

Intro:

2 things this morning

1 - Look at the Jewish ceremonies / traditions that take place in these few verses

2 - Think about what this day must have meant for Simeon & Anna

vs.21

After 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.

vs 21 - 24 several ceremonies are mentioned

vs 21 Circumcision Probably the best known of all of those mentioned today

8 days after the birth of a male baby he was circumcised either by the head of the family or a physician

This act was part of the covenant given to Abraham (Gen 17)

Initially, when the covenant was made every male had to be circumcised as a sign of promise to keep their covenant with God and thereafter every male baby when they reached 8 days old

Slaves were included in this - those bought and those born within the household

vs 13 of Gen 17 Yahweh says So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.

A blessing would be said 'Blessed be the Lord our God who has sanctified us by his precepts and has given us circumcision'

It was a marking of the covenant given by Yahweh to the Jews as a sign that the whole nation was dedicated to him.

vs 22 & 24 Purification

The mother would stay at home after the baby was born 7 days for boy 14 for girl!

She then had to wait a further 33 days for a boy or 66 for a girl - the time set aside for her blood purification.

In this time she was not allowed to go to the temple or touch any holy thing

Once the days of purification were over she would go to the temple to make offerings

This was usually a lamb plus a pigeon or dove unless the family could not afford a lamb in which case it would be a pair of pigeons or a pair of doves

The priest would meet the woman at the entrance to the tent and then the animals were offered by him as a sacrifice in order to restore the woman's fellowship with God

The lamb or a bird as a sin offering and a bird as a burnt offering (Leviticus 12)

Purification was needed, not due to an act of defilement through childbirth but because the loss of blood meant that she was ritually unclean

But it was also seen as a means of protecting a woman from sexual relations in times of weakness

vs 22-23 Presented to the Lord

In addition to the purification of Mary, because Jesus was the firstborn son he also had to be presented to the Lord and redeemed

They took him to Jerusalem and offered him to God and paid 'redemption money' of 5 shekels (Numbers 18:15&16)

This custom dated back to the original passover when the spirit of death passed over the city and the Jewish babies were saved because of the blood of a lamb that had been marked on the doorposts. (Exodus 12:23 For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.)

Because the babies had been saved by God, this ceremony acknowledged that the firstborn sons belonged to God, only He has the power to give life, and so a redemption price was paid as they were presented to God in the temple

It is amazing that as a baby he was presented in the temple and redeemed - Jesus the Son of God, born in fact to be our Redeemer - Redeemer of the world!

So there is a lot going on in just these 4 verses. Luke tells the basic facts without going in to much detail but we know from it that Jesus was treated, by his parents, as any good Jewish family would have treated their children, following the customs of the day -Circumcision of Jesus, Purification of Mary, and Jesus' presentation to God in the temple of Jerusalem.

Jesus was God's son but his family took him to the temple in Jerusalem and carried out these ceremonies according to God's law. Jesus was not born above the law. Instead he fulfilled it perfectly. As our reading from Hebrews said - 'He had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:17) The Message version says '*He* had to enter into every detail of human *life*'

What happens next is quite remarkable.

Mary & Joseph had done what was expected of them as faithful Jewish parents.

They had upheld what was customary under the law.

But then they had 2 incredible encounters, with 2 beautiful people

Simeon - a righteous and devout man upon whom the Holy Spirit rested who was looking forward to the consolation of Israel - that is He was awaiting the Messiah. He knew, because of a revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah

Anna - a prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, a lady of great age who never left the temple but spent her time in prayer and fasting, day and night

Simeon - Once again he was guided by the Spirit to go to the temple on that particular day at that time. And it seems that as soon as Jesus' parents presented him as was customary, Simeon KNEW that this was the Messiah, that Jesus was the consolation of Israel!

Look what Simeon does - he takes Jesus in his arms and praises God

And then he says about this baby boy who is just 40 days old

my eyes have seen your (God's) salvation

a light for the gentiles and glory for God's people Israel

What must have gone through the minds of Mary & Joseph???

They knew that Jesus was a special baby, they knew from before conception that he would be no ordinary child. They knew... from the angels visits to them, from Elizabeths reaction to Mary when they met when they were both pregnant, from the visit from the Shepherds in Bethlehem. They knew!

But then this man, who they had probably never met, took their 6 week old baby in his arms, recognising that he was to be the Messiah, a light for revelation and glory and he praised God.

And then Simeon blessed them, but with thought provoking, tough words. Warning Mary that her baby boy was going to bring division, opposition, revelation of inner motives and through all this there would be pain for her.

And then there is Anna - a prophetess - someone unusually close to God, not necessarily predicting the future but who spoke for God, proclaiming His truth

She had known great sadness having been married for 7 years and then widowed. But she was now 84 years old and dedicated to a life of worship

At the time that Simeon was praising God and blessing Mary & Joseph, Anna also recognised the baby and told all who were looking for redemption all about this tiny child

What a day! One to be noted in the diary or journal !

This is such a beautiful passage

Mary & Joseph...

- doing what was customary, obeying the Jewish laws and customs, with their tiny, 40 day old, humanly unplanned baby

- being reminded by this wise, old, spirit filled man of just who this tiny baby was and what his destiny was to be

Simeon...

- a devout and righteous man who had been given an amazing promise from God - that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. And as he listens to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he goes in to the temple and recognises the little baby as that promised Messiah and he praises God saying 'now you are dismissing your servant in peace'

Anna...

- a prophetess, who has become unusually close to God through her life of prayer and fasting, her total dedication to God. And she too realises just who this baby is.

It fascinates me that these people, who, along with the Shepherds, were the first to see Jesus, as a tiny, human baby recognised him as the Messiah, their Saviour, Redeemer, Christ the Lord  
Years later when Jesus is a grown man, performing incredible miracles and teaching with authority, people do not recognise him for who he is

But within 40 days of being born, the Shepherds and these 2 complete strangers see and know and understand.

The Shepherds - visited by angels; they then visited the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger; and then they spread the word concerning all that had been told to them about this child

Simeon - a righteous and devout man, anointed by the Holy Spirit, who realised the fulfilment of a promise made to him had come about, praised God, and blessed Mary & Joseph

Anna, a widow, lived a life of devotion in the temple and was privileged to see and understand just how special this baby was. And she told all who were there and looking just who he was.

May we be encouraged; to listen for the voice of God in our lives and act upon it just as Simeon did; may we commit ourselves to prayer and worship as Anna did so that we too may understand more and more the true identity of Jesus Christ and tell all who are searching just who He is. Amen