

The First Sunday after Epiphany
St. Luke 2:41-52

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

Jesus asked, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Thus says the Lord:

If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them...[i]f anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. Then the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar. He shall remove all its fat, as fat is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma to the LORD. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 4:2, 27-31)

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

Thus says the Lord:

If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the LORD,...[i]f a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity...[i]f a person sins and commits a trespass against the LORD by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: then it shall be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses. (Leviticus 5:15a, 17; 6:2-7)

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

Thus says the Lord:

When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock. If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting. And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire. Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD...The burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. (Leviticus 1:2b-9; 6:9b)

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

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

So, there, in the House of YHWH, you hear of the boy Jesus, a mere 12 years old, just as His mother Mary and guardian Joseph did, having traveled a day's walk from Jerusalem without Him. He was in the company of the people, in their presence, dwelling among them, and instructing them—listening to them, asking them questions, answering their questions—and amazing all in His hearing with His understanding. It would be nice to think that Jesus was catechizing them in the ways of the suffering servant from the prophecies of Isaiah. "Today, in your hearing, these words are being fulfilled," He could have said; He certainly did so having read the Isaiah scroll at the synagogue in Nazareth some 16 years later. (cf. Luke 4:16-22)

Having spent three days in the company of the teachers in the temple courts, His mother and guardian find Him. And, as any worried parent would do—and who wouldn't worry after having lost a 12 year-old for 3 days—they react with a bit of scorn: "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And then, He says it! "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Some translations, perhaps some better known to you, use the word house instead of business. The Greek is vague, for lack of a better term, only letting you know that Jesus was in or about *something* of the Father's. Nevertheless, business or house, it doesn't matter, for this holy Child is in and about both.

Look in the house of the Father and see the 12-year old Immanuel about the business of the Father. Jesus is manifesting Himself to the People as their Savior. There is God-in-the-flesh, the fleshy tabernacle of God walking among them. (cf. John 1:14) In other words, Jesus is the fleshy house of the Father. And, as He is the Word of God, He is also the business of God—the fleshy business of God as the Word became flesh and "'pitched His tent' among us." So, what a profound question Jesus asks His parents; "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" This Jesus is the house of God and the business of God, be He an infant, a 12-year old boy, or a 30-year old man, and even now in eternity, yet come to you in time by way of His means.

So, there He is, Jesus, the house and business of God, in the Temple, the House of God built by human minds and hands—first Solomon, then Zerubbabel, then Herod the Great. And if He is there about His Father's business, then He is there for the forgiveness of sins, to make propitiation for the people as the priests would do. Jesus is always about the business of the Father, bring you salvation, even in those innocuous moments where He is not being circumcised or being threatened with stoning or being crucified. In the stone house of the Father, Jesus is likely foreshadowing what He would do in about 19 years. At the tender age of 12, He is still, as always, set about the task of redeeming the world. In about 19 years, He will return to Jerusalem to be about His Father's business of redeeming the world in a not-so-innocuous way. There, He will be the Sin and Guilt Offering—the lamb without blemish, the spotless Lamb of God—sacrificed on the altar of the cross, shedding His blood to cleanse sinners and make the guilty right with God, and suffering the burning hell of God's wrath and abandonment as a Burnt Offering for satisfaction—as a propitiation—an aroma pleasing to God.

That's why He is Immanuel. That is why He was born and why He lived and why He died: for the forgiveness of all of your sins—everyone who has lived, is living, and will ever live. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15) Only 12 years old, Jesus is at work to save you, redeem you, forgive you—at work about His Father's business.

That's the reality; look back at what YHWH says: "When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands...If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands...he is guilty and will be held responsible." Whether you mean to or not, you sin—"All have sinned," says St. Paul. (Romans 3:23) And, according to the Law of God, whether you mean to or not, you are guilty of it. Intention means nothing when it comes to committing a sin—commit a sin, intentionally or not, and you are guilty—and ignorance is no excuse. So, this is the reality that you must face: all are guilty of sinning. And a Sin or Guilt Offering is then required...maybe even a Burnt Offering.

Therefore, God in His everlasting mercy, "became flesh and dwelt among us." The sacrifices of the Sin Offering, Guilt Offering, and Burnt Offering could not appease God forever. These things were but a shadow, St. Paul says, and the reality or fullness (that is, the fulfillment) is found in Christ—in Immanuel. (cf. Colossians 2:16-17) The author of the Hebrews confirms this when He writes,

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said..."Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.... (Hebrews 10:1-5a, 8-12)

The author also wrote,

We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every

high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. (Hebrews 8:1-5a)

To put it succinctly, the author also wrote "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:17)

By being about His Father's business, even at 12 years of age, He is about the business of the forgiveness of sins. Christ is the propitiation for your sins. He has taken your sin and guilt upon Himself, as it was transferred to the sacrificial animals by the laying on of hands, and died with it on the altar of the cross, removing it from you as far as the east is from the west. You are at peace with God—Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!

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

Thus says the Lord:

When his offering is a sacrifice of a peace offering...he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire to the LORD...and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is on the wood that is on the fire, as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

(Leviticus 3:1a, 2-3a, 5)

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

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

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