

Heaven on Earth: Temple, Worship, and Holy Presence in Luke¹

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Gospel scholars today speak of a culture's "symbolic universe" that describes how that culture maps its world, that is, how that world is structured and ordered by the people inhabiting that world. Such a process makes a statement about who they are. Each culture has within its symbolic universe some core values. Jerome Neyrey, in his book *The Social World of Luke-Acts* identifies one of the core values of first-century Judaism -- God's holiness. The presence of God's holiness in creation and the temple was central to how Israel mapped the world, and maps define boundaries that order the universe in which one lives.

Jesus and his disciples shared the same symbolic universe as the people of his day, particularly the religious establishment. One of the reasons Jesus is crucified is because he crossed some of the boundaries that these religious leaders used to define themselves. Many of the boundaries Jesus crossed directly affected the core value of purity and holiness – touching lepers, healing on the Sabbath, eating with tax collectors and sinners. But as Luke points out, from the very beginning of his Gospel Jesus crosses these boundaries because he is, as the Son of God, the embodiment of holiness and purity. Jesus is re-drawing the

¹ Much of this presentation is taken from my Lukan commentary, *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture Vols. I and II* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1996, 1997).

boundaries of holiness not only for Israel, but for the entire cosmos. As the “Holy One of God,” whatever Jesus touches and proclaims clean and holy -- no matter how unclean and unholy it might be in the eyes of his first-century culture – it is now holy because it has been transformed by the Creator who has broken into his creation to make all things new. As Neyrey puts it: “Jesus as the cornerstone of the true temple becomes the new center of the map and all holiness is measured by proximity to him.”²

Previews in the Infancy Narrative of Temple Scenes During the Great Week

It is now commonplace in Lukan studies to observe that the third evangelist has particular concerns about the temple. Such observations have been known for centuries, as these words from the Venerable Bede point out:

Luke has expounded the priesthood of Christ more fully than the others, and his ending is striking in its beauty. Having begun his gospel with the ministry of the priest Zechariah in the Temple, he ends it with a story of Temple devotion. There he depicts the apostles (that is, the future ministers of the new priesthood) gathered together not to shed the blood of animal victims, but to praise and bless God.³

Luke’s infancy narrative also begins and ends in the temple, first with the ancient priest Zechariah offering the incense sacrifice in the holy place, and finally with two narratives in Luke 2 that record Jesus coming to the temple at 40 days old for his presentation and Mary’s purification, and then twelve years

² J. Neyrey, *The Social World*, 293.

³ Venerable Bede, *In Lucam VI* (CC 120.424-5) translation by J. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1975) 121.

later, returning to Jerusalem for the Passover.⁴ What has not been commonly observed is that there is a correspondence, what some call a frame or inclusio, between temple scenes or temple images in the infancy narrative and corresponding ones in the Jerusalem and passion narratives.⁵ A brief chart offers a glimpse into this correspondence:

Infancy Narrative		Jerusalem/Passion Narrative	
1:5-25	Zechariah in Temple		
1:26-38	Annunciation		
1:39-45	Mary – New Temple Visitation Mary – Ark of Covenant	23:45	Rending of Temple Veil
1:67-80	Benedictus Covenant of Abraham	22:20	Lord’s Supper New Covenant in Blood
2:14	Gloria in Excelsis On earth peace	19:38	Benedictus (Ps 118:26) In heaven peace
2:22-40	Forty days old in Temple Fall and rising of many	20:9-19	Teaching in the Temple Stone builders rejected
2:41-52	Twelve years old in Temple Teaching the Teachers Temple of the Father	19:45-21:38	Teaching in the Temple among the Teachers Temple destroyed

⁴ Cf. J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988) 1-2 where Luke’s propensity for the temple is carefully analyzed: “Statistically, Luke refers to Jerusalem and the temple quite often when compared to the rest of the New Testament. He mentions the city in the Gospel alone some thirty-one times, as compared to Matthew and Mark who together mention the city only twenty-three times. While Luke and Acts together constitute one-third of the New Testament, they contain almost two-thirds of the reference to Jerusalem. The same sort of disproportional statistics may be seen with respect to references to the temple, which for Luke is usually designated by the term *iJerovn*. While Luke-Acts is approximately twenty-eight percent longer than Matthew and Mark combined, it contains almost twice as many references to the *iJerovn*.”

⁵ The idea of Luke using previews in the infancy narrative is not new. Cf. R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 15-24 who entitles his chapter on the infancy narrative “Previews of Salvation,” particularly p. 21 where he describes the significance of previews and reviews in the Lukan narrative.

This essay will address how the temple scenes and images in the infancy narrative correspond to ones in Jesus' Jerusalem teaching and Luke's passion narrative, demonstrating that with the incarnation God's presence has shifted from the temple in Jerusalem to the temple of Christ's body, the Church.

Although Luke has a more positive view of the temple than Matthew and Mark, he comes to the same conclusion that they do, namely, that the temple has now been replaced by Christ's presence in the world. This shift of presence from the Jerusalem temple to Christ's body is at the heart of Luke's development of christological worship, that is, that in the person of Christ heaven has invaded earth so that wherever Christ is present sacramentally it can be said that "heaven is on earth."

The Place of God's Holy Presence

One of the great themes of Luke's infancy narrative is to announce in no uncertain terms that the place of God's holiness is not only in Holy Scripture and the Jerusalem temple, but is now also in the flesh of Jesus Christ. It may have been quite shocking to first-century Jews to find out that Mary is described as Israel, the temple, and even the ark of the covenant, not because of who she is, but because God chose her womb as the locale of God's holiness, thereby fulfilling the purpose originally given to Israel, the temple, and the ark.

Zechariah's Sacrifice in the Holy Place: Luke 1:5-25

How does Luke redraw the boundaries of God's holiness? The boundaries begin to shift from the first narrative in the Gospel that takes us into the "Holy Place" with Zechariah to make the incense offering. This places us in the room just outside the Holy of Holies. By our proximity to this holiest of places, we see that not only is the temple of utmost significance, but that holiness is at the heart of Luke's symbolic universe. The Holy of Holies will be unveiled when darkness covers the earth just before Jesus expires and the temple curtain is torn in the middle.

The Annunciation: Luke 1:26-38

Luke moves the narrative from the "Holy Place" in the Jerusalem temple to the temple of Mary's womb. Mary as the new temple is portrayed by Luke in a number of ways. First, he introduces the annunciation of Jesus' birth with a significant time reference that marks time within salvation history – the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. From the moment of John's conception in Mary's womb to Jesus' presentation in the temple is 490 days – 180 days of Elizabeth's pregnancy, 270 for Mary's, and 40 days after Jesus' birth until his presentation in the temple.⁶ These 490 days are the "Seventy Weeks" prophesied

⁶ This insight comes from J. McHugh, 26-27 who notes that "even though Luke does not commit himself to an arithmetically exact reckoning of the 490 days (the inexactitude would hardly have worried him or his contemporaries), he may well have had the symbolic import of this period of waiting in mind."

by Daniel after which “deliverance would come to Israel” (Dan 9:24-27).⁷ So from the moment John is conceived until the Lord enters his temple is the time of redemption, the fulfillment of prophecy that the Messiah would come to his temple to redeem it.⁸

Second, the greeting addressed to Mary, the imperative *caire*, “rejoice,” (Lk 1:28) is addressed to the “Daughter of Zion” twice in the LXX: in Zeph 3:14 and Zech 9:9. In Matthew (21:5) and John (12:15), the Zechariah prophecy was fulfilled during the events of Palm Sunday as Christ rode into Jerusalem. Therefore, those who acclaimed Jesus in faith represent the faithful remnant of Israel, the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 9–10), the daughter of Zion—the Christian church, as affirmed by the church’s liturgical use of that passage every Palm Sunday. Just as Israel, the “daughter of Zion” rejoiced that the Savior comes to her (Cf. Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9; Mt 21:5; and Jn 12:15) so also Mary rejoiced that the Savior has come to her (Lk 1:46–56). Here Mary is being portrayed as Israel now reduced to one.⁹

⁷ J. McHugh 26.

⁸ Throughout the birth stories of John and Jesus there is an ongoing litany concerning God’s fulfillment of his promises, which the 490 days confirm. Cf. J. McHugh 27: “*When the days* of his liturgical service *were fulfilled*” (1:23)

“*The days* for her to give birth *were fulfilled*” (2:6)

“*When eight days were fulfilled* for him to be circumcised” (2:21)

“*When the days* for them to be purified *were fulfilled*” (2:22)

⁹ Cf. J. McHugh, 41-42: “[Zephaniah] envisages the day of salvation as already begun, and calls upon the Daughter of Zion to rejoice with all her heart, not to fear, because the Lord is with her, as her king and saviour. This is exactly the message of the angel in Lk 1:28–33: Luke envisages the two Annunciations as the dawning of the day of salvation (Lk 1:77–79), and Gabriel therefore tells Mary to rejoice, not to fear, because the Lord is with her, and because she will bear within her womb a son who will be the king of Israel and its saviour.”

Third, Gabriel speaks of the Holy Spirit coming upon (ejpelevsetai) Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowing (ejpiskiavsei) her. This same Spirit hovered over the waters and brought forth creation (Gen 1:2). During the exodus Yahweh's presence was over Israel as he led, protected, and fought for her in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21–22; 14:19–31). The pillar of cloud stood at the entrance to the tabernacle when Yahweh spoke with Moses (Ex 33:9–10). The presence of Yahweh in a cloud overshadowed (ejpeskivazen [LXX]) the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and the glory of Yahweh filled it (Ex 40:35). As John McHugh notes: “St Luke, when he wrote the word ‘overshadow,’ must have known what associations it would evoke in the Jewish mind. No Jew, reading the words ‘A Power of the Most High will overshadow thee,’ could fail to think of the Divine Presence or *Shekinah*.”¹⁰ As the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary, she conceives Jesus as holy, the Son of God. Again, John McHugh notes: “Like the Dwelling in the desert and the Temple of Solomon, Mary was overshadowed by the Divine Presence and filled with the Glory of Israel (Ex 40:34-5; I Kgs 8:10-11; Lk 1:35; 2:32); like the Ark of the Covenant, she became the Dwelling-place of the Most High.”¹¹ This is the moment of the incarnation of our Lord (Lk 1:35). Luther maintained that the

¹⁰ J. McHugh, 58.

¹¹ J. McHugh, 61.

conception of Jesus came through the power of God's Word in Mary's ear.¹²

Mary heard the word from the angel and conceived the child.¹³

This child conceived in Mary is called Holy, Son of God (Lk 1:35), for wherever God is there is holiness. All Jews knew that the "Holy of Holies" was the place of presence and the most holy place in all Israel. Now that Mary bears the Son of God in her womb, she, alongside the temple in Jerusalem, is the place of God's holiness. As "Son of God" and "holy," Jesus is set apart by God to cleanse Israel—and all humanity—from sin and to inherit for them the kingdom promised by the Father.

The Visitation: Luke 1:39-45

As Luke moves the scene from Nazareth to a city in Judah for the Visitation, an interesting series of parallels between Mary's journey to the hill country of Judah and the movement of the ark of the covenant to the same locale on its way to Jerusalem has been pointed out by J. McHugh:

The two stories open with the statement that David and Mary "arose and made a journey" (2 Sam 6:2; Lk 1:39) up into the hill country, into the land of Judah. On arrival, both the Ark and Mary are greeted with "shouts" of joy (2 Sam 6:12, 15; Lk 1:42, 44). The verb used for Elizabeth's greeting in Lk 1:42, (*ajnefwvnhsen*) is, in the Septuagint, used only in connection with liturgical ceremonies centred round the Ark; it is best translated as "*intoned*". The Ark, on its way to Jerusalem, was taken into the house of

¹² In "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics" (LW 36:341), Luther compares the conception of Jesus through the word spoken to Mary with the real presence of Christ's body in the Supper, effected through the Words of Institution.¹²

¹³ Similarly, the Word of the Gospel begets faith in the heart of the hearer (Rom 10:17). This corresponds to Mary as the first catechumen, since catechumens were called hearers of the Word.

Obededom, and became a source of blessing for his house (2 Sam 6:10–12); Mary’s entry into the house of Elizabeth is also seen as a source of blessing for the house (Lk 1:41, 43–4). David, in terror at the untouchable holiness of the Ark, cried out: “How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?” (2 Sam 6:9); Elizabeth, in awe before the mother of her Lord, says, “Why should this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43). Finally, we read that “the Ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obededom three months” (2 Sam 6:11), and that Mary stayed with Elizabeth “about three months” (Lk 1:56).¹⁴

As a temporary and portable vessel housing the immanent presence of the true God, Mary appears to fulfill the purpose of the ark of the covenant. The presence of the Lord, who overshadowed Mary at Jesus’ conception, now dwells in her. Luke has now shown that Mary is Israel reduced to one, the temple as locale for the presence of the holy Son of God, and the fulfillment of the purpose of the ark of covenant. The correspondence is now complete between the presence of God in the Jerusalem temple and in the temple of Mary’s womb.

The Curtain of the Temple Torn in the Middle: Luke 23:45

Two miraculous signs in Luke’s Gospel accompany the death of Jesus. An eschatological darkness covers the earth for three hours from the sixth to ninth hours, a sign that already now the end of the old world has come in a preliminary way in the death of Jesus. A new and eternal day, a dawn from on high, is about to break forth and shine forever on those who dwell in “darkness and the shadow of death,” as Zechariah foretold.¹⁵

¹⁴ J. McHugh, 62.

¹⁵ Lk 1:78-79.

During the darkness another sign occurs that no one at the cross could witness. Some fifteen hundred feet away in the temple, the curtain between the Holy Place (which housed the incense altar before which Zechariah ministered) and the Holy of Holies (which the high priest would enter once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people) was torn from top to bottom. The shift of the presence of God from heaven, down to the temple in Jerusalem, to the exiles in Babylon, to the rebuilt temple, and then to the body of the one now crucified comes full circle as Jesus' spirit is about to ascend back to the Father in heaven. The gospel itself has been a record of words and events that demonstrate that Jesus is the new locale for God's presence because he is the very Son of God. The ultimate demonstration of his Sonship is his innocent suffering and obedient death, which opens the way for all people to approach God (Cf. Rom 5:2.). This open access to God is represented by the temple curtain torn asunder. God's presence no longer resides in the temple; now God's presence is wherever Jesus is for *Jesus is the new temple!* Access to the heavenly gifts is no longer to be found in the temple's sacrificial cultus, but in Jesus, who is the *once-and-for-all* sacrifice for the world's sin.¹⁶

The New Covenant in the Blood of Jesus

¹⁶ The epistle to the Hebrews expresses this eloquently: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11-12). Cf. A. Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Editrice

The Benedictus: Luke 1:67-80

The Benedictus embraces both the OT and the NT by describing God's mighty acts of salvation in the past and how John and Jesus will bring these mighty acts to fulfillment. At the center of this hymn, which is in the shape of a chiasm, is God's remembrance of his holy covenant (1:72b) and the oath he swore to Abraham (1:73).¹⁷ Surprisingly, *diaqhvk* ("covenant") is used in the synoptics only at the institution of the Lord's Supper and here in the Benedictus. "Holy covenant" expresses that it is from God. This is the covenant promised to Abraham, as is confirmed in the next verse by *orkon*,¹⁸ but it also embraces the Passover, the Sinai covenant, and the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 34. "Remember" (*mnhsqh`nai*) is an OT theme in which either God remembers us for salvation or we remember his saving acts. Here it is the former. Remembrance is an important concept in table fellowship language, both at the Last Supper and in the ongoing Eucharist of the church (cf. Lk 22:19, *ajnavmnhsi*). It is also part of the hermeneutic of Luke's gospel, as in Luke 24,

Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989) 40a/b, demonstrates through chiastic analysis that these verses stand at the very center of Hebrews.

¹⁷ See A. Vanhoye, "Structure du 'Benedictus,'" *NTS* 12 (1965-66) 382-89. He breaks down the two strophes of the hymn into chiastic structures, locating at the center of each the means by which the knowledge of the covenant and salvation came first to Israel through the holy prophets (1:70) and then through John the prophet/child (1:76). The center of the whole hymn is the covenant (1:72b) and the oath (1:73).

¹⁸ Cf. J. Behm, *diaqhvk*, *TDNT* 2:132-33 on Lk 1:72: "The context here is so fully in line with the OT and Judaism that there can be no doubt that the word is used in the traditional sense of the declaration of the will of God concerning the future salvation, promise and self-commitment. That the occurrence of the age of salvation is understood as God's mercy to the patriarchs and His remembrance of the *diaqhvk* bears witness to a powerful sense of the saving will of God in its transcendence over time and history."

where the women are instructed by the angels to recall Jesus' words in Galilee about his suffering, death, and resurrection.

The centrality of the “covenant” (διαθήκη) suggests a link between the Benedictus, the series of covenants in the OT, and the Last Supper. The common theme is sacrifice. The covenant with Abraham was a bloody one, sealed by the presence of the Lord in the smoking pot as it passed through the two cut pieces of the animal (Gen 15:17–21). This bloody covenant was applied to each individual male through the circumcision of the foreskin of the flesh. Abraham's covenant of blood signified a right relationship between God and his people. This was a covenant of promise that would be brought to completion in the blood of the Messiah. God's presence in the smoking pot assured that this was true. While the patriarchs offered sacrifices at various times, a major fulfillment of the promise in Abraham's covenant came at the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. At the Passover, the blood of the sacrificial lamb without blemish was applied to the lintel and doorposts. The covenant promises to Abraham and to Moses are brought together in Ex 6:2–9 and 12:48–49. This covenant is reaffirmed at the foot of Mt. Sinai through another bloody act of sacrifice, where the people promise to hear and heed God's covenant (Ex 24:4–8).¹⁹ This covenant takes on a new dimension with the prophets, first with the

¹⁹ Cf. X. León-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist, 1987) 145: “The sacrifice described here [Ex 24:6–8] is par excellence the “communion sacrifice” that unites God and the people. The account of it has no parallel in the Old Testament, since this is the only instance in which the blood is sprinkled not only on the altar but on the people as well. The characteristic traits of a covenant are to be found

Suffering Servant proclaimed by Isaiah²⁰ where twice in these songs the Servant is promised to be “a covenant with the people” (Is 42:6; 49:8). Jeremiah elaborates on the theme of the new covenant where Yahweh promises: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31–34).

The new covenant comes to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who will himself be the fulfillment of the Law and the bearer of the Spirit, and who has as the essence of his messianic task to release Israel from her bondage to sin, sickness, Satan, and death. The new covenant will be one of forgiveness. This is the promise that the Benedictus rehearses through God’s mighty acts in the OT and through John’s role as the forerunner of the Messiah who will “give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins” (Lk 1:77). However, the hearer also knows that the covenant in the center of the Benedictus comes to its complete fulfillment on the night in which Jesus was betrayed and said, “This cup [is] the new covenant in my blood, which is being poured out on behalf of you” (22:20).²¹ For Luke, this new covenant of Jesus’ very body and blood subsumes the old blood covenants that anticipated this final covenant. The covenantal sacrifice God made with Abraham, celebrated in the Passover, poured on the people by Moses, and foreseen by Jeremiah is now offered in a

here: God, who has taken the initiative by calling Moses to the mountain, has stipulated the conditions of the “contract,” and the people now bind themselves to observe them.”

²⁰ See chapters 42; 49; 50; 52–53.

²¹ Luke accents the covenant as new (“the new covenant in my blood”), while Matthew and Mark accent the blood (“my blood of the covenant” [Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24]).

cup of the Lord's blood. All the OT covenants are now superceded by the coming of the one for whom John will prepare.

Appearing just before the report of Jesus' birth, the use of *διαθήκη* for the important theme of the "covenant" alludes to the ongoing presence of Christ with his church in the new "Holy of Holies" -- the Eucharist—the "new covenant" of his body and blood. Both the Benedictus and Luke's institution narrative highlight the covenant theme at the beginning and end of the gospel.²²

Earth and Heaven Joined Together in Peace

The Birth of Jesus: Luke 2:1-20

In Luke's Gospel the *Gloria in Excelsis* is a foreshadowing of the entrance hymn of the people of Israel when Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem for his death. The parallels between the song at Jesus' birth and the song of the people as he enters Jerusalem are striking, especially in view of Luke's version of the entrance hymn:

²² R. Tannehill, *Narrative Unity I*, 32–38, accents of the "tragic irony" of the Benedictus in light of the rest of Luke's gospel:

The Benedictus takes on new significance when we understand its relation to the rest of Luke's story. It arouses conflicting emotions: joy and hope but also sorrow and pity. The joy is valid in the context of the total story, for some of the promises are indeed being realized for some people. But Luke's joyful birth story has a hidden lining of sadness. Great expectations contribute to a sense of tragedy if the expected happiness is lost. Part of the function of the birth story is to awaken a lively sense of great expectations so that readers will feel the tragic loss more vividly.

On one level, Tannehill's comments are valid, but he also fails to see that this "tragic irony" is part of the catechesis about the nature of the Eucharist that celebrates Christ's bloody covenant of death. The eschatological consequences of this new covenant are now hidden under the humility of the things of this world. The great expectations of the Benedictus will be crushed if fulfillment is seen only in human terms. But if they are seen eschatologically through the eucharistic life of the church, Luke's hearers will know how his gospel functions as the source of life for his church.

- 2:14: “**Glory in the highest** to God, and
 on earth peace among men of his favor.”
- 19:38: “**Blessed the Coming One,**
 the King, in the name of the Lord!
 In heaven peace, and
 glory in the highest!”

When Luke is compared to Matthew, Mark, and John, what he has in common with them is what liturgical scholars call the *Benedictus* from Ps 118:26, that is, “Blessed the Coming One ... in the name of the Lord!” This may be seen in the following comparison of the texts:

- Mt 21:9** “**Hosanna** to the Son of David!
 Blessed the Coming One in the name of the Lord!
 Hosanna in the highest!”
- Mk 11:9** “**Hosanna!**
 Blessed the Coming One in the name of the Lord!
 Blessed the coming kingdom of our father David!
 Hosanna in the highest!”
- Lk 19:38** “**Blessed the Coming One,**
 the King, **in the name of the Lord!**
 In heaven
 peace,
 and
 glory
 in the highest!”
- Jn 12:13** “**Hosanna!**
 Blessed the Coming One in the name of the Lord,
 even the King of Israel!

What is unique in Luke compared to the other evangelists is the final two phrases (shown in red), and it is here that Luke reports words that echo the angelic hymn of Lk 2:14, emphasizing his themes of peace and glory by placing them toward the center of the circular structure with “heaven” and “in the

highest” as the frame. What is in the center is the *Benedictus*: “Blessed the Coming One, the King, in the name of the Lord.” At the birth of Jesus, there is glory in the highest; this same highest glory is proclaimed as he enters Jerusalem for his death. The great mystery here concerns *peace*: at Jesus’ birth, there is peace *on earth*; as he enters into Jerusalem for his passion and resurrection, there is peace *in heaven*. Thus *earth and heaven* are joined together in **peace** through the incarnation and atonement of Christ.

Destined for the Fall and Rising of Many – The Stone of Stumbling

The Infant Lord Comes to His Temple: Luke 2:21-40

Forty days after his birth, Jesus comes to his temple. The liturgical activity of this section of the infancy narrative focuses on the importance of the Jerusalem temple and Jesus’ fulfillment of the OT in the Holy Place. In “glory” the angels sang of “glory” (2:9, 14) to God in heaven for his gracious presence in Jesus, who brings peace to the earth. Now Simeon’s song recognizes the Lord in his temple. This infant Lord brings light and salvation for all peoples and, in particular, is the “glory” of Israel (2:34).

Jesus is now the new temple (cf. Jn 1:14; 2:19–22). Jewish Christians and God-fearers familiar with the OT would be acquainted with the idea of the movement of God’s presence. God led Israel out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21–22). God’s glory visibly came to dwell over the ark and the tabernacle to guide Israel in her travels (Ex 40:34–38;

cf. also 25:22; 33:7–23). After the priests processed with the ark to the newly built Jerusalem temple, God took up residence there (1 Kings 8). Shortly before the first temple was destroyed, Ezekiel saw God’s glory leave it (Ezekiel 10), and this same glory of God appeared to him in Babylon (Ezekiel 1). After the exile, the rebuilt second temple lacked the glory of the first temple (Ezra 6:13–18), but God promised one day to fill it with even greater glory (Haggai 2:1–9; Zechariah 8–9). *That promise comes to fulfillment here, when the “King of glory” comes in (Ps 24:7–10), and the Lord himself comes to his temple (Mal 3:1).*

Seventy weeks after the announcement of John’s birth to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel, the Lord comes to his temple to fulfill the Torah. Jesus’ parents are fulfilling the Torah by bringing Jesus to his true home. They offer the alternative sacrifice of two turtledoves or two pigeons; Lev 12:8 allows this instead of a lamb, since not everyone could afford a lamb. This helps us “to understand that Joseph and Mary were of a ‘humble state’ (Luke 1:48), i.e., too poor to be able to afford a lamb.” This affirms Luke’s theme of the Great Reversal. On a theological level, no lamb was necessary because already here at forty days old, Jesus is the lamb brought to his temple for sacrifice.

Simeon is said to be “waiting for the consolation” (προσδεχομενο" paravklhsin) of Israel. This embraces both hope and comfort, “the consolation that would be brought about by the inauguration of the messianic age.”²³

Similarly, Anna speaks to all waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (2:38,

prosdecomevnoi" luvtrwsin ÆIerousalhvm), and Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for the kingdom of God (23:51, prosdevceto th;n basileivan tou` qeou`). There is obviously a sense of expectation and longing among the faithful remnant of Israel *in the very temple precincts*.

Speaking to Mary, Simeon prophesies about the destiny of the child (2:33–35). Many Jews will fall and rise as they meet Jesus; he is a stumbling block to everyone, including his own disciples and family, because of the nature of his ministry and the nature of his kingdom. “Fall and resurrection” stresses the passion allusions in this statement, and points us forward to Jesus’ own atonement when he renders the temple sacrifices obsolete. Again, the infancy narrative introduces a theme that finds a corresponding note at the end of Jesus’ ministry *when he is teaching in the temple*. In his final parable about the workers in the vineyard (20:9–19), Jesus sums up the parable by citing Ps 118:22: “The stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner” (20:17). His application of these words to the scribes and Pharisees echoes Simeon’s words to Mary: “Everyone who falls on that stone will be dashed to pieces; on whomsoever it falls, it will crush him” (20:18).

The first “sign” (shmei`on) in Luke’s gospel is the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, a perfect image of the humility and poverty of the incarnation (Lk 2:12). The second sign is the child destined to be spoken against, a perfect image of the theology of the cross, Christ’s rejection and atonement and his

²³ R. Stein, *Luke*, 114.

resurrection and vindication. Jesus' words and actions will be spoken against because he will not meet human expectations: he will be rejected by all people until after his resurrection, when he will show his disciples from Scripture that he must be spoken against.

Jesus is the stumbling block who causes division within Israel. Everyone will be broken or crushed. Those who believe in him, disciples, must fall into the brokenness of repentance in order to be raised again as new beings, living stones in Christ, the temple of God. But upon unbelievers comes the crushing blow of judgment. Those who stumble over Jesus will receive the judgment precipitated by rejection of him, and when the stone falls on them they will be utterly crushed.²⁴

The hearer knows that Jesus' crucifixion will become the ultimate stumbling block, as St. Paul relates to the Corinthians: "We preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23) and to the Romans: "They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame' " (Rom 9:32–33, citing Is 28:16 and 8:14; cf. 1 Pet 2:8). Simeon's prophecy of Jesus' death and rejection is the ultimate manifestation of Jesus' humility. There is no mention of a sacrificial offering at Jesus' presentation because he is God's final sacrifice.

²⁴ Perhaps Jesus is also recalling another passage from Isaiah: "And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the

Teaching in the Father's House

The Young Jesus Returns to His Temple: Luke 2:41-52

The last scene of the infancy narrative is also in the temple: the twelve-year old Jesus returns to his temple and speaks his first recorded words about who he is *as the Son of God* and what he must do *as the Son concerned with the Father's business in the Father's house*.

It seems to have been customary for Jesus' parents to make an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Jesus remains in Jerusalem so that he might be present in the temple where he belongs. The verbs $\mu\epsilon\nu\nu\omega$ and $\upsilon\pi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\nu\omega$, "remain, stay, abide," are part of Luke's vocabulary for the presence of God. When he is found by his parents, he is "in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers" ($\kappa\alpha\theta\epsilon\zeta\omicron\nu\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\iota\nu\ \mu\epsilon\nu\sigma\omega/\ \tau\omega\grave{\nu}\ \delta\iota\delta\alpha\sigma\kappa\alpha\nu\lambda\omega\nu$) listening to them and asking them questions (2:46). The use of the prepositional phrase "in the midst of" suggests that the teachers are in the presence of God, for Luke will signify the presence of God in the dialogues after the Last Supper when Jesus tells his disciples, "I am in the midst of you [$\epsilon\iota\gamma\omega;\ \delta\epsilon;\ \epsilon\iota\nu\ \mu\epsilon\nu\sigma\omega/\ \upsilon\pi\omicron\mu\omega\grave{\nu}\ \epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\iota$] as the one who serves" (22:27), using the "I am" [$\epsilon\iota\gamma\omega;\ \dots\ \epsilon\iota\omicron\mu\iota$] designation to accent this as the saving presence of Yahweh. However, Luke anticipates here Jesus' later pronouncement that he must ($\delta\epsilon\iota\grave{\nu}$) be in his Father's house (2:49), teaching the teachers and all of us

inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many in them [the two houses] shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and captured" (Is 8:14-15; cf. also Dan 2:34-35, 44-45).

about his real destiny. When the twelve-year-old Jesus remains in Jerusalem, the city of God's presence, God has come home to the place where he will accomplish salvation.

What Simeon foretold when Jesus was forty days old, Jesus now states unequivocally at age twelve: he is the Son of God and his destiny is in Jerusalem and in the temple. He does this by speaking of Jerusalem and the temple as the place he must (δεῖ) be. *Jesus' first words are a full Christology that speak to his person, the Son of God, and his work, the necessity of his being in Jerusalem, where he will return as the Passover Lamb.* Jerusalem is the place of Jesus' destiny. This motif is developed in passages unique to Luke. (9:31; 9:51; 13:22; 13:31–35; 17:11; 19:41–44). Luke's preoccupation with Jerusalem as the city of destiny begins here at the end of the infancy narrative. Jesus must be present in the house of his Father, where the Father's business is transacted, among those to whom this business has been entrusted. Mary refers to Joseph as Jesus' father, but Jesus claims God as his Father.²⁵

The combination of the passion language of necessity (δεῖ) and the temporal context of the Passover is also significant. Only two Passovers are mentioned in Luke: here at the beginning of Jesus' life in the infancy narrative and at the end of his life in the passion narrative (Luke 22). Only Luke describes the day of the Last Supper as "the day of Unleavened Bread, on which it was

²⁵ It is most significant that Jesus' first words refer to God as his Father; they are a statement that he is the Son of God (cf. 10:22; 22:29; and 24:49 for Jesus calling God his Father).

necessary [ε[deɪ] that the Passover lamb be sacrificed” (22:7). Once again, the evangelist uses a simple frame of time, the Passover, and event, the passion, to help the hearer see how the infancy narrative anticipates Jesus’ final days of passion and resurrection.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple: Luke 19:45-46

When Jesus enters Jerusalem (19:45), Luke does not record Jesus *entering the city*, but pictures him immediately *entering the temple* which will now figure prominently as the place for his final teachings. Once again, the Lord returns to his temple (εἰς τὸ ἱερόν), as he did for his presentation and his mother’s purification (2:21–40) and at age twelve for Passover (2:41–52).

Jesus’ first act in the Great Week is to cleanse the temple to make it fit for his teaching -- it must be cleansed so that the holiness of Jesus may dwell in a Holy Place. Once again, God’s incarnational presence in Christ comes to God’s “incarnational” presence in the temple. “The verb for ‘cast out’ is ἐξορκίζω [εἰκβαλλεῖν τοὺς πωλοῦντας], which is used in exorcisms, suggesting that the money changers are roughly equivalent to unclean spirits who profane the holy place.”²⁶ The temple must return to its original purpose—a place of petitionary prayer for someone like the tax collector in the parable (18:9–14). The outside court of the Gentiles was a place for legitimate commerce in the exchange of money for the necessary sacrificial

elements such as wine, oil, animals, etc. But it had become a place for nontemple business, a so-called “cave of robbers” (19:45).²⁷ Jesus must cleanse it from thieves to make room for the one who will be crucified with thieves. In quoting Is 56:7, Luke leaves off “for all the nations” (cf. Mk 11:7, which includes it).²⁸ For Luke, the locale for the presence of God has already shifted from the temple to the person of Jesus. This temple built with human hands is a place of prayer *for Israel*. But the place where *all nations* will gather is in the body of Christ, *the new Israel*, where Jesus will be present when his kingdom is proclaimed in the Breaking of the Bread. The OT clearly prophesied that the cleansing of the temple was a sign that the end was at hand.²⁹

Luke records that Jesus is teaching in the temple every day. Divine presence comes to divine presence to signal the profound shift that is about to occur in the cosmos.³⁰ Jesus takes his rightful place in God’s house as the authoritative Teacher of God. But his legitimate claim to be *the* Teacher is seen by the religious leaders as the most serious threat possible to their own (claimed) authority. By taking his stand *in the temple*, Jesus asserts that his authority is that of God himself. The Jerusalem religious establishment (20:1: oiJ ajrcierei` "

²⁶ L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 299.

²⁷ See J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 935–36, for a detailed analysis of the various reasons for the cleansing of the temple.

²⁸ Cf. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 300–1; R. Stein, *Luke*, 485; J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 937; and I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 721.

²⁹ Cf. Zech 14:21; Mal 3:1 ff.; Ezekiel 40–48, which form the background of the description of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22.

³⁰ L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 307, notes: “From chapter 20 of the Gospel through chapter 7 of Acts, all the action takes place in Jerusalem and centers on the basic issue of the acceptance and rejection of God’s prophet.”

kai; oiJ grammatei`" su:n toi`" presbutevroi", "the chief priests and the scribes with the elders") understood that these teachings were aimed at them (20:19–20).³¹ The temple is now a place of conflict, and "in Luke's writing, the rejection of Jesus by the chief priests, their refusal to recognize him as lord of the temple, and their refusal to grant him his rightful control of the temple led to his death."³²

The Temple and Jerusalem (21:5–24)

Jesus' final teaching before his passion centers on the temple and Jerusalem. *Jesus, teaching in the temple, is about to teach about the temple's destruction.* And it is not simply the temple that is in view, but the *stones* of the temple and two different perspectives on those stones.

One perspective is expressed by those who comment on the majesty of the magnificent setting provided by Herod the Great for the second temple. They see only the earthly and temporal significance of the temple, bound as they are by time and space. But Jesus begins his eschatological revelation by warning them that "days will come" (21:6) that require thinking *eschatologically*, for these beautiful stones will be pulled down and not one will be left on top of another. Stones have already figured prominently in Jesus' previous sayings about

³¹ Cf. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, 77–78.

³² J. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, 110. Tyson sees the parable of the tenants in 20:9–19 as Jesus' answer to the Jerusalem authorities about his authority to teach in the temple. Tyson concludes: "These words [20:15: 'throwing him outside the vineyard, they killed him'] connect the death of Jesus with conflicting claims about the control of the temple. This association between the temple and Jesus' death appears to be primary in Luke-Acts" (p. 110).

Jerusalem: The stones (οἱ λίθοι) would cry out in acclamation when Jesus enters Jerusalem if the people were prevented from responding (19:40). The enemies of Jerusalem “will not leave a stone upon a stone [λίθον ἐπὶ λίθον] within [her], because [she] did not know the appointed time of [her] your visitation” (19:44). And Jesus is “the stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner” (20:17). Jesus repeats here what he said before he entered the holy city (19:44): *the “stones” that matter in the temple are not the ones that form the physical building, but the “Stone” whose presence has resided among those physical stones and who now prophesies the end of those stones.*

Indirectly, Jesus announces a shift in the locale of God’s presence—from the physical temple in Jerusalem to the fleshly body of Jesus. In a sense, the temple is rendered obsolete by Jesus’ incarnation (cf. Jn 4:20–26). The destruction of the temple will prompt people to look for God’s presence in the location where he has come to dwell forever—in Jesus, who, in turn, comes to dwell in his church through the Gospel—his Word and Sacraments. The church must be prepared to see that the end times begin with the death and resurrection of Jesus. After this beginning of the end, God’s grace will no longer come through animal sacrifices at the stone temple. Rather, his grace will come through what the Lord has instituted to be the worship life of the church: catechesis, Baptism, Lord’s Supper. This font of the church’s life prepares the people of God for the parousia, which could come at any time.

Jesus interjects talk of persecution in this final apocalyptic discourse, referring first of all to the period preceding A.D. 70, which portends the universal conflagration at the parousia. He warns his disciples that they will suffer betrayal just as he is about to be betrayed and that they must be prepared if they are to persevere to the end. Christians will experience persecution for no other reason than their connection with Jesus. The name of Jesus defines their identity, for *Christians bear in their bodies Jesus, the new temple, God's holy presence*. For that reason, Christians are living stones and their bodies are temples. The opponents will hate them because the presence of God has shifted from the temple of Jerusalem to where Christ has promised to be present: in those baptized *in his name*, in the Gospel, in his Supper. How ironic that the temple of Jerusalem is destroyed *by God* because the people refused to believe that a shift in divine presence had taken place and that Christians will be killed because they proclaim that this presence now dwells in them and among them!

What is the significance of Jesus' pattern during Holy Week? The infancy narrative (Luke 1-2) emphasized the shift in the location of God's presence from the *stone* temple (cf. 21:5-6) to the new temple of flesh—Jesus himself. As Jesus frequents the (stone) temple during Holy Week, the two are one—in the same place—reinforcing for the disciples that Jesus is the new temple. He is the source of divine teaching. He is the one who speaks the words of God. He is also the new place of atonement, the new Passover sacrifice. The forgiveness of sins comes through him. The time will soon come when the stone temple in Jerusalem

is destroyed (21:5–24) and the schism between Jews and Christians will be wide and deep. But for now during Holy Week the old and the new are together. The new temple teaches in the old temple, and the new people of God—his disciples—freely mingle with the people of the old covenant.

Jesus' movement back and forth across the Kidron Valley links his temple teaching to the Mount of Olives, the place of Jesus' prayer and the location of his betrayal. During Holy Week those in Jesus' company heard his teaching, shared meals with him, and were with him in his times of prayer (cf. 21:36; 22:39–45). In the early church, this pattern of Holy Week will be continued in the Divine Service. Jesus' disciples, "rising early" (cf. 21:38) on Sunday morning (Acts 20:7), the day of resurrection, will flock to the new temple, the church in order to hear the teaching of Jesus—the words of God. There they will also break bread—celebrate the Lord's Supper from the night of his betrayal—and remain watchful in prayer (Lk 21:36). This is the picture of the early church in Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7. Hence Jesus' Holy Week pattern, continued in the church's liturgy—the Service of the Word, the Service of the Sacrament, and the prayers—will preserve the church in faith until the end, so that Jesus' followers will be prepared to stand before the Son of Man when he comes (Lk 21:36).

Much more could be said about the temple in Acts, but this must be left for another time.