

### Consecration of the Firstborn

INTRODUCTION: During this Advent Season we will finish our sermon series on Exodus: “*God Is A Warrior*”

...

1. Why? Several interruptions for special Sunday events have prohibited me from finishing my regular preaching schedule by the start of Advent. (My usual practice)
2. Some will say, “*Oh, Pastor, we want to celebrate the Advent Season with the Christian Theme of Christ’s birth!*” So do I. And we can!
3. No problem: It’s actually quite easy to see how the life and ministry of Jesus Christ – especially His birth, childhood and youth are tied to the *Exodus Story*.
4. Last Sunday we began the Christmas Season with the First Sunday in Advent.
  - a) We looked at the *Passover*
  - b) We saw how Jesus is our *Passover Lamb*
  - c) *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)*
  - d) We saw how the baby Jesus was born in a stall and placed in a feeding trough (as a crib) among the sheep, attended by Shepherds ...
  - e) Because He was born to be the *Passover Lamb of God* who takes away the sins of the World.
  - f) *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)*
  - g) *And they sang a new song, saying,  
 “Worthy are you to take the scroll  
 and to open its seals,  
 for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
 and they shall reign on the earth.”  
 saying with a loud voice,  
 “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
 to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5:9-10, 12)*
5. This morning, in our Exodus story, we come to Exodus 13, and the *redemption of the firstborn*. We’ll see how Jesus’ life ties in with this ancient text once again.
6. It is **important** for us to **remember** and to **celebrate** sacred seasons and days in our Christian calendar –

- a) Advent and Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday.
- b) Many would say, “*Pastor, that’s not Reformed! The Puritans didn’t do. And it violates the Regulative Principle of Worship we say we believe.*”
- c) I would respond to this three-fold objection this way:
  - (1) There are reformed bodies of Churches who **do** celebrate the Christian Calendar, like Lutherans, Anglicans, others. Being Reformed does not prohibit the recognition of “holy days.”
  - (2) Just because the Puritans objected to Christian holidays doesn’t mean we must do the same thing.
    - (i) Not all Puritans felt that way. Anglican Puritans did not.
    - (ii) We aren’t Puritans; we’re Presbyterians.
    - (iii) Our *WCF*, chapter 21, “*Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day*” says nothing to prohibit the observance of Advent or celebration of Christmas.
  - (3) The Regulative Principle of Worship prohibits the *mandatory* observance of these special days or the *prescription* the Churches (Pastors) follow such liturgical patterns as a *Lectionary*.

7. Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* actually says this (WCF 21-1)

- a) *The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doeth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. (WCF 21-1)*
- b) God prescribed special days of commemoration for the OT Church: Passover, Unleavened Bread, etc.
- c) Paul, in the NT, continued to observe *Pentecost*.
  - (1) *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 20:16)*
  - (2) ... but in a **Christ-centered** manner
  - (3) *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)*

8. **James K. A. Smith**, a Reformed professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, and a member of the Christian Reformed Church, wrote this about the church calendar, in his wonderful book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation*, (pp. 156-159).

*This people relates to time in a way that is unique and peculiar, expressed in what is known as the liturgical year or the Christian year.*

*If we read the practices of Christian worship, we would conclude that Christians aren't people whose year doesn't simply map onto the calendar of the dominant culture. While the Western calendar clearly shows the marks of Christendom and thus shows vestiges of the Christian year, these similarities can easily mask more significant differences. For example, as the commercialization of Christmas has the "season" of consumption creeping from Thanksgiving all the way back to Halloween, the Christian observation of Advent marks a different orientation to time, particularly when it is recognized that Advent is a penitential season of denial and self-examination rather than of accumulation, consumption, and self-indulgence.*

*Thus the distinct marking of time that is integral to historic Christian worship establishes a sense that the church is a "peculiar people," and the liturgical calendar already constitutes a formative matrix that functions as counter-formation to the incessant 24/7-ness of our frenetic commercial culture. How so? What's so peculiar about Christian time? First, time here revolves around a person - Jesus of Nazareth, a first century Jew. The Apostles' Creed itself locates Jesus in time, in the historical reign of Pontius Pilate. The church is not a people gathered by abstract ideas or teachings or ideals; it is a people gathered to the historical person Jesus Christ. Second, as a messianic people, the church is a people who inhabit the present with a certain lightness of being. Advent shakes us out of the presentist complacency that we can be lulled into. Instead, we are called and formed to be a people of expectancy - looking for the coming again of the Messiah.*

*The temporality of Christian worship - macrocosmically expressed in the Christian year, microcosmically expressed in particular elements each Sunday - trains our imagination to be eschatological, looking forward not to the end of the world but to "the end of the world as we know it." At the same time, the rhythms of Christian worship and the liturgical year stretch us backward. They are practices of remembering - another habit we learn from Israel. We remember with gratitude God's acts of redemption in the exodus (Ps. 78) and the cross. Thus we are constituted as a people who live between times, remembering and hoping at the same time.*

*We are a stretched people, citizens of a kingdom that is both older and newer than anything offered by "the contemporary." The practices of Christian worship over the liturgical year form in us something of an "old soul" that is perpetually pointed to a future, longing for a coming kingdom, and seeking to be such a stretched people in the present who are a foretaste of the coming kingdom.*

9. I, personally and as a pastor, hold to James K. A. Smith's view of Christian worship, the Liturgical Calendar, and the importance of days of remembrance to both our worship and our world view.
10. When God prepared Israel to leave Egypt in the great exodus, He repeated, for emphasis, His instructions about the annual celebration of *Passover* and *The Feast of Unleavened Bread*.

- a) In fact, He repeated these instructions **three times** in one 24-hour period.
- b) In Exodus 12:1-28; Exodus 12:43-51; and Exodus 13:1-16.
- c) **John D. Currid**: *Exodus: EP Study Comm; vol. 1; p. 269*

*Now begins the third time that Moses gives regulations regarding the Passover. This is an example of repetition for the purpose of emphasis. Passover was the most remarkable day in the history of Israel. It was the birth of a nation no longer under the rod of oppression.*

- d) ... and He adds a new **ceremony/celebration** to their liturgical life: *The Redemption of the Firstborn*.

#### 11. I want us to see today the importance of **Days of Remembrance**:

- a) *Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. (Ex. 13:3)*
- b) **Remember**: The Hebrew verb *Zakar*: to think about, mediate upon, pay attention to, remember, recollect, proclaim, mention, declare, recite, commemorate, invoke, confess, memorialize.
- c) **Remembering** involves these three things –
  - (1) Recognition
  - (2) Realignment
  - (3) Reenactment
- d) With a focus on our **Redemption**.

#### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING THE WORKS OF GOD (Exodus 13:1-10)

*The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." (Exodus 13:1-2)*

*Then Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. (Exodus 13:3-10)*

##### A. Days of Remembrance Recognize God's gracious works

1. *The Lord said to Moses, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” (Exodus 13:1-2)*
2. God **adds** something to the new Festivals of the Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread: *Consecration of the firstborn.*
3. God called for Israel to offer back to Him every firstborn child
  - a) *“all the firstborn”*
  - b) cf. Exodus 13:11-12 (all firstborn children)
 

*“When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's. (Ex. 13:11-12)*
  - c) males and females
  - d) not merely the firstborn sons (heirs of the estate)
4. In the Egyptian-Palestinian world the first-born son held preferential status: the rights, privilege and status of the heir-apparent.
5. But God *expands* that special status, not just for males but also for females, not just for the firstborn of Pharaoh but also of slaves, and not just of people but also of animals.
6. Why? As a matter of **recognition**: He wants Israel, His people to recognize two things –
  - a) **First**: How special they are as a chosen people whom God calls “my firstborn”
    - (1) *Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’” (Exodus 4:22-23)*
    - (2) Something God wanted the Jews to remember even when the Exodus was “ancient history”
    - (3) They must **recognize** that the people of the Church are forever God’s firstborn – His privileged children.
 

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (Heb. 12:22-23)*
    - (4) This is why we **baptize** our children: They are not like other children, but are part of the church of the firstborn.
    - (5) Our children are *consecrated* (made holy) by being in the church ...
 

*For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. (1 Cor. 7:14)*
  - b) **Second**: That we are owned by God and servants to Him.

(1) No longer slaves to the Pharaoh and Egypt

(2) but bondservants/ slaves to Jesus Christ.

(i) *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. (1 Cor. 4:1-2)*

(ii) *Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (Col. 4:12 NASB)*

(iii) *Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, (Eph. 6:5-6)*

c) **Douglas K. Stuart:** *Exodus: NAC; pp. 312-313*

*His desire was that Israelites recognize his right to ownership of the first and best, in whatever came to them in spoils of war, or harvest, or offspring. It is necessary and beneficial that human beings recognize that God is superior to them, and the requirement of a ritual that reminded every Israelite of this by insisting on “receiving” their first born from them helped create the spiritual attitude of submission so important for salvation, personal discipline, and blessing.*

d) *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)*

## B. Days of Remembrance Realign Our Lives around God’s good works

1. *Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. (Exodus 13:3-7)*

2. Why such an emphasis on *unleavened bread*? And why for 7 full days?

a) **Note:** There appears to be a contradiction

(1) In Exodus God said “7 days”...

*Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. (Exodus 13:6-7)*

(2) In Deuteronomy Moses wrote “six days”

(i) *For six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work on it. (Deut. 16:8)*

(ii) In this passage Moses was counting the days between two “solemn assemblies”

(iii) i.e., Passover and The close of Unleavened Bread

(iv) Passover, then six days of Unleavened Bread, then the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread (not leaven)

(v) So, actually 8 days of unleavened bread.

(3) *“These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. But you shall present a food offering to the Lord for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.” (Leviticus 23:4-8)*

3. But why? Why such an emphasis on *unleavened* bread?

a) Leaven symbolizes *sin*, according to Jesus –

*Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matt. 16:6, 11)*

b) An idea Paul picks up and uses to call us to *holiness*

*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:6-8)*

c) **But** Israel would not know this for another 1450 years!

4. No. Leaven symbolizes two things *haste* and *travelling lightly*.

a) *Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. (Ex. 13:4)*

b) *In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. (Ex. 12:11)*

c) Israel had no time to allow the yeast to cause the dough to rise; In haste they ate unleavened bread.

d) a flatbread of a simple, even austere diet. The diet of a *pilgrim* on a journey.

- e) also – the absence of leaven (yeast) in the bread kept mold from forming, and enabled the *matzo* to last longer.
- f) from the Hebrew word *masa*: to drain out, to remove.

5. **J. Alec Motyer:** *Exodus: BST; pp. 151-152*

*Does it refer to a ‘straining’ or ‘draining’ process in the preparation, or are we to think of bread ‘deprived’ of a customary ingredient? This last possibility suits well the unusual circumstances of the Exodus, where the bread was made with the least possible complication. But at this point interpretation again divides into two: does the eating of unleavened bread point to days of deprivation, living on a much less than luxurious diet, or to days in which, in the interests of the greater good, life had to be made as simple as possible. Either or both of these ideas could be introduced as ways of making our times of remembrance more important. We could voluntarily embark on a period of special discipline (like some exercise in fasting) not as though it were meritorious in itself but in order to devote our minds to the great truths and spiritual realities of the season of remembrance. On the other hand, in the interests of the same good objective, we could adopt a markedly simpler diet and lifestyle.*

6. Traditionally both *Advent* and *Lent* have been considered to be times of fasting, mediation and simpler living –

- a) purging our lives from the trinkets of this world to prepare to receive the gift of the Christ Child.
- b) fasting from foods that are favorites in a spirit of repentance for the sins that caused to crucify Christ
- c) travelling lightly through life and history between the two Advents of Christ: His birth and his second coming.

7. **Personal Testimony:** *I have noticed this about myself and Jane. When we observe Advent in a spirit of anticipation, reflection and gratitude, we spend less on Christmas gifts for one another. The joy of remembering what Jesus did for us by coming to earth simplifies our lives and purges them of unnecessary gifts – vain attempts to fill our lives with the joy which only Jesus can give!*

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)*

8. **I can’t help but wonder:** What would happen if one year, one Advent, we all voluntarily decided to give each other one small, special, non-expensive gift, and gave the rest of the money we usually spent on stuff beneath the Christmas Tree to the church! Wow! Just a thought!

C. Days of Remembrance help us Re-enact God’s Great works

1. *You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. (Ex. 13:8-10)*
2. There is something about *ceremonies* (ritual actions performed over and over again) that impacts our souls eternally!

3. God said, “reenact this hasty, exciting, glorious Passover night again, and again, and again ... forever!” A memorial.

*And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. (Ex. 13:9-10)*

*It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations. (Ex. 12:42)*

*“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. (Ex. 12:14, 17, 24)*

4. Do these things “get old”? Well, let me ask you ...
- a) Does celebrating your *birthday* ever “get old”? What if one year no one remembered your birthday? I’ve had 67 of them and I’m looking forward to the next 33 of them!
  - b) Does seeing an infant *baptized* ever “get old”, or does taking the *Lord’s Supper* become boring and routine? I’ve baptized hundreds of children and administered the Lord’s Supper at least 12 times a year for almost 35 years. It never “gets old.”
  - c) I never tire of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost! Nor do I get bored with Thanksgiving Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, or Columbus Day!
  - d) I love to sing the *National Anthem*, my alma mater *Carmen Ohio*, and *The Buckeye Battle Cry* – they never “get old”
  - e) Why? **Because they all remind me of God’s common grace to me, His saving mercies, the people whom I love and the place I live – both of which are gifts of God!**
  - f) We should never get tired of remembering the great works of God in our lives!

5. *But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
That I may tell of all Your works. (Ps. 73:28 NASB)*

6. And the greatest work of God to **reenact** in your life is His act of **Redemption**.

*Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!  
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble  
and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south. (Ps. 107:1-3)*

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNIZING THE REDEMPTION OF GOD (Exodus 13:11-16)

### A. The Rite of Redeeming the Firstborn

1. God gave to Israel a perpetual rite (statue/ritual) called *Redeeming the Firstborn*.
  - a) every firstborn child, boy and girl
  - b) every firstborn animal: lambs, calves, ponies, donkeys, etc.
  - c) every firstborn of every living thing.
  
2. Why? *To remind Israel how precious they were to God*
  - a) *Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'* (Ex. 4:22-23)
  - b) In Egypt, the first-born of Pharaoh was deified.
  - c) In the Ancient Near East the firstborn sons were blessed with all the inheritance, while the other children went without.
  - d) In pagan Canaan the firstborn would be sacrificed to Baal, and young virgins as well.
  - e) In China, firstborn sons are kept; firstborn girls are aborted or discarded. (Though times are changing)
  - f) In Israel – *every firstborn is holy (consecrated) to God.*
  
3. Here's how it worked ...
  - a) Firstborn male sheep, goats, cattle were sacrificed to God.
 

*"When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord's. (Ex. 13:11-12)*
  - b) Firstborn male donkeys were redeemed for a monetary price, and if not they had to be killed.
    - (1) *Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. (Ex. 13:13a)*
    - (2) the throat was not slit, no blood was spilled, so that no one could mistake this as a sacrifice to God.
    - (3) **R. Alan Cole:** *Exodus: TOTC; p. 115*

*The offspring of beasts that are ceremonially unclean cannot be sacrificed to God, and the offspring of a human being must not be so sacrificed. The donkey is mentioned as being the one unclean beast that was both common and domestic in Israel: thus it was a recurring problem. Though such an animal could not be sacrificed, it still must be 'devoted' to God by being destroyed, unless it is redeemed by a sheep, which might be sacrificed in its place.*
  - c) Firstborn of Man: "Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem..."

- (1) *“Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”* (Exodus 13:13b-16)
- (2) Redemption of firstborn male children
- (3) Why the firstborn? Because all of Israel were *Priests* to God.
- (4) Moses explains this in **Numbers 8:14-19**

#### 4. The Redemption of the Firstborn (Numbers 3 and 8)

- a) *And the Lord said to Moses, “List all the firstborn males of the people of Israel, from a month old and upward, taking the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for me—I am the Lord—instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel.” So Moses listed all the firstborn among the people of Israel, as the Lord commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as listed were 22,273. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle. The Levites shall be mine: I am the Lord. And as the redemption price for the 273 of the firstborn of the people of Israel, over and above the number of the male Levites, you shall take five shekels[a] per head; you shall take them according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel of twenty gerahs), and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are over.” So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the people of Israel he took the money, 1,365 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary. And Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses. (Numbers 3:40-51)*
- b) *“Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. And after that the Levites shall go in to serve at the tent of meeting, when you have cleansed them and offered them as a wave offering. For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel, to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the people of Israel, that there may be no plague among the people of Israel when the people of Israel come near the sanctuary.”* (Numbers 8:14-19)

- c) Once a son (child) was born (*“the firstborn of all the people”*)
  - d) The parents would “buy back” (redeem) the child by paying the priest five *shekels*,
  - e) and a Levite son would take the child’s place as consecrated to the Lord’s service for life.
5. Every firstborn son of Israel was ...
- a) the special property of God: His slave
  - b) the priest/ priestess of God: His servant
  - c) a firstborn of God: special, privilege, heir to the covenant of grace
  - d) able to be redeemed: to belong to God and be a free person
6. So is the church today: A royal priesthood of redeemed people!
- a) *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:17-19)*
  - b) *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)*
  - c) redeemed by the blood, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.
7. God killed every firstborn human and animal in Egypt, but He “passed over” the firstborn of Israel, and redeemed them all – by the blood of the *Passover Lamb*.
8. Look at verse 12: *“You shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb ...”*
- a) Here’s how that verse literally reads in Hebrew: *“You shall **pass over** to Yahweh, every first born of the womb ...”*
  - b) As God passed over Israel, His firstborn, to save them from death,
  - c) The Jews were now to pass over their firstborn to His service.
  - d) God redeemed Israel; and Israel could redeem their firstborn because of **The Priests**.

**B. The Redemption of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:22-35)**

1. *And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,*

*“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

*And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:22-35)*

2. Joseph and Mary were fulfilling the Levitical law.
  - a) *The Law of Purification after childbirth*
  - b) *The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation. And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days. “And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, and he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” (Leviticus 12:1-8)*
  - c) They were poor and so they paid the price of *two turtledoves* (i.e., pigeons)
3. It is commonly believed that Joseph and Mary were *redeeming* Jesus, their firstborn son, per the instruction of Exodus 13 and Numbers 4 and 8 ...
  - a) ... but they **were not!**
  - b) They did **not** pay 5 shekels for Jesus. Nowhere in the Gospel accounts does that happen.
  - c) They did **not** have to bring the firstborn to the Temple to redeem him anyway.
  - d) They had **already** circumcised Jesus, some 27 days earlier, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of his life.
  - e) **Darrel L. Bock:** *Luke: ECNT; vol. 1; pp. 235, 237*

*In addition to coming for cleansing, the parents came to Jerusalem to dedicate Jesus to the Lord. The child need not be brought along, if they wished only to pay the prescribed ransom for the firstborn. What Jesus’ parents did was above what the law instructed for a firstborn.*

*In Num. 18:1-16, only Levi's family was required to give their sons for priestly service, but a redemption price of five shekels for the firstborn were required of other families. In the dedication, the child is said to belong truly to the Lord. How much Jesus belongs to the Lord is something the parents will only slowly come to understand.*

4. Joseph and Mary were **not** redeeming Jesus for themselves; they were giving Jesus to God for all mankind.
  - a) They treated Jesus like He was the Son of a Priest – a Levite ...
  - b) ... because they knew, somehow and in someway, Jesus would be used by God to save us all!
    - (1) *But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:20-21)*
    - (2) *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12)*
    - (3) *saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose[b] and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (Matt. 2:2-4)*
    - (4) *"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32)*
    - (5) *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35)*
  - c) They realized this: *Jesus did not belong to them, but to God, and in some mysterious, wonderful but unsettling way, He belonged to the whole world.*
  - d) *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)*

5. In the Christ Child there was, one in the same, the King of the Universe, the High Priest of Heaven, the Lamb of God, and the Firstborn son who would save us all!

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:1, 14, 18)*

6. So ... when you and I celebrate *Advent* and *Christmas*, and when we set out the *Nativity Scene* in our homes, or sing the *Carols of Christmas*, let's be sure to stop and **remember** ...

- a) Passover is connected to Christ, just as the Cross is to the Manger.  
b) Christ came to die for sins and help us come to God

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, (1 Peter 3:18)*

- c) God's covenant of grace remains on us and on our children –

*And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)*

- d) This is why we **baptize** our little ones: We put the mark of the blood on them so God will pass over their sins and redeem their souls.

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7, 9)*

- e) There is one firstborn son who is *the exception*.

7. When God said to Moses, "*Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem...*", He was **not** including His own Son, Jesus Christ.

8. God would sacrifice His only Son to save us and our children.

9. So in the years to come, when our children say, "Why do we observe Advent and celebrate Christmas?" We will say to them: "*Because His only Son came into the world to save all of us. The unredeemed boy became the Redeemer of mankind ...*

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)*

10. And **that**, my Beloved, is something to be **remembered** and **retold** throughout all our generations ... forever!