

The Lord under the Law

Luke 2:21–24

Introduction

Well, it is a joy and a privilege to be with you this morning, to open the Word of God to you, as we continue this month-long series, “Glory to the Newborn King”—which is an appropriate celebration of the Christmas season: a celebration of the incarnation of God the Son. And I pray that the glory of that miracle—the miracle of *all* miracles—has confronted your heart in these first several weeks of Advent. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:16, calls it the great mystery of godliness.

And it is truly marvelous: the highest pitch of divine wisdom; the greatest display of humility that there ever was. The Puritan John Flavel illustrated it this way. He said: if the sun—in all its glory—lighting and heating this entire planet from 93 million miles away; if the sun were to fall from the sky, and somehow be degraded into a random atom, it wouldn’t be so great an abasement as God becoming man. He says, if an angel were to be expelled from heaven and converted into a fly, or a worm, that angel would travel less a distance than God the Son traveled in the incarnation. Flavel says, “The distance betw[een] the highest and lowest species of creatures, is but a finite distance. The angel and the worm dwell not so far [apart]. But for the infinite, glorious Creator of all things, to become a creature, is a mystery exceeding all human understanding” (1:226). The distance between God and the most glorious created being in the universe is an infinite distance!

It *is* an astonishing, mind-bending, heart-ravishing thought: the infinite, eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, almighty God takes on the nature of finite, temporal, dependent, mortal humanity, into personal union with His divine nature, all without changing or shedding His divine nature. The unchangeable God becomes what He wasn’t, while never ceasing to be what He was.

And why? Because man had ruined ourselves by disobedience to God’s law. And our transgression against infinite holiness required an infinite punishment: eternity in hell under the wrath of omnipotent vengeance. No man could ever pay that infinite penalty and survive. And yet no one *but* man could ever righteously offer an atonement on behalf of man. No one *ought* to pay but man; no one *can* pay but God. But God can’t suffer! God can’t die! If our Savior was to stand in man’s place, bear man’s curse, and pay man’s penalty, God would have to become man—so that the dignity of His deity could satisfy justice, and so that the frailty of His humanity could succumb to the punishment. Praise God for His wisdom and love!

But you know, it's more than that. The law of God—which we all have broken—does not only demand that we pay the penalty for breaking it. It also demands that we actually obey it! We're required to pay the penalty for disobedience, sure. But having that penalty paid does not release us from the requirement to obey God's commandments in a way that befits His worthiness. We need to be found not just *not-guilty*; we need to be found *righteous*! Not only *not* transgressors of the law; but *doers* of the law! The payment of our debts brings us “back to zero,” if you will—back to a state of moral neutrality—reckoned as never having sinned, but also as never having obeyed either. But if we're going to stand in the presence of God and not be incinerated by His holiness, we need a positive record of righteousness credited to our account. Which means, we need a Substitute who not only dies in our place, but who also lives in our place—a Substitute who not only pays the penalty on our behalf, but who also obeys all the positive demands of the law on our behalf.

And so God has become man in order to fulfill the law in both of those ways, according to both of our great needs! God the Son has to take on a nature in which He could bear the *curse* of the law, yes. But inasmuch as God is the Law-Giver—inasmuch as it is not proper for deity to obey, and submit—God the Son also has to take on a nature in which He could obey all the *precepts* of the law, so that everything that God required of sinners would be fulfilled by our Substitute. And so, Galatians 4:4, “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

The wonder of the incarnation, then, is not only that the infinite becomes finite, that the eternal invades time, that the Creator becomes the creature. It's that the *Law-Giver* is born *under* the law, that the *Lord* becomes the *slave*! That's Philippians 2, isn't it? Though existing eternally as *God*, though *equal* with God, “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a *slave*, being *made* in the likeness of men.” And “being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming *obedient*”—something He could not be as God.

And note: not just obedient *in* His death. Philippians 2:8 says He became obedient *until* death, obedient to the *point* of death, obedient all the way *up* to death. Christ's obedience unto death spanned the entirety of His law-fulfilling life! “In my place condemned He stood”? Yes! But just as much: “In my place *obedient He lived*”! Romans 5:19: “For as through the one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by the one man's *obedience* the many will be constituted righteous.”

And it is this humility of the Savior—in the Law-Giver come under the law—that Luke means for us to see, as he moves along his account of Jesus' birth. In the previous passages, Luke has highlighted the humility of the Christ child by emphasizing, over and over again, the manger—the feed-trough that the Lord of the universe had to lie in, because there was no room (in the

world that He had *made*) for Him to have a bed! Verse 7: the manger. Verse 12: the manger. Verse 16: the manger. That was the Master in the manger.

Here, Luke turns to showcase the lowliness of our Savior's birth by shifting the picture slightly, and showing to us: the Lord under the law. And we see that too. The word "law" is only used ten times in Luke's Gospel, but five of those ten occur in the second half of chapter 2. Notice these. Verse 22: "according to the law of Moses." Verse 23: "as it is written in the Law of the Lord." Verse 24: "according to what was said in the Law of the Lord." Verse 27: "to carry out for Him the custom of the Law." And verse 39: "When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord."

You see, our Great Substitute was the Second and Last Adam—the One who would fulfill the law that Adam broke, so that you and I, as Adam's sons and daughters, could be freed from the condemnation that we inherited from him. But that's not all! Our Great Substitute *is* "the Light of revelation to the *Gentiles*," but He is also "the glory of His people *Israel*" (Luke 2:32). And so He also subjected Himself to the law of Moses. He came not only to fulfill the law that Adam and *his* sons had broken; He also came to fulfill the law that Abraham and *his* sons had broken.

And that is a special demonstration of His humility. The law of Moses is "holy and righteous and good"—yes: Romans 7:12. But in Acts 15:10, the Apostles call it a heavy "yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear." The author of Hebrews says, "it has only a *shadow* of the good things to come and not the very *form* of things" (10:1). The Apostle Paul, who praises the law in Romans 7, says of its ceremonial aspects in Galatians 4:9, that they are "weak and beggarly elements," and in Colossians 2:20, "the rudiments of the world." In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul calls it "the ministry of death" and "of condemnation." Why? Because the law could not impart life to sinners; it could only show how far short we fall of God's standard of perfect righteousness. But our Savior—the Lawgiver Himself—placed the heavy yoke of that law upon His own shoulders; because if He hadn't, justice would have required of us that which we had no power to perform. And we could hope for nothing but everlasting misery.

And so, infinitely greater than the sun becoming a random molecule, or an angel becoming a worm, God became man! The Lord who was above the law would come under the Law, to redeem us from the curse of the law. And in the passage before us this morning, we see **four ceremonies** of the law that the Lord came to fulfill which all magnify the beauty of His humility. Let's read Luke, chapter 2, verses 21 to 24. "And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. ²²And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the

LORD’), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.’”

I. The Circumcision of the Covenant Head (v. 21)

Well, the **first ceremony** that we see in this passage is, number one, **the circumcision of the covenant head**. Verse 21: “And when eight days had passed, before His *circumcision*, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

Now, circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant—the divine seal of Yahweh’s covenant love and faithfulness to Israel. God promised Abraham that a great nation would come from his descendants, that they would dwell in peace in the land of Canaan, and that that nation of descendants would be the instrument through which Yahweh would bless the entire world (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21). And the sign of marking out that nation as peculiarly and specially belonging to God was the sign of circumcision. Genesis 17:10 says that every male belonging to Israel—whether he was born a Jew, or even if he was a convert to Judaism—was required to bear this mark of identity. Genesis 17:12 prescribed that it be done on the eighth day after birth. And if any male Israelite didn’t bear the sign of circumcision in his flesh, Genesis 17:14 says, in a bit of a wordplay, “that person shall be *cut off* from his people; [for] he has broken My covenant.”

Why did God insist on such a ceremony to be the sign of His covenant promise? Well, it can’t be overlooked that such a procedure afforded certain health benefits to an ancient people—whose standards of hygiene were ancient to match. It prevented disease in a way that ensured the propagation of the nation from which the Messiah would come. Second, circumcision set God’s people apart from the rest of the world. It taught them that they were different from the world—that the paganism and idolatry of the nations was cut off from them, and they were consecrated to Yahweh alone.

But third, circumcision also served as a spiritual object lesson for man’s corruption. The depravity of sin is passed down to each generation through procreation. Psalm 51:5: David says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” Circumcision was a reminder that from birth there was a fleshliness in the heart of man that had to be cut away from him. This is why as early as Deuteronomy chapter 10 we begin reading about the circumcision of the *heart*—also Deuteronomy 30 verse 6, Jeremiah 4:4, Acts 7:51. And in Colossians 2:11, the Apostle Paul speaks about our regeneration in Christ, and he says, “in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in *the removal of the body of the flesh* by the circumcision of Christ.” Heart circumcision was the cutting away, as it were, of the fleshliness of the heart, purifying it from its corruption and setting it apart unto God.

Well, if that was the case, why in the world is the baby Jesus being circumcised? He had no sinful nature passed down to Him by ordinary generation. His was not an ordinary generation! Mary was “with child by the Holy Spirit,” Matthew 1:18. And therefore, Luke 1:35, he is called “the *holy* Child.” Jesus was sinless and spotless. He had no need for the heart circumcision that physical circumcision was a picture of. There was no sin to be cut away from Him. There was no need to set Him apart from the world unto God. He was no natural stranger to the covenant, that He should be initiated into it by bearing so demoralizing of a sign. He was the **head of the covenant!** He was the God who *made* the covenant with Abraham! Why should He do this?

Well, in the first place, it proves plainly that He was truly human—that God the Son really did assume to Himself a reasonable soul and body, that He was a partaker in flesh and blood, as Hebrews 2:14 says. Because the children He came to free from sin are truly human, so our Mediator must be truly human. Second, it identifies Him as the seed of Abraham, a true Israelite, and a member of the covenant people—even as He was prophesied to be. If He didn’t do this, He would have been cut off from Israel—the very people He had come to redeem. He would have been barred from any lawful Jewish assembly, and would have had no right to any Jewish ordinance (cf. Ryle, 48).

Third, even as we’ve said, it identified Him as the Substitute for sinners. He was made in the likeness not only of flesh, but of *sinful* flesh, Romans 8:3 says. He came to be “made sin” for us, 2 Corinthians 5:21, so that He might satisfy the law’s demand for our destruction. He takes away our uncleanness by bearing that uncleanness in Himself. And so He submits to a law of cleansing to fulfill it for those of us who were in its debt. Fourth, it was an obedience unto blood that prefigured His later, ultimate obedience unto blood. Matthew Henry said, “Then he shed his blood by drops, which afterwards he poured out in purple streams.”

And then, fifth, it indebted Him to fulfill the whole law. Galatians 5:3 says, “Every man who receives circumcision, he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.” If righteousness is going to come by lawkeeping, Paul says, “It’s all or nothing! You’ve got to obey all of it! God doesn’t grade on a curve! Perfect obedience, or hell!” Well, as we’ve mentioned, you and I had all ruined ourselves by our disobedience, and so we were bound for hell. O, but our Substitute—the Lord, the Law-Giver, has freely submitted Himself to be born under the law! And He rendered perfect obedience to the whole law! Just as He would say at His baptism, in Matthew 3:15—which John the Baptist balked at, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”—He could have said the same at His circumcision: “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness.*”

The spotless white robe of Christ’s obedience to the law is the garment of salvation, Isaiah 61:10, that every believer is wrapped with! His lawkeeping is the *stuff* of your righteousness before God! And one stitch in that garment is the **circumcision of the covenant head**—the *Head* of the

Covenant come under the *bond* of the covenant! the One who knew no sin to be made sin! to undergo a painful rite of cleansing for us who were unclean!

And as was the custom, “His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb”—first to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, and then to Mary in Luke 1:31. And there’s so much to say about the name “Jesus.” It was, of course, a common name; *Yeshua* comes into English as Joshua—the same name as Moses the Prophet’s successor, as well as the high priest in Zechariah 3.

Consider the humility in that name. This baby is Yahweh in the flesh! The person of God the Son that acted in and through this little baby’s human nature is the same person of God the Son who has sustained the cosmos from eternity. This One’s name is *I Am Who I Am*! Now, He’s “Josh.” That’s astounding to me. Imagine pointing to God the Son and saying, “Yeah, that’s Josh.” Unthinkable humility!

But then, consider the grace in that name. *Yeshua* means “Yahweh saves.” “You shall call His name Jesus, *for He will save* His people from their sins.” The Messiah could have taken many names. He was Prophet; He was Priest; He was King; He was Judge. But He took a name that highlights the *salvation* that He has come to accomplish for poor sinners. J. C. Ryle said, “He selects a name which speaks of mercy, grace, help, and deliverance for a lost world. It is as a Deliverer and Redeemer that he desires principally to be known” (49). Every time we speak the name of Jesus, we speak the promise of our salvation: *Yahweh saves*.

And so, rightly do we sing, with Newton, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds / in a believer’s ear! / It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, / and drives away our fear.” And with Wesley, “Jesus the name that charms our fears! / that bids our sorrows cease! / 'Tis music in the sinner’s ears; / 'tis life and health and peace.”

II. Purification of the Fountain of Cleansing (v. 22a)

Well, then we come to a **second ceremony** that the Lord Jesus came to fulfill, which magnifies the beauty of His humility. First, the circumcision of the covenant head. **Second: the purification of the fountain of cleansing.** Verse 22 says, “And when the days for their *purification* according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.”

This “purification” refers to the instruction outlined in Leviticus chapter 12. You can turn there briefly. Starting in verse 2, the law says, “When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days.” So there is a ceremonial uncleanness that is associated with giving birth, particularly because of the bodily fluids that are associated with that. That’s why

verse 2 ends by saying, “as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean.” So, this wonderful, joyous occasion of the birth of a child—and particularly a male child, which meant the continuation of the family line—this joy-filled event in a family’s life would be tempered, so to speak, by the law’s perennial reminder that sin corrupts everything in this life. There is absolutely nothing sinful about the *act* of giving birth. But the one giving birth and the one being born are sinners. They are tainted with the stain of Adam’s corruption. And so the law prescribes a mother’s purification.

Verse 3: “On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.” So this was the state Mary was in after giving birth to Jesus. She was required to remain at home and avoid contact with holy foods, persons, and places for 40 days (cf. Edwards, 82). When Luke 2:22 speaks of “the days for their purification” being “completed,” he’s speaking of these thirty-three days after the circumcision.

Now, what’s interesting about Luke’s allusion to Leviticus 12, is that Leviticus 12:4 calls them, “the days of *her* purification”—which is to say, the mother’s purification. But Luke calls them, “the days for *their* purification.” He changes the pronoun from a feminine singular in Leviticus to a plural in verse 22. It seems he’s intentionally including the child alongside his mother as in need of this ceremonial purification. And surely that was the intention of the law in Leviticus. During birth, mother *and* child would come in contact with these bodily fluids that made one unclean, and so this ceremony was to cleanse them both.

And that’s where we can admire the amazing condescension and humility of our Lord, once again. Who was this child? This is God Almighty, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, the “Holy, Holy, Holy” *God* that Isaiah saw in chapter 6 of his prophecy, and in response fell on his face and pronounced a curse on himself! But even if we were to place His deity to one side, according to His humanity, He is, again, Luke 1:35, “the *holy* Child,” conceived by the Holy Spirit, who “shall be called the Son of God.” He is, 1 Peter 1:19, “without blemish, and without spot.” As a human being—as the Last Adam—He was born without the stain of original sin. There is no reason for Him to be submitting to a law of cleansing! He Himself is **the fountain of cleansing!**

Do you remember what Luke will tell us in chapter 5, when this baby boy grows up, and one day meets a man covered with leprosy; a man who was ceremonially unclean, and couldn’t come within fifty feet of anyone; a man who in Luke 5:12 fell on his face and implored Jesus: “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean”? Verse 13 says, “And [Jesus] stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.” Leviticus 5:3 forbade anyone from touching a leper, lest they be defiled by his uncleanness. But

such is Jesus' holiness and purity and cleanness, that Jesus touches the leper, and the leper becomes clean! The leper's uncleanness does not contaminate Jesus' purity; Jesus' purity is so boundless and bottomless that His purity cleanses the leper's impurity!

This Jesus is **the fountain of cleansing**—submitting, along with His mother, to the days of *their purification*! O what grace! O what humility! O what condescension! That He should be said to be purified from uncleanness, who is the fountain of all purity! All for our sake, we who are full of corruption, mountains beyond the corruption of a man covered with leprosy. Dear Savior, would You be called unclean, so that You might wash away *my* stains?

III. The Presentation of the Beloved Son (vv. 22b–23)

Well, that brings us, in the **third place**, to **the presentation of the Beloved Son**. The circumcision of the Covenant Head; the purification of the Fountain of Cleansing; and now **the presentation of the Beloved Son**. Look at verse 22 again: “And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to *present* Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’).”

Now, this is a reference to Exodus 13, when Yahweh delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt by means of the tenth plague, which was the death of the firstborn in all of Egypt. As a consequence of such a deliverance, God commands the people in Exodus 13:2: “Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.” In other words, I redeemed you by taking their firstborn and sparing yours by means of the Passover. Now that you are redeemed, you are to set apart every firstborn to Me.

Now, interestingly, this dedication of the firstborn was in a sense supplanted by the dedication of the Levites to serve as priests to God. In Numbers 8, verses 15 to 18, God says, “I have taken [the Levites] for Myself *instead* of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. But I have taken the Levites *instead* of every firstborn among the sons of Israel.” And so, rather than continuing to take the firstborn of every family, God says, “I’m going to take this entire tribe, and they are going to be set apart for service unto Me, to serve in My temple and to govern the theocracy of My people Israel.”

But that didn’t mean the firstborn from every other tribe were off the hook. Numbers 18:15–16 says, “Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal, which they offer to Yahweh”—so they are still to dedicate the firstborn to the Lord—“shall be yours”—they don’t

have to enter priestly service, because the Levites take their place. “Nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem...by your valuation, five shekels in silver.” And that was what Joseph and Mary were doing with Jesus. They were dedicating Him to Yahweh, as every devout, law-keeping Jewish family would have done. And though the text doesn’t mention the redemption price, it would have meant paying those five shekels to a priest. And they did that by taking the baby to the temple, and **presenting** Him to the Lord.

And that really is another astonishing thought—another instance of the Savior’s great-hearted humility. The One who had come to be the Redeemer of God’s people—who would give His life as a ransom for many—He Himself was redeemed by a ransom price according to the prescriptions of the law of God! Before He redeemed His people from their sins, Jesus subjected Himself to *being* redeemed by five shekels of silver, according to Numbers 18.

And inasmuch as the dedication would have been carried out by the priest to whom that redemption price was paid, Jesus was represented to God by that priest of Israel! The baby that that Levite held in his hands was the *Great High Priest* of the New and better Covenant, which would be “enacted on better promises” (Heb 8:6)! Here is the One of whom Psalm 110 prophesied, “You are a priest forever, according to the [superior] order of Melchizedek”—the one who *received* tithes from *Levi*, while Levi was in the loins of his father Abraham (Heb 7:10)! There is only one mediator between God and men: the man Christ Jesus. And here He is, *represented to God* through the mediation of a priest! It’s just unthinkable!

And still more than that, consider this language of “**presentation**.” Being presented to Yahweh has overtones of introduction. “Lord, here is the fruit of the womb, the blessing You have given us. We give him back to You.” But who was this? This was the One of whom the Father would shortly testify by a voice calling out of the heavens, “This is My **beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17)! This is the One whom the Apostle John calls “the only begotten God who is in the *bosom* of the Father” (John 1:18)—a figure depicting the most intimate closeness and familiarity. Jesus Himself speaks in John 17:5 of the glory that He had *with* the Father before the world was. This **beloved Son**, freshly sent forth from the bosom of the Father, who had from eternity basked in brightness of the glory of His Father’s face, now needs to be **presented** to the Father, as if He were a stranger? someone who needed the mediating work of a priest to introduce Him to the Father?

There just is no humility like this. The gap between what He deserved and what He experienced is literally an infinite distance. The **beloved Son**, presented, as if a stranger, so that I, a stranger, one with no name, and no father, should be received as a Son! Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ!

IV. The Sacrifice for the Spotless Lamb (v. 24)

And that brings us to a **fourth ceremony** that Christ fulfilled, which magnifies the beauty of His humility. Number four: **the sacrifice for the spotless Lamb**. And that comes in verse 24, but I'll back up to verse 22 again. "When the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ... and to offer a *sacrifice* according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'"

So we learn here that part of the purification and presentation ceremony mentioned in verses 22 and 23 was also a **sacrifice** to be offered on behalf of the mother and child. When we read of the purification ceremony earlier in Leviticus 12, we stopped at first 5. But Leviticus 12 verses 6 to 8 prescribe this very **sacrifice** as part of the same ceremony: "When the days of her purification are completed, ... she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. Then he shall offer it before Yahweh and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take *two turtledoves or two young pigeons*, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."

And time constrains us to be brief with our comments here, but it really is the same point as the previous three, made just from another angle. A **sacrifice** presupposes sin—which, of course, there was none of in the baby Jesus. He was Himself the unblemished and spotless Lamb of God, the One who would Himself be the ultimate **sacrifice** that would put away sin once for all (Heb 9:26)! Hebrews 7:27 says that He was the One, unlike those other high priests, who didn't need "to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" on the cross! He is both the High Priest who offers *and* the offering that *is* offered!

You might have thought that Mary would have been exempted from offering a **sacrifice** to the Lord, when she presented to the Lord the Son who would be the once-for-all sacrifice, to which all other sacrifices pointed and prefigured. But no: the law required it. And so the Lord who would come under the law to redeem those of us who were under the law—He must fulfill it. In this way it was fitting for Him to fulfill all righteousness (cf. Matt 3:15).

And just as a punctuation mark on the Lord's humility, note that the sacrifice that Mary brought on behalf of the spotless Lamb of God was the *poor man's* sacrifice. Leviticus 12:8 says, "But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons." One would think that if God were going to subject Himself to the infinite condescension of becoming man, that at least He would enter into His creation as the best man there was, the most honorable man,

the most revered man. If God is coming, it should be on a red carpet with a silver spoon and in the lap of luxury! Not so with our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ! He was born to a poor family, who, though they weren't utterly destitute, didn't have enough money to pay for the **sacrifice** that they were bound to offer. The humility of our Savior is of a glory that is beyond tracing out.

Conclusion

(1) The Head of the Covenant doesn't need the covenant sign of circumcision to set Him apart from the world or to cut away the fleshiness of a sinful heart. But He submits to the law. (2) The Fountain of Cleansing doesn't need to have purification made on His behalf. But He submits to the law. (3) The Beloved Son, eternally in the bosom of the Father, does not need to be "presented" to the Father in a ceremony of dedication. But He submits to the law. (4) The Spotless Lamb of God, the ultimate and perfect once-for-all sacrifice—the Great High Priest who offers Himself as that sacrifice—does not need to have a sacrifice made on His behalf. But He submits to the law.

What does that mean for us? Just three brief words of application. First, **trust** in His righteousness alone for your right standing before the throne of God. Dear sinner—dear fellow lawbreaker—this Savior has kept the law for sinners! Turn away from trying to earn your righteousness before God by the filthy rags of your own "good works." You could never do it. In Jesus, there is a record of perfect obedience that is offered to you freely, by faith alone. Don't insult the work of our Savior and imply that there was something deficient in His lawkeeping by trying to supplement it with your own. He will be *all* of your righteousness! Or, He will be *none* of it. Trust in His obedience alone, this morning.

Second, dear people, **worship** Christ for His humility. "The King of Kings lay in lowly manger; / In all our trials born to be our *friend*. / He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger: / "Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!" Let your heart soar in tearful praise of a humility so lovely! God of very God—the Lord and Lawgiver Himself—born under the law! Find words better than I can assemble with which to worship your lowly Savior, among you as the One who serves (Luke 22:27). John Flavel said, "The highest honor that ever the law of God received, was to have such a person as the man Christ Jesus is, to stand before its bar, and make reparation to it" (1:230). Let us worship Him for that.

And finally, in the strength of the grace that comes only from Him, **imitate** that humility. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." He had every right to be free from the constraints of the law. But He submitted to it freely, in order to serve undeserving sinners like you and me. Can we stand beside Him, in that manger, near the knife of His circumcision, in the temple of His purification, and presentation, and sacrifice—can we stand beside Him *at the cross*

and insist on our own rights? No dear friends. The incarnation of God the Son—the Lord become the slave of all—is to make us a humble people, eager to set aside our own rights and lay down our lives in the service of one another.

Trust Him. Worship Him. Follow Him.