertextual and canonical criticism to view the necessity of the presentation. Luke makes an analogy of Samuel and the sanctuary in Shiloh and Jesus and the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem bound direction adds to Luke's narrative in 2:22-24. Khoene proposes this may be a foreshadowing of the cross. This can also be made more vividly clear added to the understanding of the offering of the first born, thirty-two days following the shedding of His blood in the cutting of the Covenant.

The sign for the covenant God made with Abraham is circumcision (Gen 17:10). This is serious; it involves blood. "Blood could indicate both kinship (i.e., 'we are one blood'; cf. Exod 24:6-8; Luke 22:20) and oath curse (i.e., 'may my blood be shed if I violate the covenant'; cf. Jer 34:18-20; Heb 9:15-22; 10:26-29)... sacrifices were commonly offered to establish or renew covenants... giving rise to the Hebrew idiom 'to cut a covenant' (karat berit)" (Oxford Reference). The Gentile Luke was called to write of the importance of fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant in his gospel, that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). There seems to be a clear allusion of Christ being "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32) with this passage from Genesis, not only in the promise, but in the act of circumcision as part of the covenant itself which is about to be fulfilled. All peoples are not brought to this light by Christ's circumcision, but through His death on the cross, which this bloodletting in Jerusalem looks forward to. In Don Richardson's book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, the author sees a clear significance that Abram befriends Melchizedek, king of Salem (believed to be current Jerusalem) before entering into

his covenant with God. Before the King of Sodom, Abram aligns himself with the God of Melchizedek, a Gentile. Richardson says “The fact that the writer of Genesis provides not the slightest explanation of how Melchizedek learned about El-Elyon seems to indicate that the writer did not think it at all unusual that a person like Melchizedek should be found with such knowledge among the Canaanites!” He suggests this is a prefigurement of an extension to the covenant with the Gentiles, a light to the Gentiles. These last words would come out of the mouth of another mysterious figure in Luke’s gospel.

Simeon and Anna are two prophets referred to by the evangelist in the presentation pericope. Their presence is significant. They are instruments of the Holy Spirit, which shows the will of God unravelling. The first thing to be seen as unusual by their presence, at least their presence as prophets, is that prophets were not common in the time of the Second Temple. David Miller states that many scholars assert that Jews believe prophecy, as understood from a Second Temple perspective, was all in the past.

According to common presentations of this model, most Jews also hoped for a future renewal of prophecy and the coming of one or more eschatological prophets who were expected to serve as agents in connection with God’s future restoration of Israel. They therefore reserved the title "prophet" for the biblical prophets and for eschatological prophets. Any prophets who did appear on the scene would be identified by the people either as impostors or as eschatological prophets, and, in the latter case, as a sign that the end was near. (Miller)

There is a growing acknowledgment, however, of the diversity among Second Temple Jews, and that Jews of this period may have believed in the continued existence of phenomena associated with prophecy. Miller claims the prophetess Anna was not just mentioned because she could tell the future as it related to the “redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38), but because she was a devout woman “worshipping night and day with fasting and prayers” (Luke 2:37). This showed the anticipation of God’s redemption by pious Israelites. Miller notes that Anna is introduced similarly to other biblical prophetesses: she praised God (Exod 15:20-21; Judg 5) like Mariam and Deborah, and foresaw the future (Judg 4:6-7; 2 Kgs 22:16-20) like Deborah and Huldah. “Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him” (Luke 2:25). The word for prophet is not used for him, but his use of terminology is associated with prophets elsewhere. The presence of the Holy Spirit, his predictive statements and his pairing with the prophetess Anna, lead the reader to conclude he is a prophet. He received a revelation by the Spirit that before death he would see the Messiah (Lk 2:26). Through His direction he encountered the Holy Family (Lk 2:27).

According to Miller, it is not just the Spirit’s presence that renders Simeon a prophet, but that his association with the Holy Spirit was typical of his entire life. Simeon’s juxtaposition with Anna corresponds to a literary strategy used frequently throughout Luke-Acts, linking male and female characters together. In this case, they are both prophets. Conner, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, speaks of the underlying theme of Joy throughout Luke’s gospel. “The presence of Jesus is cause for thanksgiving and praise. From his birth, through his ministry, to his last meal and magnificent resurrection, Jesus prompts joy in his followers.

There is joy surrounding Jesus, because, in Jesus, the promise of salvation dwells” (Conver 144). This was particularly prevalent at the presentation. “In fact, in the prophetic attitude of the two elderly people, the entire Old Covenant expresses the joy of the meeting with the Redeemer” (John Paul II). Conver points out though, that Simeon’s joy contrasts to his later prophecy, one that culminates in “(and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35).

The prophecies of Simeon come with an ominous cloud. There is something sorrowful there, filled with a sense of the triumphant while remaining grave and solemn. “[T]he shadow of the Cross already looms in the background, because the darkness will reject that Light. Indeed, turning to Mary, Simeon prophesies: ‘This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed’ (*Lk* 2:34-35)” (John Paul II). As previously mentioned, humility is of the utmost importance here, to be expressed by God’s servants. “Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (*Lk* 18:17). Many will fall in Israel, including Herod; and many others who will have sought to destroy Christ, will fall along with the destruction of the Temple. The perfect encapsulation of a humble servant of God is Mary; “blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (*Lk* 11:28). Here it is seen how such a blessed occasion can be marked with a sting, for this child’s greatest act, will be in his agonizing death for mankind. At the time of Our Lady’s fiat she was willing to accept whatever God had in store for her; it was certainly at least made more clear by the words of Simeon. “But she knew beforehand all these agonies; she knew and saw them. When she

professed herself the handmaid of the Lord for the mother's office, and when, at the foot of the altar, she offered up her whole self with her Child Jesus-then and thereafter she took her part in the laborious expiation made by her Son for the sins of the world” (Leo XIII: ISE 3). There is a morality in full submission to God’s will that is being taught by this, and it is worth imitating, “to know him and the power of his resurrection and [the] sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death” (Phl 3:10). By this one is made strong; by this Christ’s will is accomplished. The events of the circumcision, Christ’s first spilling of blood, and the presentation in which Christ’s mother is told of her intimate involvement in her Son’s passion, brings a completeness to Luke’s gospel; “there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother, who, in a miracle of charity, so that she might receive us as her sons, offered generously to Divine Justice her own Son, and died in her heart with Him, stabbed with the sword of sorrow” (ISE 3). Yes, to contemplate these things will enable the Church to humbly accept God’s graces and empower her to be the light to the world.

One current application of how this passage from Luke can be fruitful, though it may not be considered modern, is by meditating on and praying over it in the recitation of the Rosary. This is a very powerful prayer that the Church encourages the faithful to pray regularly to better ourselves as Christians and to bring about the kingdom of God. John Paul II warned against objections to this practice in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*:

The timeliness of this proposal is evident from a number of considerations. First, the urgent need to counter a certain crisis of the Rosary, which in the present historical

and theological context can risk being wrongly devalued, and therefore no longer taught to the younger generation. There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, it sustains it, since it serves as an excellent introduction and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives. (4)

The presentation of the temple is the fourth joyful mystery of the Rosary; we experience joy that our eyes have seen God's salvation. It foreshadows the fifth sorrowful mystery, in which Our Lady participated in her Son's passion standing before the cross. "The final two [joyful] mysteries, while preserving this climate of joy, already point to the drama yet to come. The Presentation in the Temple not only expresses the joy of the Child's consecration and the ecstasy of the aged Simeon; it also records the prophecy that Christ will be a "sign of contradiction" for Israel and that a sword will pierce his mother's heart (cf *Lk* 2:34-35)" (RVM 20).

Leo XIII strongly suggested meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary as an effective weapon against things plaguing the Church not long ago. He wrote twelve encyclicals and five apostolic letters on the subject. "In these encyclicals, there is frequent reference to the perilous situation in which the Church found itself: anticlerical governments and forces opposed to religion threatened its existence" (Thompson S.M.). The Church is under as much attack today, and not just from external sources, but within. It is the contrite supplication to

Our Lady involving the contemplation of the life of her Son, such as in His presentation, that so pleases God to grant us His help. It is help for the Church He created. He does not just grant her complete protection; He wants us to pray for her. “For as the disastrous condition of the Church and of Society proved to Us the extreme necessity for signal aid from God, it was manifest to Us that aid should be sought through the intercession of His Mother, and by the express means of the Rosary, which Christians have ever found to be of marvellous avail” (ISE 1). The Pope goes on to emphasize that Providence ordains the Rosary have “new power” to give its devotees confidence and “new influence” to move the heart of the mother of Christ to grant us comfort and succour.

The Via Matris, or the Seven Dolours of Mary, is another way to recognize the Man and Lady of Sorrows associated in liturgy and popular piety.

This pious exercise already existed in embryonic form since the sixteenth century, while its present form dates from the nineteenth century. Its fundamental intuition is a reflection on the life of Our Lady from the prophecy of Simeon (cf. Lk 2, 34-35), to the death and burial of her Son, in terms of a journey in faith and sorrow: this journey is articulated in seven "stations" corresponding to the "seven dolours" of the Mother of Our Saviour” (Directory on Popular Piety and The Liturgy).

In Our Lady’s complete giving of herself to participation in her Son’s life, a broad range of emotions are revealed. For not only is this a joyful mystery, but the first dolour of her heart. As St. John Paul notes, she is reminded of “the drama yet to come” (RVM 20).

The presentation in the Temple is prayerfully reflected on nightly in the recitation of the *Nunc Dimittis* within the Divine Office. This is offered to God as a way of thanks before dismissing oneself to sleep. “Compline is to be drawn up so that it will be a suitable prayer for the end of the day” (SC 89). It is as relevant today as ever, and the lay faithful should be encouraged to pray it as a means of keeping the day holy, keeping the faith alive and continuing the tradition of the Church. “That the day may be truly sanctified, and that the hours themselves may be recited with spiritual advantage, it is best that each of them be prayed at a time which most closely corresponds with its true canonical time” (SC 94).

Every night faithful Christians, Catholics and Orthodox, recite the words of Simeon. This is mandatory for religious, but is often recited by lay faithful as well. “In this way the Church, the people of the New Covenant, takes as it were the last word of the Old Covenant and proclaims the fulfilment of the divine promise, announcing that the “light for revelation to the Gentiles” has spread over all the earth and is present everywhere in Christ’s redemptive work” (John Paul II). Christ’s words on the cross of Psalm 31 are coupled with those of Simeon as a suitable prayer before sleep: *In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum* — “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (LK 23:46).

All of these practices of the Church can be an outward sign of one’s faith. They generally are practiced in private or with groups of other Catholics, but living authentic Catholic lifestyles is attractive to those outside the Church. Saint John Paul II, who was ever a proponent of genuine ecumenism, to participate in shedding the light of Christ to the

nations, needed to clarify that the practice of the Rosary does not prevent spreading the truth. If Catholics become more like others there is no invitation for others to change.

Perhaps too, there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that “when the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified”. If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism! (RVM)

The Church, even at the last Council, continued to teach her children to be an outward sign to bring others to Christ. “The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth. Wherefore she makes the words of the Apostle her own: ‘Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel’, and continues unceasingly to send heralds of the Gospel until such time as the infant churches are fully established and can themselves continue the work of evangelizing” (LG 17). The Church commemorates the Purification of Mary and the Presentation in the Temple forty days from Christmas (inclusive), as “On the eighth day, the flesh of the boy’s foreskin shall be circumcised, and then she shall spend thirty-three days more in a state of blood purity; she shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary till the days of her purification are fulfilled” (Lev 12:3-4). This feast on February 2nd is Candlemas. “Today, with our lighted candles, we too go to meet him who is “the Light of the world” and we welcome him in his Church with the full enthusiasm of our baptismal faith. Everyone who

sincerely professes this faith is promised the final, definitive “meeting” with the Lord in his kingdom” (John Paul II). This is a great celebration within the Epiphany season of the Church where the faithful in attendance at mass light their candles from one initial flame amidst a darkened church. “They are a strong reminder to bear witness in the world to Christ, the light that never fades: ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven’ (*Mt 5:16*)” (John Paul II).

Indeed these words of Luke’s gospel have the intended effect of the Holy Spirit to not only draw creation closer to Christ, but in accepting Him, to draw others closer by both a natural, or supernatural, radiance and by action. They are also a further encouragement to realize the Messiah has come. The earth has received her King. After Christ’s ascension He commissioned His followers to preach and left an Advocate. It seems the world finds itself again in dark times, but Christ expects His message delivered nonetheless. On an individual basis, people may themselves lack consolation, realizing it is difficult to express, or live out, their own beliefs. Countless saints have gone through a “dark night,” and yet this has largely contributed to what made them saints. There is an incredible amount of integrity to someone who feels nothing of what they profess to believe, and yet live it out to the fullest. Thomas a’Kempis and Saint John of the Cross have written on the subject. Saint Teresa of Calcutta suffered from terrible spiritual aridity that she did not let interfere with her tireless charity toward the Lord through service of others and prayer besides. This is a wonderful example of being a light amidst darkness. One particular saint, while being proclaimed a doctor of the Church, was recalled by John Paul II to have been proclaimed “the greatest saint of modern times” by Saint Pius X (DAS 10). She must have been proclaimed this because she is

particularly effective as an example leading to Christ. St. Therese of Lisieux is an example of a saint in modern times that one in darkness can follow to the light: “I give thanks to my Jesus for making me walk in darkness, and in this darkness I enjoy profound peace. I only desire that my darkness may obtain light for sinners” (Letter dated September 1890). During trying times, the best thing an afflicted soul can do is to trust. To do so will be of great importance as an example to others. When there is a storm, what good would it do to jump ship? Trust in Our sleeping Lord (Luke 8:23). This is the best way to be a light to the nations, or all those outside of the Church, not to scatter when the shepherds are struck, but to remain ever faithful to the one true Shepherd.

Luke’s elaboration on the infancy narrative with the telling of the circumcision, purification and presentation present to us an excellent use of narrative form which viewed from a textual critique can be seen as tying the New Testament to the Old, one fulfilling the promises of the other. Luke’s word choice shows his clear understanding of the Septuagint and what he recounts in the presentation pericope to be significant to the Jewish members of his readers and of a new importance to the Gentiles he evangelized to. Christ has come as a light to all the world, a promise made to His people of old, but not in a way that many expected, as He was a “sign of contradiction.” There are various ways to dwell on the mysteries of this event, and to do so is fruitful. It remains as important to the world today as when first written by Luke.

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