

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Luke 2:22 (NIV)

We kind of read over this verse in our last study because there were things that needed to be accomplished before Mary's purification was to take place, 40 days after Jesus was born.

Luke has pulled all of the rites and obligations surrounding the birth of Jesus into one sentence. The most probable reason is that his readers would have known all of the requirements surrounding any birth and it was unnecessary to reiterate them to his immediate readers. That is not true for us living thousands of years later and in a different culture.

“Say to the Israelites: ‘A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period.... Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. He shall offer them before the Lord to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood.

Leviticus 12:2-7a (NIV)

Several questions come to mind when reading this:

- 1) Birthing is normal – why is she unclean?
- 2) Why are a burnt offering and a sin offering necessary?
- 3) Why is the time different for a male child and a female child?

The Bible doesn't explain the why for any of these. The purpose may be that the reasoning behind these instructions is beyond the understanding of the people and culture of the time. Never the less it was important to follow these instructions to keep the people safe from diseases that could result from any flow of blood.

The blood stream in humans is a relatively sterile environment; within the body it maintains a balance. Outside the body it becomes a perfect environment for disease cultures to thrive. Since there is always blood released from the mother in birthing, there is a concern about how that blood is handled. It becomes even more important if there is hemorrhaging during and after the birth. A bacterial infection if it enters the bloodstream can be serious because the blood can spread the bacteria to any part of the body.

I believe that is why she is considered unclean at this time. Because of the blood and the possibility of that blood culturing a disease, she is separated from most of the people until the risk becomes minimal.

The Torah (Law of Moses) stated that 40 days after the birth of a son the mother is considered ceremonially unclean for 7 days and then at 40 days declared clean again by making an offering and immersing herself in a mikveh (ritual bath).

If this is just for protection of the mother and community from infectious diseases, then why the need for burnt offering and a sin offering.

The burnt offering is a poor translation of the Hebrew *olah* meaning ascension. It expresses a desire to be in communion with God, and expiates sins incidentally in the process, because one cannot commune with God if still tainted with sins.

A sin offering (*chatat*) is an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It is an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. It could only be offered for unintentional sins committed through carelessness, not for intentional, malicious sins.

So through the priest, Mary express in her offerings the sorrow for any unintentional sins she may have committed and her desire to be in communion with God.

As for why the difference between a male and female birth, I can find answers but none are conclusive. This will have to remain a mystery for now.