

Hours ago, as the sun was setting, there was a chorus of bleating. All around Egypt lambs were being slaughtered for the families' dinner. Now smoke rose over the city as an eerie silence settled. Inside the houses the children were not playing or joking. Not tonight. They all sat, some huddled close to mom, others close to dad, but none alone, and they watched the fire, inhaling smoke and the smell of the bitter herbs as the lambs were cooked. After they had eaten not one of them slept. In their sandals, belts, and tunics they were waiting with an anxious apprehension at what was about to occur. In one house a mother squeezed her son, her eldest, tightly to her when a scream rang out. Or maybe she clutched him extra close because of that first wail. It wasn't her son. Soon the entire city was filled with the tears and shrieks of mothers and fathers, of brothers and sisters, all of whom would now have to bury their dead. Yet the houses with the Israelites, the houses with the lambs' blood on the door frame were untouched; they had been spared and were very soon to be granted escape and freedom.

This is why Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem—He was their firstborn and therefore He was to be consecrated, called holy to the Lord in remembrance of His faithfulness in the past. He has been set apart for God just like every first son of Israel because they were all spared by the command of the Lord and the blood of the Lamb, and this moment of consecration is a recognition of God's grace to each family who was spared but also to the whole of Israel as they are God's firstborn son, the one to receive a double blessing and God's favour—they are the ones redeemed by sacrifice as laid out by God.

Christ's parents are faithful to fulfill what God had laid out. And yet Christ is set apart specifically, like no other son before, and Simeon recognizes just how special this ordinary looking child is. This child is set apart for the glory of Israel and to be a light to the nations; Anna calls Him the redemption of Jerusalem and therefore also of all the nations that would be drawn to that holy Hill, the house of God. And Mary and Joseph have fulfilled all the specifications in order to keep this child pure, holy, and blameless. He has been circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day and then offered in remembrance of God's faithfulness; already Christ is one holy to God, and He will keep this perfection throughout His days.

This is because He is to be the spotless, the unblemished lamb who offers up His blood to protect His chosen ones from the death which would end slavery to sin and evil. Yet this isn't just for those with Jewish blood, with Abraham's nose and Isaac's eyes. And this doesn't just protect the firstborn from the threat of the Egyptians. This is for all, even though it is our sin which enslaves us, not the Egyptians or someone outside of us, and this is for us even though we fully deserve the death He has paid for. His protection is for all and is received by those who have faith in this Christ child who is born in order to die, His blood shed to mark us as those redeemed, purchased, the cost of our death because of our sin paid for.

This eternal child, the infinite in temporal flesh is proclaimed by John the Baptist to be the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World. In today's reading He is here in the temple to remember that He might not be here—the Israelites might have come to a swift end— had God not saved His people by the blood of spotless lambs. But this lamb has entered human history to take away the sin of the entire World.

And you are one in this world. Inside the house of your flesh Christ's blood has been spread to protect you from the angel of death, the Lord that comes for those who would oppress and destroy, the devil and humans alike, the angel here to destroy the sin which would lure you outside of the safety of Christ and His sacrifice, the angel here to destroy the death which would bring an end to you.

Inside Christ you are safe. No longer are you a slave to those who would rule over you and under the cover of His blood bought righteousness death is no longer a threat but simply a passing period of time when your flesh lays still yet your soul rejoices with the Lord until the two are reunited again.

Through the sacrifice of the eternal, immortal God-made-flesh you have been made one of Abraham's children by faith, those chosen by God and kept safe from the evils without and His wrath on

said evils. The salvation they experienced in the Passover is shared with you as the blood of the Lamb was spilled for your sake.

Because Christ was set apart for such a life, a life of redemption through death, a life of victory through suffering, a life of eternity-granting by eternity-sacrificing, He has made you into one of the countless stars of Abraham's offspring and has, is, and will protect you through the trials of the days. This lamb was brought to the temple before He had spoken His first words or taken His first steps to be set apart in remembrance of the salvation offered by the shedding of innocent lambs a millennia and a half ago. This lamb is brought in remembrance of a sacrifice, of a faith, that looked forward to His own life and His own death. Their blood was shed as a precursor to the blood He would shed. And He was set apart to shed that very blood in order to sprinkle it on His people, to cover the doorposts of their lives, to redeem them, to protect them, to care for them every single moment of life.

This blood would come about by opposition. Those who would reject Christ, the anointed, consecrated, holy one would bring about the cleansing sacrifice by their denial and anger against Christ. And even after the deed is complete people would reject Him and those who would follow after Him; these are those who stumble over Him. But to those who believe, they will be raised up, and they will be apart of Jerusalem's redemption and Israel's consolation. Neither the world, nor the devil, nor the sin within them or without them could bring about destruction because they had been marked by the blood of sacrifice which would carry them even through death.

And today is no different. There are still those who oppose us who have received Christ and are raised by Him in faith. And yet His salvation for you is surer than anything that our enemies could impose upon us. In Christ, the set apart sacrificial lamb, we have the hope of Life, the promise of eternity, the protection from death itself.

And today, as we come together to partake in such a gift of sacrifice, of the flesh and blood of the Lamb, as we come in repentance of our sin, we are marked once again, to remember the gift which

is given for you. Just as Simeon rejoiced to see the babe, to hold salvation in the flesh, we too rejoice to see by faith that Christ is with us—He is speaking salvation to you, He is offering you His own flesh and blood, long ago shed for you, that you may receive it and remember His never ending grace, and you may remain covered by His sacrifice and trusting in it. He is here for you to hold, for you to taste, for you to receive, all by faith. In this, the Holy Supper, we may rejoice that salvation has come to us and we have seen it; the consolation of Israel is in our midst because He still cares for us.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, set apart to save you, is here in your midst. He is here to purchase you back from the cost of your sins. He is here to steal you away from the devil who would hold you in slavery. He is here to protect you from the very death—which you well deserve but no more. When He comes to destroy sin and every evil, even death itself, because you have been marked with the blood of the lamb, He will surely Passover you. Instead, He is here to be your salvation and your redemption, your consolation and your very hope.

Amen.