

Jewish Observances Done by Mary & Joseph Luke 2:21-24

All Jewish families observed these laws as given in the Old Testament. All three would find Christ the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic representation of each of these rituals. They all point to Christ and His work on earth.

“²¹And 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.” Luke 2:21

I. The Rite of Circumcision & Naming of the Child — Done on the 8th day of life. This was probably not done in the temple. Probably in Bethlehem in a home, like John the Baptist’s circumcision done in his home.

- Primary Old Testament Scripture –
Genesis 17:1-14 – Circumcision given to Abraham.
Leviticus 12:3 – Circumcision within the Law.

- Purpose - Circumcision was Abraham’s part in the covenant making process. It was to serve as an outward sign of an inward dedication to God. Unfortunately, the Jews would do the outward sign but not have the inward heart for God. Deut. 10:12-20
This act symbolized the Jews separation from the Gentiles and their unique relationship with God.
Illustration – Wedding ring

The 20th century evangelist John R Rice said this about circumcision, “You see, circumcision was only an object lesson, as were the other ceremonies of the law and just as the Lord’s Supper and baptism are now object lessons.” p. 79

“Thus every male child among the Jews accepted the conditions, obligations, and privileges of the Covenant between God and Abraham and his need, inscribing his name in his own blood in roll of the nation.” J W Shepard p. 33

- Primary New Testament Scripture –
Romans 2:25-29; 4:11; Galatians 3:23-29; 5:6; 6:15; Philippians 3:3-11 - An outward religious show without inward heart for God means nothing of eternal significance to Him!

Colossians 2:9-14 Ruling power of sin is removed by Christ - a type of circumcision of the heart. Rom. 6:6 “crucified with him”; 7:24-25 “who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

- Believer’s Application -
Nothing but the acceptance of the work of Christ on the cross for our sins can make our standing before God right. Ephesians 2:8-22

“²²And 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; ²³(As it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)²⁴And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”
Luke 2:22-24

II. Rite of Purification – Done about the 40th day after birth. This only involved Mary, not Joseph or the Christ child. It was a blood sacrifice.

- Primary Old Testament Scripture –
Leviticus 12 – Women’s purification within the law. 40 days = boy; 80 days = girl
- Purpose – These offerings and sacrifice was for the purifying of the Jewish mother after bringing a sinful child into the world. “Christ was not conceived and born in sin as others are; yet, because He was made under the law, He complied with it.” Matthew Henry, p. 1571 This was done only in the Temple but interesting enough the woman needed not to be present, but many would come. It was a very moving ritual done on her individual behalf. The women would give their money offering which purchased a sacrifice (lamb or two turtledoves/pigeons), and then sent to a special area outside the Temple courtyard where they could view the sacrifices presented and the incense rise, symbolizing prayer. Afterwards, they would be free to go into the Temple area. As Joseph and Mary did, most couples combined the Purification Rite with the redeeming of a firstborn.
- Primary New Testament Scripture –
Titus 2:14; Hebrews 1:3; 7:24-27; 9:22-28; I John 1:7 – Christ cleansed us from our sin! He is our Lamb.
- Believer’s Application –

Are you uncomfortable with the thought of sin, your sin? Scripture is full of the reality of our sinful nature and the need we have for cleansing before God. Have you accepted the work of Christ on your behalf? John 3:16, 36; 10:28; Romans 3:10-25; 5:1-15; 10:8-13 Only the shedding of blood could purify the unclean. Cleansing always demanded the shedding of blood. For a very poor family two turtledoves or pigeons (two simple wild, very assessable birds) could be substituted for a lamb. God always gives access to cleansing; one just must seek it!

III. The Rite of Redemption – Done about the 40th day after birth.

- Primary Old Testament Scripture – The Old Testament is full of verses concerning God the Redeemer!
Exodus 13:1-2 – God required all firstborn based on sparing the firstborn of Israel in Egypt.
Numbers 3:13; 8:16-18 (God later replaced the firstborn with the Levites); 18:15-17 – Firstborn required to God within the law.
- Purpose – God claimed all first born children and animals as His possession. One could redeem (buy back) from God children and unclean beasts. This law was a memorial/picture of God’s work for Israel in Egypt and a picture of Christ’s work on the cross for the redemption for man. The Israelites actually purchased from God their child or animal for 5 shekels. This was not necessarily done in the Temple, but families would seek out a priest. The priest would give two blessings.

1) Thanksgiving for the child 2) Thanksgiving for the redemption of the child. Often families would come to the Temple and combine the mother's purification with the completion of this act. It is at this time when Mary and Joseph met Simeon and he blessed the baby Jesus. Remember, the Rite of Redemption was only done once in a couple's life together and was very special.

- Primary New Testament Scripture –
Matthew 5:17-18; Galatians 3:13; 4:1-5; Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18-19; Ephesians 1:7; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 9:11-14; John 1:29 Christ is our Redeemer! His blood is the payment for our sins! He is our Lamb. (Revelation 5:9) Luke 1:68 is the first mention of Christ our Redeemer.

- Believer's Application –

Luke 24:18-21 Christ's followers misunderstood his redemptive work.

1. One must have faith to believe the Word of God.
2. God must open our eyes.

Eyes opened v. 31

Scriptures opened v. 32

Understanding opened v. 45

Our prayer must be Psalms 119:18 “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

“Our Lord's relationship to the law is an important part of His saving ministry. He was made under the law (Gal. 4:4); and though He rejected man's religious traditions, He obeyed God's law perfectly (John 8:46). He bore the curse of the law for us (Gal. 3:13) and set us free from bondage (Gal. 5:1)” Warren Wiersbe p. 143