

The Second Sunday after Christmas
St. Luke 2:40-52

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Jesus asked, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Thus says the Lord:

If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments...If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. (Leviticus 4:2, 27-31)

Thus is prescribed the Sin Offering at the Temple, the House of YHWH, the living God. In such manner is a man cleansed of the sin he commits unintentionally against the Lord's commands, and he is forgiven before the Lord his God.

Thus says the Lord:

If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD,...If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity. If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby—if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty. (Leviticus 5:15a, 17; 6:2-7)

Thus is prescribed the Guilt Offering at the Temple, the House of YHWH, the living God. In such manner is a man cleansed of the sin he commits—the guilt removed from him—and he is made right in the sight of man and before the Lord his God.

Thus says the Lord:

When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock. If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that

he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD...The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. (Leviticus 1:2b-9; 6:9b)

Thus is prescribed the Burnt Offering at the Temple, the House of YHWH, the living God. In such manner does a man make propitiation—that is satisfaction—for any ill wrath of God, for it is an aroma pleasing to Him. In such manner does a man also consecrate the whole of him for service and adoration of YHWH, the living God.

Therein is the business of the House of YHWH, the living God: the receiving and making of offerings—sacrifices. There, in the House of YHWH, in the Tabernacle before, did God dwell among His people. There, in the House of YHWH, in the Tabernacle before, did God meet His people and forgive them.

So, there, in the House of YHWH, you hear of the boy Jesus, a mere 12 years old, as His mother and foster father found Him, having traveled a ways from Jerusalem without Him. He was in the company of the people, in their presence, dwelling among them, and instructing them—listening to them, asking them questions, answering their questions—and amazing all in His hearing with His understanding. You might think that He was catechizing them in the ways of the suffering servant from the prophecies of Isaiah. “Today, in your hearing, these words are being fulfilled,” He could have said; He certainly did so having read the Isaiah scroll at the synagogue in Nazareth some 16 or so years later.

Having spent three days in the company of the teachers in the temple courts, His mother and foster father found Him. And, as any worried parent would do—and who wouldn't worry after having lost a 12 year-old for 3 days—they reacted with a bit of scorn: “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” And then, He said it! “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” Perhaps, as many know it, “Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?” Business or house, it doesn't matter, for this holy Child is about both.

In this holy season of Christmas, the word Emmanuel is bandied about so easily. Still, presented for you today is the 12 year-old Emmanuel—God with us, God in the flesh, God dwelling among us, God pitching His fleshy tent among us, God “tabernacling” among us. There in that 12 year-old Boy is the House of God—that 12 year-old Boy **is** the House of God. Stop and think about that for a moment: Jesus is Emmanuel—Jesus is the House of God—be He an infant, a 12 year-old boy, or a 30 year-old man.

But, He is also presented to you in the Temple, the House of God built by human minds and hands—first Solomon, then Zerubbabel, then Herod the Great. If He is there about His Father's business, even if the glory of the LORD had left the Temple centuries earlier, then He is there for the forgiveness of sins, to make propitiation for the people as the priests used to do (even in YHWH's absence); He is there foreshadowing what He would do some 20-ish years later. At the tender age of 12, He was set about the task of redeeming the world. For it would be in about 20 years years that He would return to Jerusalem to be about His Father's business of redeeming the world. There, He would

be the Sin and Guilt Offering—the lamb without blemish, the spotless Lamb of God—sacrificed on the altar of the cross, shedding His blood to cleanse sinners and make the guilty right with God, and suffering the burning hell of God’s wrath and abandonment as a Burnt Offering for satisfaction—as a propitiation—an aroma pleasing to God.

That’s why He is Emmanuel—God in the flesh among us. That is why He was born and why He lived: in order that He may die for the forgiveness of all of our sins—everyone who has lived, is living, and will ever live. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2:14-15) At only 12 years old, Jesus gave you a sneak peak into His business.

For a reality check, look back at what YHWH said: “If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD’s commandments...If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done...he shall bear his iniquity.” Whether you mean to or not, you sin—“All have sinned,” says St. Paul—you do, the man in the pulpit does, the person sitting next to you does. And, according to the Law of God, whether you mean to or not, you are guilty of it. Intention means nothing when it comes to committing a sin—commit a sin, intentionally or not, and you are guilty. So, this is the fact you must face: you are guilty of sinning, and a Sin or Guilt Offering is then required...maybe even a Burnt Offering.

Therefore, God in His everlasting mercy, “became flesh and dwelt among us.” (cf. John 1:14) The sacrifices of the Sin Offering, Guilt Offering, and Burnt Offering could not appease God forever. These things were but a shadow, St. Paul wrote (cf. Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:3-5), and the reality or fullness (that is, the fulfillment) is found in Christ—in Emmanuel. The author of the Hebrews confirms this when He writes, “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself,” (Hebrews 7:27) and...

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ...“You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... (Hebrews 10:1-5a, 8-12)

To put it succinctly, it can be said as he wrote in another part of the letter: “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

By being about His Father’s business, even at 12 years of age, He was about the business of the forgiveness of sins—the forgiveness of your sins, of the sins of the man in the pulpit, of the sins of the person next to you. “Christ is the propitiation for our sins,” wrote St. John. (cf. 1 John 2:2) He has taken your sin and guilt upon Himself, as it was transferred to the sacrificial animals by the laying on of hands,

and died with it on the altar of the cross, removing it from you as far as the east is from the west. You are at peace with God—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

But, there was one more animal sacrifice made at the Temple.

Thus says the Lord:

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering,...he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD...[The priests] shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. (Leviticus 3:1a, 2-3a, 5)

Thus is prescribed the Peace Offering at the Temple, the House of YHWH, the living God. In such manner does a man thank and praise God for being at peace with him and for being in fellowship with him.

While the bloody sacrifices are over, it is still well and good to thank and praise God for the peace that you have with Him in His Son, Emmanuel. This you do when you receive His good and perfect gifts and He comes down to you to serve you with forgiveness, life, and salvation, when you pray, praise, and give thanks in words and songs, and when you give back to God that which He has given you to support this body and life—your time, talents, and treasures. You do all these things joyfully rejoicing, because Emmanuel has come, removing your sin and guilt. You can rejoice because you are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.