

Our gospel text today sets forth the second event. That is among the very few infancy and childhood stories we have recorded for us in scripture about Jesus. Luke puts the first one right before this passage in the line that we call verse 21. You know, of course, that the Scriptures weren't original, originally labeled with verses. That's a later addition. And that first event is Jesus circumcision, which occurred according to Jewish law, eight days after his birth. And that's when he was given the name that the angel had told his father and mother, Yeshua, the Lord's Savior. The term we use, Jesus comes from the Greek. So that's just another little fact. Beside this. The circumcision would have been done by custom in the home, usually by the father. And friends and family and neighbors would all be celebrating. Then, according to the law, all firstborns, whether human children or animals, were consecrated to the Lord. And every firstborn male among the children was to be redeemed with an offering. In addition, Mary would have had some ritual ceremonial duties that she had to perform after sharing a male child. She would have been unclean for seven days and thus available on the eighth day to be part of the circumcision that was very kind. And then have a 33 day time of purification where she could touch no holy thing and could not go into the temple. And at the end of this 33 day period, she was to bring to the priest a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering and a turtle dove or a pigeon for a sin offering. Now, if she couldn't afford a lamb, she was supposed to bring two pigeons or two turtle doves. And therefore from the offering she did bring, according to scripture, we know that Mary and Joseph were not wealthy, but she brought two doves.

And so we find them in our scripture today, headed to the temple in Jerusalem to perform their duty. These as faithful people of God. Now I imagine the situation in their home was much like what goes on in a Christian home today. As we prepare to bring a baby for baptism. Here in the church, there's the usual hustle and bustle. I can imagine Mary saying, please, Joseph, one more time, let's go over this you will get everything we need for both the baby and the sacrifice. So they get to the temple and then they're greeted by a pious man named Simeon, who Scripture declares has been guided by the Holy Spirit to arrive at the temple at the very same time that Mary, Joseph and Jesus arrived there. Now, we don't know much about Simeon, but I would hazard a guess that he was known around the temple simply because I would imagine people would know about someone about whom they said, the Spirit of God rests upon this man. And otherwise I doubt that Mary would have let this man pick up her newborn baby and hold him in his arms. Now, we usually depict Simeon as old, but frankly, there is nothing specific in the text that tells us that Simeon is old. And Luke is certainly very quick to point out that Hannah, she's old. So Simeon had been promised that he would see, he would not die before seeing the salvation of God and God's consolation for Israel. He frankly could still have many years left, several years left, we don't know. Joseph and Mary were likely expecting a little blessing for Jesus when Simeon took him in his arms. And instead, before issuing a blessing, Simeon proclaims Jesus as God's salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, Jesus, Messiah, Savior for both Jew and Gentile alike. And Mary and Joseph, Scripture declares, were amazed at what was being said about their son. Why? Why were they so amazed? This was certainly not the first remark, first incredible remark they had heard about their son. An angel had appeared in a dream to Joseph telling him that Mary's child was to be a son to be named Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, who would save his people from their sins. Then the angel Gabriel appeared in person to Mary, telling her also that she was conceived by the Holy Spirit, bear a son to be named Jesus, who would be great and called the Son of the Most High, be given the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob and have an everlasting kingdom. Now, frankly, that's amazing. And even Mary's cousin Elizabeth had called her the mother of my Lord. Then, at Jesus birth, a group of excited shepherds show up telling Mary and Joseph that while they were out working the night shift, first one angel, then a group of angels appeared to them, telling them they could find the Savior, the Messiah, swaddled in a manger of all places over in Bethlehem. And lo and behold, they come and they see a hey, that's true. Now that was amazing also. So just what was different about Simeon's comment that elicited A response of amazement from Mary and Joseph. Well, we can only conjecture, let's face it, perhaps it was the point that Jesus was to

be a revelation for the Gentiles as well. I wonder if Mary and Joseph remembered that when the Magi dropped in for a visit.

However, I'd like to offer another possibility and you're probably saying of course she would, because that's how she does it. Perhaps they were amazed because they had been so absorbed, so caught up in the wonder and joy and work of caring for their newborn, that all the angels' comments had faded to the recesses of their sleep-deprived mind. And Jesus was simply and wonderfully their little boy, their newborn, their wonderful child. Our theology states that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. For Mary and Joseph, I believe this encounter with Simeon was a moment in which they had a glimpse of understanding about the reality of who their son was, about both parts of him, both natures of who he was. And frankly, this did amaze them. It's interesting that Luke makes no comment at all about their reaction to the rest of Simeon's pronouncement after he blesses the baby. It certainly is a foreboding one. This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too. What a mind-numbing afterward to a baby blessing. My guess is that the only part they could wrap their heads around was the idea of a sword piercing Mary's soul too. Perhaps they thought it referred to the trials and tribulations that any parent had. When you're raising a child, you know, it's not always easy and they disappoint us at times. But perhaps they thought that's what it was. Mary could never have imagined that the sword piercing her soul would be the one that pierced the side of her son as he hung on a Roman cross.

You know, they apparently didn't have too long to think about what Simeon was saying because next thing we know, Anna appears on the scene. Anna, the pious elderly widow. And she not only praises God, but she starts telling everybody around who would listen about Jesus, who would be the redeemer. By now I imagine Mary and Joseph are a bit uncomfortable, maybe even a little bit embarrassed, because there had to have been other parents there with their newborns performing their ritual duties. Yet Simeon singles out their son and raised his voice in praise to God. And Anna started talking to all around about that precious little one. I imagine Mary and Joseph finished their duties as quickly as possible and then went home to ponder just what had gone on at that time in the temple. If we only read Luke's Gospel, it seems that life for Mary, Joseph and Jesus from then on was rather straightforward and simple. Yet Matthew tells us a different story. He includes the visit of the Magi, the account of Herod's jealousy that leads to the tragic murder of all the boys under age 2 in the Bethlehem area. From Matthew we learn of an angelic night visit to Joseph in a dream and the way that the Holy Family very quickly into Egypt where I imagine the Magi's gifts were put to good use to support them in their exile there. And then we have another angelic visit in a dream to Joseph telling them Herod has died, it's safe to get up now, go back. And they go back to Galilee and settle in Nazareth. The beginning of Jesus' life certainly had its ups and downs and difficulties like ours often do. That's just part of being human. But you know, it's interesting to note that from then on there are no more accounts of angelic visits to Miriam and Joseph. Apparently our loving Heavenly Father didn't feel the need to be a helicopter heavenly parent. Apparently he said, I've entrusted Jesus to a man and woman who demonstrated their faithfulness and obedience. And perhaps just the still small voice of encouragement and guidance was all that was needed for the rest of Jesus' young life.

Is there any message for us today in the story of the Holy family? Well, you know, I believe there is in all our day-to-day realities of home and job and school. It's also easy for us to lose sight of, as did Mary and Joseph, who Jesus is and who we are in him. To forget all the times the miraculous has touched our lives as individuals and as the body of Christ together. To forget that he promised to endow us with his very spirit, to comfort us and never ever deserv. To show us life abundant and to equip us for ministry as his body now present in the world today. As Jesus was the light for the world, so are we called to be light in the darkness that is part of our world. Today we are just at the beginning of 2025, but it has been a troublesome

and worrisome year so far for our nation and our world. It is very easy to lose hope. Yet by the Spirit Jesus is ready, willing and able to encourage us and transform us right now, you and me, so that we may fulfill our call to be the light our world so desperately needs. He is Ready, willing and able to use us, to use you and me. To reach out to all who suffer and hurt, who are lonely and afraid, who need care, compassion and protection, whether for physical or spiritual needs. To reach out to those who need to hear the good news of the love and mercy of God, those who are already within and those who are still outside of the community of faith. He is ready, willing and able to fill us with deep and abiding joy, to give us wisdom and understanding as we seek his face in the scriptures and sacrament and prayer, so that all of us, young and old alike, may grow in grace and in deep fellowship with our God and with each other. And above all, he is ready, willing and more than able to equip us and strengthen us and empower us to stand strong and speak forth for justice, to love to the depths of our being and to stand strong for and seek for merciful kindness and. And to walk humbly with our God, even and especially when such a position is at odds with the powers to be at in our own nation and in the world at large. Aren't you amazed? Thank you.