

Just like us the Hebrew people saw all life and the vitality of life as a gift from God. To be unclean, legally impure, was to lack holiness. Such was seen not as a moral condition but as a state of being, incompatible with the holiness of God and prohibitive of any contact with him.

In the Israelite's culture, childbirth caused temporary impurity. The impurity of childbirth was caused by the loss of blood during the delivery of the child. This causes the woman's vitality to be diminished and by that token was seen as being objectively separated from God, the source of life until her vitality was restored. Mosaic Law restricted any woman giving birth to a male child to abstain from touching any holy object or approaching the Temple for 40 days. Then the woman and her husband had to offer a sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem to cleanse the woman of this legal impurity. (*Lev 12: 1-8*)

The presentation ritual of the first-born son was necessary for any tribe other than Levi. The parents would symbolically give their child to God and then buy him back, that is, redeem him for a small offering. Fulfilling these obligations was what brought the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem in this reading from Luke's Gospel. As routine as this all seems for their time and culture, there is much more going on here than blind adherence to law and custom.

Did Mary really need to be purified after the birth of Our Lord? Several of the Early Church Fathers argued that she didn't have any impurity to atone for; and their argument resonates with us in the light of the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation and the Blessed Virgin Mary's sinless life. Yet, she was a devout Jew who lived her faith and so in humility and obedience, Mary and her husband Joseph faithfully followed the law.

Jesus, the Son of God is brought to the Temple and presented to God. Jesus is given back to his Father in heaven who in turn, returns him to Joseph his father on earth, as he offers the required sacrifice for his redemption. The Son of God's father Joseph redeeming from God the one sent by God to redeem us from our sins.

Where is the connection from this Gospel reading to our lives here in this church at the end of the Year 2020? Do we offer our children, our gift from God back to God?

Jesus, the Son of God came from God. The Divine spark that gives us life, creates our soul and makes us fully human at the moment of conception comes from God. We come from God.

Our parents, we as parents much like Joseph and Mary bring our children here to the Church, our Temple to present them back to God in the sacrament of Baptism. In the Sacrament, we offer our children and those of us who are baptized as adults ask their God Parents offer them back to God.

During the Rite of Baptism, we recite the Creed, acknowledging our faith and trust in God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then in the act of Baptism we die to our old selves, our sinful selves and in the removal of the stain of Original Sin, we are returned to our parents and our families as adopted sons and daughters of God.

As parents we now share our children with our heavenly Father just as Joseph and Mary shared Jesus with his heavenly Father. And just as Joseph and Mary were entrusted with raising the child Jesus by God the Father, so we are entrusted with the raising of our children by that very same Father. In that action, living the trust that God shows to us, our families are called to become holy families just like Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Sometimes we get the pious impression that the Holy Family didn't have to struggle. That even during the hard times, their son, being the Son of God protected them from the vagaries of life. Not hardly. Even before he was born, do you really think it was comfortable for Mary to ride on a donkey to Bethlehem 9 months pregnant? And I'm sure Joseph never raised a blister or stumbled on a rock or pothole for the entire journey.

Then the pain of rejection and desperate struggle to find shelter so Mary could give birth in relative comfort and safety; the safety of a stable and the comfort of straw on the floor. Jesus lying in the feed trough, wrapped in burial cloths because that was all that was available.

Then Herod decides to try to kill the Christ child and they become refugees. Without any preparation they flee from the certain death of their child to a land where they don't speak the language or understand the culture. A land that their fore fathers fled many years before.

Eventually the long journey back to Judah. Not to home, they had to hide Our Lord's existence from Herod and from the Romans because neither of them wanted the struggle that would come from a rival king in Israel. So they hid in Nazareth, a backwater town known only for the stubborn ignorance of its people. Jesus, Mary and Joseph struggled.

In our own families we struggle as well. Conflicts, problems finding work, problems at work, issues at school, too many bills, too much drama, illness, you name it, and to ice the cake we get sucked into social media while our stress levels go up and our quality of life goes down. We wildly flail looking for a way through all of this mess, while ignoring the obvious solution. We fail to pay attention to the example of the Holy Family, because if we did, relative peace would return to our lives.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived their faith, always, everywhere, in every circumstance. In doing so they were joyful and successful in their endeavors. We need to live our faith, always, everywhere, and in every circumstance. It won't always be easy, it wasn't for them; it won't be convenient, it wasn't for them; but at the end of the day who is more joyful, the person with material wealth, or the person with spiritual wealth? One kind of wealth gets left behind when we go to meet the Holy Family in person, the other we bring with us to present to them as we enter into the heavenly kingdom.