

The Law is mentioned five times in this passage describing the presentation of Jesus in the Temple: firstly, for the parents,

To be justified as laid down by the Law of Moses

and then

observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord

and

to do for him what the Law required in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord

And, finally,

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required they went back to Galilee.

Mary and Joseph are observant Jews and follow the precepts of the Law faithfully but, although the Gentile Luke, may have confused the precepts of presentation with the precepts of purification in his construction of this scene, this emphasis on the Law has a wider purpose. This is not only about Jesus as the child of faithful law-abiding parents and himself as a law-abiding Jew but Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law. God's chosen people are not chosen for their own sakes but for the sake of the salvation of us all. Even visiting the remains of the Temple now, one is struck by its fortress-like quality. It's a place designed, not for inclusion, but for exclusion. One can even see a similar construction and motif at Tel Aviv airport. One has the sense of entering a citadel. Luke understands Jesus as turning this motif on its head; as entering the Temple to open it up to its original purpose of being a light to the nations, a place of restoration for us all. And he does this in the most dramatic fashion possible by envisaging Jesus, not only as the fulfilment of the Law, the Messiah figure for which all Israel has been waiting, but as the light at the heart of the Temple itself. This is further developed in the Letter to the Hebrews where Jesus is portrayed as, not only the High Priest who now dares enter the Holy of Holies, but the sacrifice at the heart of Temple worship itself - what the Temple is for. Similarly Simeon describes Jesus, not only in terms of glory, but also in terms of suffering and rejection. Yes, he is a sign to the nations but a sign that respects our freedom as human beings to accept or reject God; a Temple, not made by human hands, but which shares our humanity to the full; a Temple we, too, can enter because one like us has gone before and where we find acceptance because, though without sin, he has been tempted as we are; a Temple, then, entirely inclusive but from which we can exclude ourselves through sin, including the sin of making others feel excluded.

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