Dedication of Firstborn

Teaching Tips

December 20, 2015

Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

A. Firstborn (Exodus 13:13) bekor (Heb.)—The human or animal born first.

B. Law (Luke 2:22) nomos (Gk.)—The divine laws that comprise the Mosaic Law in the first five books of the Old Testament, or Pentateuch.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Excitement of Celebration. Many people forget the excitement behind holidays and special occasions, and treat them as routine and ordinary. Are there still times for great excitement and celebration? Luke captures the overflowing joy the priest, Simeon, experienced as he dedicated Jesus according to the Law of Moses.

A. Pray for understanding and wisdom.

B. Become familiar with the second temple in Jerusalem and women’s purification rituals after childbirth in The People, Places, and Times and Background sections.

C. Complete Lesson 3 in the companion Precepts for Living® Personal Study Guide.

D. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and confidence in leading the lesson.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open the class with prayer, including personalizing the Lesson Aim as appropriate.

B. Read the Unifying Principle and Keep in Mind verse to the class.

C. Invite the class to share their favorite holidays and what they do to celebrate them.

D. Ask for a volunteer to read the In Focus story aloud and discuss it as a class.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Ask for volunteers to read the Focal Verses.

B. Use The People, Places, and Times; Background; In Depth; and Search the Scriptures sections to clarify the Focal Verses.

E—Explore the Meaning
A. Answer the question in the Discuss the Meaning section.

B. Ask for a volunteer to read the Lesson in Our Society section.

**N—Next Steps for Application**

A. Discuss the Make It Happen section and how to apply it during the week.

B. Pray for the class, thanking God for His salvation.

**Worship Guide**

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: Dedication of Firstborn

Song: “OCome, All Ye Faithful”

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 30:5–12

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**Bible Background • EXODUS 13:11–16; LUKE 2:21–39**

**Printed Text • EXODUS 13:13b–15; LUKE 2:22–32 | Devotional Reading • 2 CHRONICLES 30:5–12**

**Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE the story of Simeon at the presentation of Jesus at the temple; FEEL the immenseness of joy that Simeon felt; and COMMIT to make Jesus the center of attention during the secular busyness of the season.

**In Focus**

Melissa and Sharice had been inseparable friends all their lives. They dreamed of going to the same college together after high school. Once they received their acceptance letters, however, their hopes of attending the same college were dashed. Sharice was accepted to a historically Black college down South while Melissa was accepted to a school closer to home. The first semester was the hardest. Melissa would go to their familiar hangouts, but it just wasn’t the same. Sharice went away and connected with many friends in college, but none of her new friendships were the same as with Melissa. They talked on the phone just before Christmas. Sharice didn’t know if she was going to be able to come home that Christmas since her family was not in a position to pay for a plane ticket. As they talked on the phone, Sharice avoided the issue and Melissa assumed Sharice didn’t want to come home.

As Melissa sat down on the couch for Christmas Eve, she heard a knock on the door. She wondered who it could be since all of her family was gathered in the den. She opened the door and there on the front porch was Sharice with her arms wide open. They both screamed with excitement and hugged. Melissa didn’t know her father had bought Sharice a ticket home to surprise her.

*Our joy is increased when we receive something we have been longing for. What experiences have you had in receiving something which you had been longing for?*

**Keep in Mind**

“And when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to
Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22).

Focal Verses

KJV

Exodus 13:13b All the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

14 And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? That thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage:

15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

Luke 2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

23 (As it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

NLT

Exodus 13:13b However, you must buy back every firstborn son.

14 And in the future, your children will ask you, ‘What does all this mean?’ Then you will tell them, ‘With the power of his mighty hand, the LORD brought us out of Egypt, the place of our slavery.

15 Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, so the LORD killed all the firstborn males throughout the land of Egypt, both people and animals. That is why I now sacrifice all the firstborn males to the LORD—except that the firstborn sons are always bought back.”

Luke 2:22 Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.
The law of the Lord says, “If a woman’s first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD.”

So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him

and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required,

Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

I have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared for all people.

He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

The People, Places, and Times

Simeon. Simeon (Gk. Sumeon, soo-me-OWN) was an elderly Jewish man residing in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ birth, who faithfully observed the Jewish teachings, or Torah. He lived in anticipation of the fulfillment of the arrival of the expectant Messiah, the “anointed one,” who would bring comfort and relief to the Jews living under the oppression of the Roman Empire. Luke does not bestow the title “prophet” on Simeon as he does Anna (Luke 2:36); however, Simeon does deliver prophetic oracles under the power of the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus’ role in God’s plan of salvation.

The Temple. The temple held a significant place in Jewish social, religious, and economic life. It was a place of religious observance including the presentation of tithes and offerings, daily prayers, pilgrimages, and festivals. The temple referred to in Luke 2 was not the temple Solomon built; the Babylonians destroyed that temple when they seized Jerusalem in 586 BC. After King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylonia and allowed the exiles to return to Judah, the Jewish leader Zerubbabel led the campaign to restore the temple of Solomon in 538 BC. This temple is commonly referred to as the “second temple.” Herod the Great began an elaborate construction project on the temple in 20 BC that was completed in eighteen months. This was the temple in Jerusalem where Jesus was presented. Some scholars refer to this as the temple of Herod.

Background

In ancient Israel, as in many other ancient civilizations, the firstborn son held a privileged place in the family. The firstborn son usually had a legal right to his father’s inheritance. According to Exodus, the firstborn son was also dedicated to God. Exodus associates the consecration or setting apart of the firstborn male, both human and animal, with God’s saving act of delivering the Israelite firstborn males from death in Egypt (Exodus 13:14–15). Moses instructed the Israelites that every male firstling must be set apart for the Lord and redeemed for a price. For example, verse 13 stipulates that a donkey should be redeemed with a sheep. However, the redemption for a human firstborn is unspecified. By contrast, the book of Numbers specifies that the firstborn should be redeemed for five shekels of silver paid to the priest (Numbers 3:47–48, 18:15–16).

Moses commanded the people to teach their children the meaning of the firstborn’s consecration. When the children asked why they observed the Passover festival, their parents should tell them that the Lord delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt when the king of Egypt refused to release them to worship the Lord. Since
the Lord killed the firstborn humans and animals in Egypt, except the firstborn of the Israelites where there was blood on the doorposts, they observe this ritual to commemorate the Lord’s salvation.

At-A-Glance

3. The Leading of the Spirit (vv. 25–27)
4. The Light for All People (vv. 28–32)

In Depth

1. The Law of Dedication (Exodus 13:13b-15)

The Lord commands every firstborn male child in Israel to be redeemed. The foundation of this commandment is the requirement of every firstborn male whether human or beast to be sacrificed or dedicated to the Lord. The Lord had executed judgment on Pharaoh and enacted the Hebrews’ deliverance from slavery by killing the firstborn males of Egypt. The dedication of the firstborn was a reminder that He had spared the firstborn males of the Israelites and delivered them from the tyranny of Egypt. So now in order to be exempt from giving their sons over in service to God, they must offer a sacrifice in the place of their firstborn.

These verses set the context for the passage in Luke 2:22–26 where Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple to offer the required sacrifices for Him as a firstborn male. Firstborn sons were valuable in the ancient Near East. It speaks to our current time as we are to dedicate what we consider valuable to the Lord. This also looks forward to the second Exodus where Jesus a firstborn male is sacrificed for our deliverance from our bondage to sin.


According to Luke, Mary and Joseph, who were observant Jews, brought Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord as was instructed in the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22). Mary also was to give an offering for purification 33 days after giving birth so the priest could declare her clean. Mary’s offering consists of two pigeons or doves, which indicates Mary and Joseph are a poor couple.

Although offering a sacrifice was a requirement of the Law, bringing the child to the temple was not mandatory, and also not a known practice among first-century Jews. Mary and Joseph come to the temple to dedicate Jesus similar to how Hannah dedicated Samuel to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:21–28). Underneath it all, they know Jesus is more than just an ordinary child. They come to the temple to show Jesus is the Son of God being given back to His true Father.

3. The Leading of the Spirit (vv. 25–27)

Simeon, like Mary and Joseph, is presented as a man who faithfully observed the Law of Moses. We know this because he is called “righteous” (v. 25), which means to keep God’s commands or be just in His sight. Simeon is also called “devout,” which means having reverence for God. God rewarded Simeon for his many years of faithfulness and piety by allowing him to see the consolation of Israel.

The Holy Spirit, which was upon him, revealed that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah (Gk. Christos; v. 26). Luke explains that the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple at the same time Mary and Joseph were presenting Jesus to the priest.

4. The Light for All People (vv. 28–32)
Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon takes the infant in his arms. He immediately recognizes Jesus' significance and sings praise to the Lord. The song is a confirmation of the Holy Spirit's revelation that Simeon would see the Lord's Messiah. The song proclaims that the time of the salvation of the Lord is now.

Simeon sings a message of fulfillment and peace. The consolation Simeon was expecting was the salvation God had prepared in the presence of all peoples. He could sing of witnessing it with his own eyes: here in his arms was the expected Messiah in the form of a baby. As the prophet Isaiah before him (Isaiah 49:6), Simeon proclaims that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles, bringing them God's salvation and glory for the people of Israel (v. 32). Simeon's message is that God's salvation was for all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

**Search the Scriptures**


2. What did Simeon mean when he said that he had seen the salvation of God (v. 30)?

**Discuss the Meaning**

As Christians, we are sometimes quick to dismiss the Jewish observance of the Law of Moses. However, in Luke 2:22–32, Mary and Joseph’s faithful observance of the Law of Moses, and Simeon along with the Holy Spirit, worked together to bring the three to the temple at the same time. Can we look to both the teachings of the Law of Moses, especially those on how to treat the poor and marginalized, and to the Holy Spirit for revelation of God and His purpose for our lives?

**Lesson in Our Society**

December is a month when many Christians are busy with preparations for the celebration of Jesus' birth and the coming new year. It is also a time when many people spend beyond their means to provide gifts that frequently depreciate in value or interest for the recipient. Jesus was born of humble beginnings. His parents could only afford the substitutionary offering of two pigeons when they presented Him at the temple. Nevertheless, that did not prevent them from taking several days to faithfully observe the rituals of God. It is important that we take time from the busy holiday season to remember that the celebration of Jesus' birth is not about the material gifts we give, but about His significance in our lives and the world today.

**Make It Happen**

In the United States, Christians tend to focus on December 25, the day Jesus' birth is celebrated, and once the day has passed, we continue with our busy schedules. However, in many Christian communities, the Christmas season actually begins on Christmas Eve and continues another forty days until the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in February. This holiday season, commit to learning about the different ways Christians celebrate the season, such as the Mexican tradition of Las Posadas, and choose one that you find interesting. Or you could form your own new tradition, such as making a special meal at one of the feast days on the church calendar or volunteering to help someone in need. Whichever you choose, invite family and friends to join you in celebrating a new tradition that will help renew the joy of celebrating Christmas and your faith throughout the year.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do.

**Remember Your Thoughts**
Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text


The first set of verses captures just part of the Exodus narrative, in this case, one of Moses’ messages to the people at their first stopping place, Succoth, after escaping from the Egyptians (12:37). They had not yet entered the Promised Land, “flowing with milk and honey” (13:5)—it would be decades before that happened—but when they did, Moses’ instructions from God (13:1) detailed the way they would commemorate their deliverance from Egypt. By the time the Israelites would finally emerge from the wilderness, ready to overtake the Canaanites per God’s sovereign promise to their forefathers, a full forty years would have passed, and by then they would need a way to remember the events that at the time were fresh on their mind.

The second set of verses introduces the ultimate significance of the Old Testament practice when it comes to bear on the life of the infant Jesus.

13b All the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

Just prior to this verse, God commanded the Israelites to “set apart” the firstborn males of certain animals to Him. In this use, “set apart” uses the Hebrew ’abar (ah-VAR), which means to bring over or present as an offering. This is similar to but not the same as setting apart meaning to be or make holy, or to consecrate, from the Hebrew qadash (kah-DASH) (cf. Exodus 13:2). The same Hebrew word ’abar is used in 12:12 when God said that He would “pass through” Egypt on the pivotal night for both nations. In 12:13, God also said that He would “pass over” (Heb. pasakh, pah-SAKH) the Israelites’ doorposts that had lamb’s blood on them. Because both words are used in close proximity, the parallel meaning and wordplay seem to be highlighted and repeated for emphasis. God thus would pass through and bring death to Egyptian firstborns but pass over Israelite homes and spare their firstborn. Here the verb is used in a sacrificial context, as it often is in Mosaic Law, to indicate that the Israelites are to bring their offerings over to God.

While those animals were to be set apart for sacrifice and slaughtered in remembrance of the Passover, God required that the Israelite’s firstborn sons be redeemed. “Redeem” comes from the Hebrew padah (pah-DAH), which means “to ransom” or to buy back (cf. Deuteronomy 9:26).

14 And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: 15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

The passage from Exodus describes the seven-day feast of unleavened bread, which starts with the powerfully metaphorical Passover feast, with unleavened bread representing the haste with which they left Egypt, not being able to bake bread properly. A part of this annual festival, as instituted, included the involvement of children, as a way of saying that God’s redemption is perpetual and applies to all future generations. The richness and depth of the symbolism are profound—applying lamb’s blood, among the other rituals of the first Passover meal, spared the life of Israel’s firstborn (symbolizing all of Israel). To later commemorate their deliverance or rescue from Egypt, the firstborn of each donkey, their most valuable but unclean animal, could be ransomed or redeemed (bought back with a price) with a sacrificed lamb in its place. The sacrifice of their other firstborn animals is analogous to the sacrifice of Egypt’s firstborn who were not similarly ransomed or redeemed by a lamb’s blood. As well, the annual consecration of Israel’s firstborn sons is analogous to the redemption of her firstborn sons from Egypt—cause for perpetual celebration. Just as God passed over them, so they are to pass over to Him their sacrifices in remembrance. Per Cole, “Like all of Israel’s religious customs, it is interwoven with the history of salvation” (123).
Luke 2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

The lesson bridges the original Old Testament context of having “set apart” or consecrated (to be or make holy) the sacrificial firstborn to deepen the significance of the event in Jesus’ childhood, as He now is to be called holy (Gk. hagios, HA-gee-ose—e.g., Holy Ghost, hagios pneuma) like all firstborn, but this time the Law applied to the Firstborn of all firstborn.

Had Joseph and Mary been able to afford it, they would have offered a lamb, but because they were poor, they offered the allowed alternative (Leviticus 12:6–8). The offering of the turtledoves or pigeons was a purification offering in connection with Mary’s giving birth. For the birth of a male child, the woman was unclean for seven days, and on the eighth day the male was circumcised. Following this, she remained in a state of purification for 33 days. For a daughter’s birth, she was unclean for 14 days and remained in a state of purification for 66 days. The purification is related to the blood flow that occurs at childbirth, which would make the woman ritually impure at childbirth and in the days following. At the end of the period of purification, the offering was presented as a means of ritually purifying the temple, something that the woman could not do until she herself was ritually pure again (Lev 12:1-8). As they had at every point, Jesus’ parents had conformed with all Jewish laws (cf. Luke 2:39), this time obeying the purification rites after birth (Leviticus 12:2–4), as well as setting aside their firstborn to the Lord (Exodus 13:2, 12, 34:19).

The reality of Jesus being born into poverty and surrounding Himself with the poor throughout His life should be an encouragement to many, as Ryle states, “it should encourage every poor believer as he approaches the throne of grace in prayer. Let him remember … that his mighty mediator in heaven is used to poverty” (40).

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

Simeon, a prophet, is one of two witnesses to Christ in the temple, the other being Anna, a prophetess (vv. 36–38). Simeon is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. His timely but sole presence at the temple was only to witness to Christ—similar to his presence in Scripture. God is never without witnesses. Simeon being righteous and devout makes him a credible witness to something so significant as Jesus being presented to God at the temple. It is no coincidence that Simeon, Joseph, and Mary arrived when they did, confirming the divine appointment, and consoling Simeon, who had waited for Israel’s consolation (cf. Philippians 2:1–2, KJV).

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Called Simeon’s song or psalm, his words have been loved around the world for centuries. God’s work and plan is for all people (Luke 2:10; cf. Isaiah 52:10; Psalm 98:3). Now that Simeon has seen this, he is ready to peacefully “depart” (Gk. apoluо, ah-po-LOO-oh), which can also mean to set free or dismiss, but here figuratively means to die. His words also are curious, because he doesn’t say that he has seen the Christ or the Messiah, but rather God’s “salvation” (Gk. soterios, so-TAY-ree-ose, from which we get the English word soteriology or the study of salvation), a word used only five times in the New Testament (see also Luke 3:6; Acts 28:28; Ephesians 6:17; Titus 2:11). What else has the power to deliver us from the fear of death other than strong faith? It is interesting for an old, devout Jew not only to equate Jesus with salvation but as a light to the Gentiles and the
glory of Israel (Isaiah 45:25, 46:13, KJV). All of Jewish history was great because of God—Israel’s entire history was replete with acts of a merciful and forgiving God who loved not only Israel but the entire world. Indeed, the day will come when all Israel, and all the world, will see the glory of the Lord, and that day surely cannot come too soon for any of us who today, like Simeon, also hope to see the “consolation” of Israel, God’s people.

Say It Correctly

Matrix. may-TRIX.
Zerubbabel. zi-ROO-bu-bel.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Separate for a Purpose
(Leviticus 20:7–8, 22–24)

TUESDAY

God’s Heart and Dedication
(2 Chronicles 30:5–12)

WEDNESDAY

Dedication of Samson
(Judges 13:2–5, 24–25)

THURSDAY

Dedication of Samuel
(1 Samuel 1:11, 20, 24–28)

FRIDAY

Dedication of David
(1 Samuel 16:10–13)

SATURDAY

Dedication of Saul/Paul
(Acts 9:1–6)

SUNDAY

Dedication of the Firstborn