



CHAPTER 2: 9-26

The Gospel of
Luke

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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Luke 2: 9-26

Ver. 9.—*And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. "An angel," says Titus, "in a body which he had assumed to signify that God had assumed a body, and had made Himself visible to man by means of the flesh He had taken upon Him."*

The author of the work "De Nativitate Dei," attributed to S. Cyprian, Toletus, Francis Lucas, and others think that this angel was Gabriel, for if was he who appeared to the Blessed Virgin and to Zachariah, and he was the agent in all this matter of the Incarnation.

Came upon them. In the Greek *ἐπέστη αὐτοῖς*, which some translate "stood over them," like an angel coming down from heaven. These shepherds, being Jews and believers, are called by an angel, for angels often appeared to the Jews; the Magi, being Gentiles and astrologers, are called by a star. See S. Gregory, Homily 10, on the Gospels. Euthymius gives four reasons why the angel appeared first to the shepherds,

no hope of salvation, but only despair, and desolation. Hence Isaiah, ch. xl. l, promising the coming of Christ, says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God: speak unto the heart of Jerusalem." And in ch. li. 3, "The Lord shall comfort Sion;" and again in lxi. l, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to comfort all them that mourn." And in 2 Cor. i. 5, S. Paul says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." In the time of Christ the condition, as well of the State as of the Church of Israel, was one of the deepest affliction. Their body politic, while it lacked its own chiefs, was under the yoke of Herod and the Pagan Romans, and their Church, on the other hand, was under bondage to impious priests, to Scribes and Pharisees; and in S. Matt. xxiii. 5, Christ tells us what manner of men these were—how they oppressed the people, and into what errors and vices they led them.

And the Holy Ghost was upon him, both sanctifying him and conferring on him the gift of prophecy. Observe that in Holy Scripture the Holy Ghost is said to come to, or be in, any one not only by the grace which makes that person acceptable, but also by any grace, "*gratis data*," i.e., conferred not necessarily in consideration of the merit of the recipient, and not for his own benefit, but for that of others, e.g., the grace of prophecy, as here in the case of Simeon. So in ch. i. 35, the Holy Ghost is spoken of as about to come upon the Blessed Virgin, that she may conceive a Son, and become the Mother of God; this is a grace, "*gratis data*." And again in ver. 41 of the same chapter Elizabeth is spoken of as full of the Holy Spirit when she began to prophecy.

Upon him. In the Greek *ἐπ' αὐτόν*, the Holy Ghost, coming down upon him, took possession of his soul, so that he seemed not so much a man of this earth as a celestial and divine being, and this on purpose that his testimony as to Christ might be irrefragable and beyond dispute.

Celsus (*De Incredulitate Judæorum apud Vigilium*)—to be found among the works of Cyprian) gives a tradition to the effect that Simeon was blind, and recovered his sight when he touched Christ; but S. Luke would not have been silent about so great a miracle, and which would so clearly have been in place here.

Ver. 26.—*And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. "It was revealed" by a divine oracle and promise—the Greek expression is χζηματιξειν. "The Lords Christ"—the Messiah, anointed with the unction of the Holy Spirit and the plentitude of grace. (Isa. xi. 2.)*

In this Simeon was privileged far beyond Abraham, Isaac, and all the patriarchs and prophets, who, as the apostle says, Heb. xi. 13, "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and embraced them." Hence it is plain that Simeon was a man of singular holiness, and full of holy aspirations and zeal.

Ver. 25.—*And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the holy Ghost was upon him.* Calvin would have it that Simeon was of obscure birth and unknown; but that he was venerable by his age and his sanctity appears from what follows here. Many hold that he was a priest, and that it was in this capacity that he blessed Mary and Joseph. So say Lyranus, Dionysius, Cajetan, Francis Lucas, Toletus, S. Athanasius (in “The Common Essence of the Father and the Son”), S. Cyril (*De Occursu Dom.*), S. Epiphanius (“Treatise on the Fathers of the Old Testament”), and Canisius (*de Deipara*, bk. iv. ch. 10). But Theophylact, Euthymius, Jansenius, and Barradius are of opinion that he was a layman, and gave his blessing not as a priest but as an old man.

And the same was just. From this Galatinus (*De Arcanis Fidei*, 1. I, cap. 3) gathers that Simeon was the disciple and son of Hillel who, a little before the birth of Christ, was the founder of the Scribes and Pharisees, as S. Jerome states on Isa. viii. The words of Galatinus are: “Simeon, the son of Hillel, whom the Talmudists, by reason of his extraordinary sanctity, call ‘Saddic’ the Just. In whom (as it is related in the ‘Pirke Avoth’ or ‘the chapters of the fathers’) the rule of the great Academy of the Synagogue came to an end. He spoke many things concerning the Messiah, and, at length, being in his extreme old age, and having received an answer from the Holy Ghost that he should not see death without seeing the Messiah, receiving Christ Himself in his arms, he confirmed, in the presence of Christ, the truth of those things which he had taught about Him under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And his noteworthy sayings are to be found scattered about in the books of the Talmudists.”

Genebrardus (Chronology, bk. ii.) is of the same opinion, and adds: “For the belief that with Simeon the spirit of the great Synagogue—a spirit less than the prophetic but greater than the common—died out, the Talmudists are our authority in the treatise ‘Pirke Avoth.’ The Rabbi Moses, the Egyptian, records that he was not only the disciple, but also the son of Hillel, and the teacher, and indeed the father, of Gamaliel, at whose feet Paul learnt the law.” All this, however, while it appears highly probable, is at the same time uncertain. There were many Simeons or Simons (for the two names are identical) who were just, as, for instance, Simeon the high priest, the son of Oniah, called “the Just,” and spoken of with praise at some length in Ecclus. 1. I. Besides, the successors and disciples of Hillel, the Scribes and Pharisees, were in the highest degree hostile to Christ.

Devout. In Greek *εὐλαβής*—religious, God-fearing. *Waiting for the consolation of Israel*—the coming of the Messiah, who was to console Israel, that is, the faithful people, and set them free from the oppression of Satan, of Herod, the Romans, and the Scribes and Pharisees. For, eager for the common weal, “he sought,” says S. Ambrose, “the good of his people rather than his own.” By the transferring of the sceptre from Judah to Herod, according to the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 10), by the completion of the seventy weeks of Dan. ix., and by other prophecies, Simeon knew that the coming of Christ was at hand, to deliver Israel—that is, the faithful—from all evil, as well from their sins as from all miseries, partly in this life, partly in the life to come. Christ, then, is the consolation of the faithful, for except in Him there, is

and not to Scribes or rich citizens. The first is that here at Christ’s crib, all things breathe poverty and lowliness, and the simple shepherds, poor and humble as they are, are more pleasing to God than proud rich men, and incredulous Scribes and Pharisees—“I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight,” Matt xi. 25. Theophylact remarks on this passage: “He has overcome the learned by the unlearned, the rich by the poor; and by fishermen He caught the whole world like fish.”

The second reason is that the shepherds were following the old way of life of the Patriarchs, the most innocent of industries. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses were shepherds, and to them, as being holy and innocent, God often appeared by His angels.

The third is that Christ was to be the shepherd of His people—“I am the Good Shepherd” (John x.). Hence it was once usual to paint Christ as a Shepherd surrounded by sheep, as we may still see in Rome in S. Cosmas and S. Damian and other ancient churches.

And the fourth is, in order that we may understand that to the shepherds of rational sheep—of the faithful—the Divine mysteries are first revealed by God, for them to teach their sheep—to the people committed to their care.

The author of “*De Mirabilibus Sacræ Scripturæ*” quoted in the works of S. Augustine (vol. iii. bk. iii. ch. 2), gives a fifth reason, namely, that Christ was the Lamb that was to be offered for the salvation of the world. It was fitting, then, that He should first be made known to shepherds.

Tropologically, Christ reveals and communicates Himself to those who watch over their thoughts and actions as the shepherds watched their flocks, and consoles those who have no consolation for themselves. S. Bernard (Serm. 5, “On the Nativity”) says, “The infancy of Christ has no consolation for them that speak much, nor His tears for them that laugh, nor his swaddling clothes for them that are clothed in fine raiment, nor His manger and His stable for those who love the chief seats in the assemblies. But we shall see that these things yield, perhaps, all their consolation to those who wait for their Lord in calmness and quietness. And let them know that the angels themselves bring no consolation for other than such as these.”

And the glory of the Lord shone round about them. In the Arabic version, “the glory of the Lord arose upon them.” Everywhere in Holy Scripture God has manifested His glory by a heavenly light.

“By *glory of the Lord*,” says Euthymius, “we are to understand Divine light.”

This brightness, then, was not that of the stars, but a far more august effulgence, the indication of the Majesty of God, whose ambassador the angel was. However, S. Ambrose, Serm. 10, "On the Feast of the Nativity," says, "When the Saviour arises, not only is the salvation of the human race renewed, but also the brightness of the sun himself; as the Apostle says in Ephes. i. —That by Him He might restore all things that are, whether in the heavens or on earth. For if the sun is darkened when Christ suffers, it must of necessity shine more brightly than usual when He is born. . . . To sum up, I hold that it came to pass that the night began to wane while the sun, hastening to pay his homage to the birth of the Lord, brought forth his light upon the world before the night fulfilled her course. Indeed I call it not night at all, nor will I say that it had any darkness when the shepherds watched, the angels rejoiced, and the stars paid their service. If the sun stood still at the prayer of Joshua the son of Nun, why should it not at the birth of Christ make haste to advance into the night?"

And they were sore afraid. They were filled with a holy and reverent fear, by reason both of the strangeness of the vision and the brightness, and also of the majesty of the heavenly messenger, - a majesty which so strikes men as almost to stupefy them, so that of old the opinion prevailed that he who had seen an angel must die, according to the words of Manoah, the father of Samson, "We shall surely die because we have seen God." Judg. xiii. 22. From this we may learn that the sign of a good angel is that he first terrifies us and then consoles us.

Ver. 10.—*And the angel said unto them; Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all people—but first to you, whom first I summon to visit and adore the Messiah that is born.*

Ver. 11.—*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* In Bethlehem, of the seed and lineage of David. Each word here has its weight, and suggests new matter for joy, as is clear to every one who ponders them deeply. Toletus makes a full and minute examination of the passage. The name "Christ" denotes priesthood and kingship, says Eusebius in the Catena, for both kings and priests were anointed, and were therefore called "Christi"—that is "consecrated by anointing."

Ver. 12.—*And this shall be the sign unto you (by which you may know this child from others recently born), ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.* For other children born at that time were in houses and in beds,—only Christ was in a manger in a stable. Hence it appears that this manger was commonly known to every one, unless we suppose, as Toletus would have it, that the angel pointed out to the shepherds with his finger, or by an inward inspiration, the cave where the manger was. The angel gives this sign that the shepherds may not suppose, according to the Jewish notion, that their Messiah, as King of the Jews, was to be sought in the royal palace of Herod or in any place of the same kind. For this was Christ's first Advent—the Advent of Humility, as His second Advent, to judge the world, will be one of Majesty. The sign, then, of the Word Incarnate and straitened is the lowliness of the swaddling bands and the manger. As S. Bernard says, Serm. 1, "On the Nativity," "What more unworthy, what more detestable, what more severely

probable that she was also sprinkled with water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer, this water being, as it were, an "aqua lustralis" used in all purifications.

Then she offered the infant to God, and redeemed him. And, lastly, she offered to God as a whole burnt-offering of thanksgiving a lamb, or else a turtle-dove, or a pair of young pigeons. These last two acts, were performed by the woman (by this time purified) standing in the "court of the clean;" there she, would offer the infant at the door of the tabernacle, and there watch from afar off her holocaust being offered in the "court of the priests"—for between the court of the priests and that of the people there was a wall or a partition three feet high, so that the people could, from their court, watch the offerings, and all that was being done in the court of the priests.

Tropologically, the turtle-doves and the pigeons which the woman used to offer for her *sins*, *i.e.*, her defilement or legal uncleanness, signified the groaning or compunction of the penitent by which sins are expiated, especially when they accompany the sacrament of expiation. Moreover, the Blessed Virgin, having no sin, needed no sacrament to expiate it, but she received the Sacrament of Baptism as a profession of the Christian religion, that of Confirmation, the Eucharist, and perhaps also Extreme Unction. She entered into the state of matrimony with Joseph, but this was not a sacrament in the old law. She never confessed her sins or received absolution from a priest in that she had no sins. It may be said, however, that the Blessed Virgin had reason to fear lest she had been guilty of some distraction in prayer, some venial negligence in word or thought, and that she might have confessed such as these, since, as S. Gregory says, "It is the characteristic of good souls to acknowledge fault where there is no fault." And this is true in the case of sinners and those in the state of original sin, but not for those who are innocent and unspotted as the Blessed Virgin was. Wherefore, as the angels see clearly all their own actions, and the defects—even the most trifling—in them, and as Adam, too, saw his own actions when he was in the state of innocence—in accordance with the perfection which belongs to this state—so the Blessed Virgin in like manner saw all her own acts in the past and in the future, and knew that they were most pure and most holy, and altogether without any defect, even venial, and for this reason she could not confess them as sins. She did not, however, lift herself up on that account, but humbled herself the more, knowing this to be the gift of God and not her own merit. Hence the opinion of Sylvester, in the "Golden Rose" (tit. 3, ch. 53), to the effect that the Blessed Virgin received the Sacrament of Penance and was accustomed to confess venial sins conditionally to S. John, must be flatly rejected, especially as absolution cannot be given on uncertain matter, but the penitent, to be capable of it, must confess some particular sin—Vasquez (part iii., disp. 119, ch. 7).

Chrysostom, Tertullian, S. Augustine, and S. Ambrose in his book “On Penance.”

To present Him to the Lord. The Syriac version has “*in the presence of the Lord.*” The Blessed Virgin, holding Christ in her hands, on bended knee, offered Him to God with the greatest reverence and devotion, saying, “Behold, O Eternal Father, this is Thy Son whom Thou hast wished to take flesh from me for the salvation of men. To Thee I render Him, and to Thee I offer Him entirely, that Thou mayest do with Him and with me as it shall please Thee, and by Him mayest redeem the world.” So saying, she presented Him to the priest as to the representative of God; and then she redeemed Him with five shekels, as the law prescribed.

Ver. 23.—*As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to Me Lord* (Exod. xiii 12)—that is, shall be offered and consecrated to God as a thing dedicated and holy. Christ was not bound by this law, both because He subsisted in the Person of the Word, which is bound by no laws, and also because He did not open His mother’s womb, but came forth while it remained closed. So Cyril (*Hom. De Occurs. Dom.*), Pope Hormisdas (*Ep. i ch. iii.*), Bede, and others.

Rupertus, John of Avila, Jansenius, and Maldonatus, therefore, who take the phrase “*that openeth the womb*” as merely equivalent to “*first-born,*” and suppose, on this ground, that Christ was included by these words, but otherwise excepted from the law as being God and the Son of God, are incorrect in their view. Lastly, I quote the following from S. Bernard’s “Sermon on the Purification”—“Very slight, brethren, does this oblation seem, in which He is but presented to the Lord, redeemed with birds, and straightway taken back. The time shall come when He shall be offered up not in the temple, nor within the arms of Simeon, but outside the city in the arms of the Cross. The time shall come when He shall not be redeemed with blood not his own, but with His own blood shall redeem others, because God the Father hath sent him to be the redemption of His people. That shall be an evening sacrifice, this is a morning sacrifice—this is the more joyous, that shall be the fuller.”

Ver. 24.—*And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons,* because they were poor; for the rich were obliged to give in addition to this a lamb for a holocaust. Although the three kings had offered to Christ a great quantity of gold, still the Blessed Virgin, zealously affected towards poverty, accepted but little of it, that she might show her contempt of all earthly things, and what she took she spent in a short time, says John of Avila, on S. Matt. ii. Quæst. 47; or, if she took much, say S. Bonaventure and Dionysius, she distributed it among the poor. And, lastly, because she was by her condition poor, she would be reckoned among the poor, and offer the gift of the poor.

The purification of the Blessed Virgin is commemorated by the Church on the second day of February, in order, Baronius says, to abolish the Lupercalia, which used to be celebrated at Rome on that day. The order of the rite of purification was as follows First, the woman came into the “court of the unclean”—she being unclean until her purification. Next, she offered a sin-offering of a turtle-dove or a young pigeon. It is

punishable than that, seeing the God of Heaven become a little child, man should of his own free will set himself in opposition to magnify himself upon the earth? It is a trait of intolerable insolence that, where His Majesty has effaced Himself, a poor worm should be puffed up and swollen with pride.”

Ver. 13.—*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying.* Because, as I said at verse 7, all the angels accompanied Christ to earth and adored Him, and they are His battle array and His host,—the army of Heaven that fight strongly for God against the evil spirits and against the ungodly. Wherefore He is called the “God of *Sabaoth,*” that is, of armies. So it was that Jacob, the type of Christ, fleeing from his brother Esau, saw an army of angels that brought him aid; wherefore he said, “This is the camp of God,” and called the place *Mahanaim*—“The camp in double,” on account of the two ranks or bodies of angels which he saw coming to protect him, Gen. xxxii. ‘Again, if the stars of the morning praised God, and all the sons of God (that is, the angels) rejoiced at the creation of the world, as Job says (ch. xxxviii 7), how much more did they do so at the Incarnation and Nativity of the Word?

Ver. 14.—*Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men* (of good will “*bonæ voluntatis,*” Vulgate). So the Syriac, Egyptian, Coptic, and Persian versions also have it, except the words “of good will,” of which we will treat presently. “In the Highest” may be taken with reference both to “God”—glory to God who dwells in the highest heavens; and also, and preferably with reference to “*glory.*” In the highest heavens the angels give glory to God, as on earth men enjoy peace through Christ who is now born. Again, these words may be taken either in an *affirmative* sense—supplying “*is;*” or in an *optative* sense—supplying “*be.*” In the former sense it is, Now is there glory to God in heaven, and peace on earth. For the inhabitants of heaven glorify the mercy, the wisdom, and the fidelity of God, in that He has now exhibited to the world the Christ promised by Him to the patriarchs, and hence there is peace on earth, for that Christ is born to reconcile to God, as the peace-making King, men who are born sons of wrath. So Toletus and Maldonatus. In the *optative* sense, praised and glorified be God in heaven, and let all the inhabitants of heaven bless and glorify Him, because He has deigned to send Christ upon the earth, that He, being incarnate, may bring to men peace—that is, reconciliation, grace, salvation, and all good things. Therefore let heaven and earth praise God, and let all the dwellers therein rejoice before Him, because Christ is born who is the glory of God, the joy of angels, the peace of men. So Jansenius, Baradius, and others.

The Greek versions make this hymn consist of three members:—(1) Glory to God in the Highest, (2) an earth peace, (3) good will among men. So, too, the Syriac, and the Arabic, which instead of “good will” has “rejoicing” [*hilaritas*]; and the Greek fathers everywhere adopt this reading—S.

Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, &c.

But all the Latins, and, among the Greeks, Origen, S. Chrysostom, and Cyril, read, and with better reason, for *εὐδοκία* *good will*, *εὐδοκίας*—*of good will*, making the hymn consist of two members. For as glory is given to God as to Him who is glorified, so peace is given to men of good will as to those whom the peace of Christ belongs and befits; and in this way the concatenation of the whole sentence hangs better together. The peace on earth cannot be supposed to be other than that which belongs to men of good will. S. Bernard, in his Epist. 126 to the Bishop of Aquitania, says: “How then shall the peace of men stand before God, or with God, if His glory cannot be secured to God among men? O foolish sons of Adam, who, despising peace, and seeking after glory, lose both peace and glory!”

And on earth peace. The peace of men with God, to whom Christ has reconciled us, and, following on this, *peace*—that is, tranquillity of mind; and in the third place, peace and concord with other men. Moreover, *peace* meant for the Jews every good—all prosperity and happiness. Some say that this peace is Christ Himself, “For He is our peace, who hath made both one,” Eph. ii. 14; for “it pleased God through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, bringing into peace all things, whether they be in heaven or on earth, by the blood of His Cross,” Colos. i. 20 (Vulg.), S. Augustine (*Orat. contra Judæos, Paganos, et Arianos, c. x.*), says: “Within the Virgin’s womb there were celebrated spiritual nuptials, God was joined to the flesh, and the flesh clave unto God, coming forth from hence like a bridegroom from his chamber, at whose wedding all creation was stirred up and seemed to exult. For the choir of angels proclaim, as the result of these nuptials, peace to men of good will; for He that was the Son of God became the Son of Man.”

Good will. These words may be taken in three ways—First, with reference to, and as qualifying, “*men.*” Peace be to men, and yet not to *all* men, but to those that are of good will. So S. Ambrose reads. Secondly, S. Leo (*Serm. on the Nativity*): “Peace be to men, *to make them of good will*, that they may in all things subject and conform their will to God’s will and law.”

But, as the Greek is *εὐδοκία*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *טַרְסוֹן* *tratson*, and is generally attributed in Holy Scripture not to man but to God Himself, signifying the grace, benevolence, satisfaction, and love of God towards men, Gregory of Nyssa, Theophylact, and Euthymius give the following interpretation. Peace be to men, whom God deigned to pursue with this grace and display of good will—with His benevolence and love, freely and without their merit; to give them such a Saviour and Reconciler to make peace between Himself and them. So, in Ps. v., it is said, “With the buckler of Thy good will” (in Greek *ευδοκίας*) “hast Thou crowned us” (Vulg.)—that is, surrounded us, as with a crown, with a buckler, which is Thy benevolence. And in S. Matt. xvii., “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”—in the Greek *ηὐδόκησα*. So, too, “men of good will” are elsewhere called “the sons of love.” See Eph. i. 9.

have it, and a young turtle-dove or pigeon as a sin-offering, if she be rich; but if poor, only a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons (Lev. xii. 6, 7). And the third, that if the offspring be a male, and the firstborn, it be set before God, and offered to Him as His due, and holy, that is, consecrated on account of the immunity of the firstborn of the Hebrews granted them by God, when the firstborn of Pharaoh and the Egyptians were smitten by the angel in the time of Moses (Exod. xiii. 1). The child, however, so offered might be redeemed by his parents for five shekels (Num. iii. 47).

Symbolically, these five shekels stood for the five wounds of Christ, with which, as with a price, He redeems the human race.

The days of her purification. In the old law the woman bearing a child was unclean, with a natural, a legal, and a moral uncleanness; but especially because she bore a child whom she conceived in original sin. The natural uncleanness was that physically incidental to her gestation and delivery; and the *legal* defilement was consequent upon this, for the law, on account of these impurities, regarded her as impure, and directed that she be kept away from the temple, and be held, as it were, “unclean” for forty days, until, on the fortieth day, she was purified by the prescribed rite.

With reference to the question whether the Blessed Virgin suffered this impurity, S. Jerome (*Ep. 22 ad Eustochium*), John of Avila, commenting on Lev. xii., and Erasmus on this same passage, affirm that she did. All other authorities, however, agree in the contrary view, since the Virgin’s parturition was perfectly pure. See S. Augustine (*de Quinque hæresibus, ch. v*). This point has been treated in what has been said on v. 7 of the present chapter. Hence the Blessed Virgin incurred no defilement, and therefore was not bound by the law of purification. Yet, in her zeal for humility, in order to make herself like other women who bear children, that she might not give scandal in seeming to be singular, and that she might conceal her virginity and her conception by the Holy Ghost, the Blessed Virgin was willing to be purified, even as Christ, for similar reasons, was willing to be circumcised. Hence S. Bernard (*Serm. 3 On the Purification*) says: “In this conception, and in this child-birth, there was nothing impure, nothing sinful, nothing that had to be purged, for this offspring is the fount of purity, and is come to make a cleansing of sins. What is there in me for a legal observance to purify—in me, who, by this immaculate parturition, am become most pure? Truly, O Blessed Virgin, thou hadst no need for purification; but had thy Son need of circumcision? Be thou among women as one of them, for so too is thy Son among men.”

Tropologically, the purification of the soul is penance, and this the Blessed Virgin underwent, not for her own sins, seeing that she had none, but for those of others, as Christ did. Still she did not undergo the *Sacrament of Penance*, because she had no sins of her own to confess. See S.

and of body, all our passions, temptations, sorrows, and afflictions, whether in this life or in the life to come. Art thou afflicted, then, with fear or over-scrupulousness, with anger or bitterness, with sorrow or poverty? Call upon Jesus, and thou shalt feel that He is thy Consoler and thy Saviour.

Christ was circumcised in the cave where He was born by some priest or Levite, and felt greater pain than other infants, in that He had the use of reason which other infants lack, and possessed a more delicate and active sense of touch.

His name was called Jesus. The name of *Jesus* signifies the function of Saviour in its greatest fullness, inasmuch as He not only saved men Himself, but gave to His apostles and to these like them the power of saving. This is what is implied by the word *Josue*, or, as the Hebrews say, *Jehosua*. Let the faithful then remember that they are children of Jesus, and that they ought therefore to imitate Him in bringing about the salvation of souls.

Which was so named of the angel (when Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin His conception, ch. i. ver. 31) *before He was conceived in the womb.* For Christ was conceived at the end of the Annunciation, when the Blessed Virgin answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word." In this sentence S. Luke gives us to understand that the name of Jesus had been decreed by God, for this Child from all eternity, to signify that He was to be the Saviour of the world.

Observe here how God joins and couples in Christ the humble with the sublime, the human with the divine, the poison with the antidote, to show that in Him human nature was joined to the Divine Majesty. Christ would be circumcised, so taking on Him the appearance of sin, but presently, when He wipes away this appearance He gives Him the name of Jesus—the Saviour that heals all sins. So, too, He would have Christ born in a stable and laid in a manger, as being poor and abject, but soon He summoned by the star the three kings, and by the angel the shepherds to adore Him. So, again, He would have Him suffer, be crucified, and die; but at the same time He darkened the sun and the moon, rent the rocks and shook the earth, that all the elements might testify of, and mourn for, the ignominious murder of their Creator. The more, then, Christ humbled Himself, the more the Father exalted Him. To thee, Christian, He will do the same; wherefore fear not to be humbled, knowing, for certain that by this means thou art to be exalted. For the road to glory is humiliation, according to that promise of Christ, "Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Ver. 22.—*And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord.* Observe that here three different ordinances are intertwined and joined together. The first is that of Lev. xii. 2, *et seq.*, that a woman, if she have borne a male child, shall remain unclean for forty days, and then be purified in the temple legally, that is by the sacrificial rite prescribed by the law. The second, that the mother offer to God a lamb, as a holocaust for her own purification (not that of her child, as S. Augustine would

Ver. 15.—*And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass. This thing, a metonymy, common in Scripture, by which the word is put for the thing signified by it, as in ch. i. 37, "No word"—that is, nothing "shall be impossible with God."* And in 2 Kings i. 4, "What is the *word* that is come to pass?"

Which the Lord hath made known unto us. In the Greek ἐγγώτισε—*revealed, made known.* Yea, and has given us, rather than the scribes and all others, a sign by which we shall find the Messiah that is born. Wherefore, if we, who have been invited by Him through an angel, do not visit and adore Him who is born for us, and revealed first to us, we shall be ungrateful to God, to the angels, and to Christ, and enemies to ourselves.

Ver. 16.—*And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. With haste,* from their longing and zeal to see Christ. Hence S. Ambrose remarks, "Thou seest that the shepherds make haste; for no one seeks after Christ with slothfulness." And Bede, "The shepherds hasten, for the presence of Christ must not be sought with sluggishness; and many perchance that seek Christ do not merit to find Him, because they seek Him slothfully."

Ver. 17.—*And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. They made known*—in the Greek διεγγώτισαν—they knew distinctly and with certainty. Or it may be translated, according to Pagninus, *they made known*; Theophylact has, *they published abroad.* So, too, the Syriac version; and hence it follows:—

Ver. 18.—*And all they that heard it wondered at these things which were told them by the shepherds.* The *and* is not found in the Greek, the Syriac, or the Arabic version, and with this omission the sense is plainer. But, according to the Roman version, the meaning is, they wondered at the birth of the Messiah, and at the other things that were said about him by the shepherds, namely, that an angel had appeared, that angels had sung "Gloria in excelsis," and Christ was lying in a manger, &c.

So the Gloss, Francis Lucas, and others. Lyranus, however, interprets the "*and*" as equivalent to "*that is.*" Hence it appears that the shepherds told to many what they had heard and seen respecting the birth of Christ; and that therefore many went to the crib and saw Christ; but that those only believed in Him whose hearts God touched efficaciously, while others, offended at His poverty, despised Him. S. Ambrose assigns the reason for this—"The person of the shepherds was not despicable—assuredly the more precious in the eyes of faith, the more despicable it was to worldly wisdom. Not the schools crowded with their bands of wise men did the Lord seek, but a simple folk, that knew not how to deck out and colour the

things they had heard. For simplicity is what is sought, ambition is not wanted.”

Ver. 19.—*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*—putting them together and comparing them—not as Bede would have it, the prophecies made about Christ by the prophets, but the things seen and reported by the shepherds with reference to the angels—the “Gloria in excelsis,” &c., with what she had experienced herself—the annunciation of Gabriel, the prophecy of Elizabeth and of Zacharias, and the other things which she herself had witnessed and felt in herself. And this she did, first, that seeing the wondrous harmony—all things agreeing so well together—she might be the more confirmed in her faith that the only begotten Son of God was born of her. So speaks S. Ambrose. Secondly, that by the sweet contemplation of these circumstances so consonant among themselves, she might feed her mind, and look with sure hope for the rest—namely, that God would bring this work to an end, and redeem mankind by Christ. Thirdly, that in good time she might unfold all these things and narrate them in order to the apostles, and especially to S. Luke, who was destined to write of them. Observe here in the Virgin the rare example of maidenly silence and modesty, of heavenly prudence, and of the firmest faith and hope, as she wonders at the present and waits for the future. She was comparing the signs of deepest loneliness which she saw with what she knew of His Supreme Majesty, the stable with heaven, the swaddling clothes with that which is spoken of in Ps. civ., “covered with light as with a garment,” the crib with the throne of God, the beasts with the seraphim.

Ver. 20.—*And the shepherds returned* (to their flock, says Euthymius, for God would have the faithful, however exalted by Him, remain in the discharge of their several callings), *glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them*. Hence it is clear that the shepherds remained constant in the faith and gospel of Christ—nay, exulting and jubilant in the joy of the Holy Spirit at having seen Him.

Ver. 21.—*And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb—when eight days were fulfilled—when the eighth day from His nativity was come. That the child should be circumcised*—this indicates that He was circumcised, implying that He underwent the rite, not of obligation, but freely and of His own will. For, in the first place, He was God—the Author of the law, and, therefore, not bound by the law; and, in the second place, He was not of the common generation of men, who are procreated of the propagation of sin and conceived in iniquity, says Bede, but conceived and born of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, without original sin, for wiping out of which circumcision was instituted. For circumcision was the sign and stigma of sin, the cautery with which it was burnt out, and in Christ there was no sin, no lust. So in His circumcision Christ humbled Himself to a still greater degree than in His nativity—in the latter He took upon Him the form of man, in the former the character of a sinner.

Here are seven reasons why Christ would of His own accord be circumcised, drawn from the writings of S. Cyprian, S. Augustine, Bede, and others, and given by S.

Thomas, (part iii., *quæst.* 37, art. 1):—*First*, to show the reality of His human flesh, as against Manichæus, who said that He had a phantom body, Apollinarius, who said that the body of Christ is consubstantial with the Godhead, and Valentinus, who said that He brought His body from heaven.

Secondly, to sanction the rite which God had instituted.

Thirdly, to show that He was of the seed of Abraham, who had received the ordinance of circumcision as a sign of the faith which He had in reference to Christ.

Fourthly, to take away all excuse from the Jews, lest they should not accept Him if He were uncircumcised.

Fifthly, to commend to us by His own example the virtue of obedience. Hence it was that He was circumcised on the eighth day, as the law prescribed.

Sixthly, that, having come in the likeness of the flesh of sin, He might not seem to reject the remedy by which the flesh had been wont to be cleansed of sin.

Seventhly, that, bearing the burden of the law Himself, He might free others from that burden, “God sent forth His Son made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,” Gal. iv.

S. Leo (*Serm. 2 on the Nativity*) adds as another reason that by this rite Christ’s character was hidden from the devil: “The merciful and Almighty Saviour, so conducting the beginning of His assumption of human nature as to hide the virtue of the Godhead inseparable from His humanity with the veil of our infirmity, eluded the craft of the enemy, who was secure in the supposition that the birth of this child, begotten for the salvation of mankind, was no less liable to His power than that of all other children who are born.”

S. Augustine (*Serm. 9 on the Nativity*) gives yet another reason—that putting an end to the carnal, Christ might put in its place that spiritual circumcision which consists in the mortification and cutting away of vices and concupiscence—“Christ,” he says, “took circumcision upon Himself as about to do away with circumcision; He admitted the shadow as about to give light—the figure as He that should fulfil the verity.”

Lastly, by this act He began that suffering by which He became the Redeemer and Saviour of the world. So it was that in this rite the name of “Jesus” was given Him, because He healed not our infirmities with drugs, as the physicians do, but by taking them upon Himself and making satisfaction for them to God, so earning the power of healing all the diseases of soul