

According to the Word

The Promised Child and the Written Command (Luke 2:21–24)

Series: Luke: An Orderly Account - Dr. Randy White

I. They Honor the Appointed Time (v. 21)

From the Shepherds' Praise to the Household's Obedience

- The shepherds praised God because everything was “as it was told unto them” (Luke 2:20). Mary and Joseph now act according to His commands.
- Heaven’s extraordinary announcement is followed by the household’s ordinary obedience. The promised child’s greatness does not make God’s instructions unimportant.
- Luke marks “eight days,” then the completion of purification. These appointed times concern distinct observances, not one ceremony on one day.

The Covenant Sign Is Received

- “Eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child.” God’s covenant with Abraham prescribed the eighth day, and the law repeated that requirement (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3).
- The child announced as “Christ the Lord” receives the sign belonging to Israel’s males. Luke places the Messiah within the covenant people whose promises He has come to fulfill.

His Greatness Does Not Remove His Lowly Place

- The One promised David’s throne begins life in a household that observes God’s commands. Royal identity and humble submission belong together in Luke’s account (Luke 1:32-33).
- Paul’s later description, “made of a woman, made under the law,” helps explain this setting (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus enters the circumstances of those He came to redeem.
- These are Israel’s covenant obligations. We learn from their submission without making these observances ordinances for the Body of Christ.

II. They Give the Appointed Name (v. 21)

The Name Was Given Before the Child Was Conceived

- “His name was called Jesus.” The angel had named Him “before he was conceived in the womb.” His parents receive God’s appointed name.
- Gabriel had told Mary, “thou shalt ... bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS” (Luke 1:31). The naming fulfills that instruction.
- The shepherds’ report confirmed the child’s identity. His name had already been appointed before they arrived.

Their Obedience Acknowledges God’s Prior Purpose

- The name belongs to God’s announcement of the Son and His promised reign. Mary and Joseph name the child within a purpose that precedes their experience of His birth.
- Matthew’s account supplies the explicit explanation: “he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name directs attention to the Saviour and His work.
- Their part is to honor what God has said. Naming Him does not create His identity or confer His mission; it acknowledges the identity and purpose God has revealed.

III. They Acknowledge the Written Claim (vv. 22-23)

They Come When the Days Are Accomplished

- “The days of her purification” concerns Mary’s observance after childbirth. Leviticus 12:2-4 assigns seven days followed by thirty-three further days after the birth of a son.
- This later journey brings them to Jerusalem “according to the law of Moses.” Luke gives God’s instruction as the explanation for their conduct.
- Ceremonial purification does not accuse Mary of an immoral conception or Jesus of wrongdoing. The law regulates clean and unclean conditions as well as moral conduct.
- **Chronology note:** Luke 2:39 naturally suggests a return to Nazareth after these observances. Egypt before the presentation merits consideration, but Matthew 2:19-23 raises the question of avoiding Judea. A later Egyptian journey requires a summarized return in Luke; neither placement is explicitly dated.

They Present the Firstborn to the Lord

- They bring Jesus “to present him to the Lord.” Luke grounds that action in what is written: the firstborn male “shall be called holy to the Lord.”
- Exodus 13:2, 12-15 connects the Lord’s claim upon Israel’s firstborn with deliverance from Egypt. The presentation belongs within that remembered redemption.
- “Holy to the Lord” means set apart as belonging to Him. Jesus’ designation as Mary’s “firstborn son” now carries a stated legal significance (Luke 2:7, 23).

Their Actions Rest on What Is Written

- “As it is written” places their conduct under an authority beyond family preference. The angel’s instruction concerning the name and the written law both receive their obedience.
- Mary’s purification and Jesus’ presentation are related purposes of the visit, but they are distinct. The mother brings the purification offering; the firstborn is acknowledged as the Lord’s.

IV. They Bring the Permitted Offering (v. 24)

God’s Law Makes Provision for Limited Means

- Their sacrifice is “according to that which is said in the law of the Lord.” Once again, Luke explains the household’s action by reference to God’s word.
- Leviticus 12:6 prescribes a lamb and a bird. Verse 8 permits two birds when the mother’s means do not reach to a lamb; Luke records that permitted provision.
- The offering indicates limited means at this time. The promised King enters a humble household, yet its offering is fully within what God has authorized.

Their Offering Has Its Stated Purpose

- These sacrifices belong to Mary’s purification. They are not a payment to make Jesus holy or the five-shekel redemption money prescribed for a firstborn son.
- The household does not need to invent an impressive gift to match the child’s greatness. God has already stated what may be brought in these circumstances.
- From the eighth day to the appointed name, from the firstborn claim to the offering, the same pattern holds: God’s word governs their response to God’s gift.
- Last week’s witnesses found everything “as it was told unto them.” This household acts “as it is written.” The faithful word that calls forth praise also deserves careful obedience.