Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Few things in life are more delightful than the birth of a baby. You have proud parents and phone calls to the family and friends, and, of course, lots of photos for Instagram and Facebook. And biblically speaking, it is right that we celebrate the birth of a baby because the very first command given to human beings was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Psalm 127 says, “*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!*” And later on in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the Lord told the people of Israel that if they obeyed Him there would be lots of babies but if they disobeyed Him there would be barrenness and infant mortality. So having babies is something that the Bible clearly describes as good and desirable, and to be celebrated.

So we must to ask: What is Leviticus 12 all about? And the simplest thing to do, of course, would be to ignore it as, you know, ‘Old Testament.’ But that will not do because the Old Testament is a part of the Bible and in today’s cultural climate, people investigating Christianity will have questions about chapters like this. So we need to understand Leviticus 12 and chapters like it. And what we are going to see today that Leviticus 12 has direct links to the Lord Jesus and the gospel.

But why did childbirth need purification in Old Testament times? Why is such a big deal made about childbirth? Why were new mothers unclean, for up to *80 days*! And why was nothing required of fathers? Is this sexism, perhaps? And/or is this a Bible contradiction, because in one place having children is commanded and celebrated, while here it seems like it is something dirty? Well, we are going to see that this was not a sexist ritual or a Bible contradiction. In fact, this purification ritual testifies to the sacredness of life and the importance of birth and motherhood. And our reflections on this chapter should enlarge our devotion to God who through Jesus Christ is redeeming fallen humanity and a contaminated creation.

So as we think about **the gospel in the childbirth purification ritual**, our two points will be the **sanctity** of life and the **sanctification** of life.

1. First of all, then, Leviticus 12 and the **Sanctity** of Life. And sanctity means sacred or holy or precious in the sight of God; life is precious in God’s sight. And we have to understand this before we can look at the details of the ritual that are laid out here.
   1. We have noted this before but **death was not a part of God’s ‘very good’ creation**. Animals and humans were not created to die but to live. So if Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation of the serpent, sin and death would not have come in to contaminate all of creation. Somehow, they would have gone from an earthly existence to a heavenly existence, but not by death. In **Genesis 5**, for example, we read that “*Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him*.” So Enoch did not die; he just went from earth to heaven. And that is how it would have been for Adam and Eve if they had not sinned. So God is pro-life; we were created for life, not death.
   2. And we noted earlier that the very first command that God gave to Adam and Eve was **to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth**. So Adam and Eve were commanded to reproduce – to have children. This is an important part why He created humans male and female; their bodies were designed with bearing children in view. And this was an essential part of marriage that would have been clean and natural and very easy for Adam and Eve and all future couples.
   3. But **then came the Fall**. And you may remember from our study of Chapter 11 that the Fall affected every aspect of creation. **Romans 8** talks about creation being in “*bondage to decay*,” and yearning to be set free from this bondage. And last time we saw this how this affected the animal kingdom; the Fall brought chaos and confusion and change in the animal and bird and fish kingdoms, with the result that were now clean and unclean animals.
      1. Well, that passage in Romans 8 uses another image to describe how the Fall affected creation. Listen to this: “*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now*.” So the pain of childbirth is clearly something bad. And I am sure that every mother here is going uh huh! right now. So sin’s effect on the whole creation is like the intense agony of childbirth. And creation yearns for the day when it will be set free from this pain.
      2. And if you know your Bibles, this “*pain of childbirth*” language will remind you of what? **Genesis 3**. That is where the Lord said to Eve that because of her sin, “*I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children*.”
      3. So, because of the Fall, bearing children, something God designed as pure and natural and easy, would now be difficult and painful and dangerous. And we are not talking here just about the act of giving birth, but everything associated with having children, from the menstrual cycle to male and female reproductive systems to conception to being pregnant to giving birth to the survival of the baby and the mother. All of this was now affected by the Fall; having children was now sometimes not even possible, and if it was, it would be difficult and painful and dangerous.
      4. And congregation, **that is what is in view with this ritual** – the effect of the Fall on something that God designed as a very important part of marriage; something that was originally pure and natural and easy. So this is not about childbirth being a sinful thing or about a woman’s moral status; it is about how the Fall affected something God designed as very good in every respect.
      5. And this is brought out in our text in **verse 7**: There it says, “*She shall be clean from the flow of her blood*.” And in vv3&5 this is equated with menstruation. So it is the loss of blood in child-birth that is the specific focus here. And what we can infer from this is that in God’s original design for reproduction, there was no monthly bleeding for women and no loss of blood in child-birth and the weeks that followed. They are post-Fall realities.
         1. You may remember from our study of the offerings that the people of Israel were forbidden from eating or drinking blood. And this was because, as **Leviticus 17:11** explains, blood is the source of life. So Adam and Eve did not lose blood before the Fall. Losing blood is a consequence of the Fall.
         2. And the loss of blood in child-birth, for many centuries, and sadly sometimes still today, often led to the death of the mother or the child, or both.
         3. So the loss of blood in childbirth is physical evidence of how the Fall has impacted something very important and very good in God’s creation design, bearing children. That is why this ritual was necessary.
   4. Now, having said all this, some of us might still be thinking that it all sounds a bit over-the-top and extreme. Is childbirth really such an ordeal? Well, I won’t ask for a show of hands, but I am pretty sure that some of us will have seen the TV series ‘**Victoria**.’ Yes? It is a historical drama about Queen Victoria. Well, I don’t know if you remember this, but one episode was about the birth of a child to Victoria and Albert. And several weeks after the birth, Victoria went to church for an Anglican service called “**The Churching of Women**.” It is found in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. The reason it exists is because of what we read in Leviticus 12 and because giving birth back then was way more likely to result in the death of the mother or the child or both. So after birth, mother and baby would stay home for several weeks. And only when the mother was sufficiently recovered would she and baby attend church, where this ceremony called the “churching of women” was included in the service. It included responsive readings and prayers and the reading of Psalm 127. And it allowed the congregation to celebrate her survival and to give thanks for the birth of the child. Butin the TV show, Victoria resented this service, because she felt it perpetuated the idea that new mothers were unclean and in need of purification. And she was right because this purification ritual was part of Israel’s ceremonial law that had its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will see why this is so in our second point. But it may interest you to know that it was only several pregnancies later that Victoria learned about a new drug called ‘**the blessed chloroform**,’ which was a pain reliever. However, she had to seek permission from the Archbishop of Canterbury to use it because in those days the pain of childbirth was viewed as something women just had to bear because of Eve’s role in the Fall. The idea that women could take pain-relief for child-birth was frowned upon. And I mention this because it helps us see that pain relief in child-birth and other medical advances that allow most women to cope with and survive child-birth, and be up and about much quicker than used to be the case, which for us is just normal, are fairly recent ‘inventions.’ And this is why Leviticus 12 seems so extreme to us when even just a few hundred years ago it was still horrifyingly real.So again, the loss of blood in child-birth and the potential for death was why this ritual was necessary.
   5. Well, there are a number of implications that arise out of what we have established already regarding the sanctity of life:
      1. The first is that we must **long for and pray for the Second Coming of Jesus and the new heavens and the new earth**. We have already mentioned Romans 8:“*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility … in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*.”
         1. When Adam and Eve were created, God gave them earth and the universe and said, in effect, fill it and explore it and use it and master it and enjoy it. And this would be done easily and without sweating or losing blood and death. And I don’t know exactly what eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth will be like, but it will be even better! Sp pray that Jesus will come back soon!
      2. Secondly, **because God is pro-life, we must be pro-life**. We should be death-haters. And I don’t mean that we fear death, because, as believers, we know that on the other side we go to be with the Lord. But, and I know this sermon is a day late, we oppose things like euthanasia and abortion, because they are about killing, not life. Having a terminal illness or a severe disease and being in pain is a terrible thing to have to endure. Being unexpectedly pregnant for whatever reason is a huge burden to cope with. But God says, “*You shall not kill*.” So we work for things like better palliative care and medicine and pregnancy support; we do not kill.
      3. Thirdly, **motherhood is very good**. It is so good that the consequences of the Fall on God’s good design became the subject of this special ritual. And we could park on this point for a long time because of today’s cultural climate, but we were created for and commanded to have children, if we are able to. And “*children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward*.” And having many children is a blessing from God.That’s what God says. Don’t fall for the world’s lies that career is better than motherhood or fatherhood, or that not having children is better for the planet. “*Children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward*.” Motherhood and fatherhood are very good.
      4. And this brings us, fourthly, to another of today’s hot topics – **transgenderism**. This passage speaks about a “woman” and a “male child” and “she” and “his” and a “female child” and “her” and “a son” and “a daughter” and “he.”
         1. Our world says that there is your biological sex but also your gender identity. But God says, “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female He created them*.” End of story!
         2. When the women of Israel gave birth, they could very quickly see whether their baby was male or female, which determined whether circumcision was necessary, and how long the purifying time would be. There was no ‘wait 10 years and see how the child identifies.’ That is a modern nonsense and it is an attack on the truth.
         3. Now, it needs to be said here that because of the Fall, a very small number of babies are born with genital or reproductive system abnormalities; a set of conditions we today call intersex. That is a separate discussion.
         4. And we also need to acknowledge that people can and do have questions about what being male or female means, especially in a world working so hard to blur all of the distinctions between male and female, and to ram transgenderism down our throats at every opportunity. But the solution, people of God, is rediscovering the wonderful beauty of what God’s word teaches about male and female; not surgery. “*God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female He created them*.”
2. Well, now that we have seen what Leviticus 12 reveals about the sanctity of life and some of its implications, we can move on to the details of this ritual and consider the **Sanctification** of Life. And sanctification means to make holy or to make clean.
   1. So again, because of the Fall’s impact on what God had designed to be natural and clean and easy, as evidenced by the flow of blood that accompanies and follows child-birth, if the Old Testament woman gave birth to a **male child**, she was considered ritually unclean for seven days, and she lived in a kind of ‘managed isolation.’ Then, on the eighth day, the male child was to be circumcised, and Mum could be present for the ceremony. But after that, she was not allowed to go into the tabernacle courtyard or touch anything to do with tabernacle worship for a further 33 days. And this was so that the place where God dwelled among His people was kept free of all of those things that symbolized post-fall uncleanness, such as bleeding. Now, if her child was a female, the mother was unclean and lived in ‘managed isolation’ for two weeks, and after that was not allowed to enter the tabernacle courtyard for a further sixty-six days.
      1. And of course, the obvious questions is: Why is the time of purification with female babies twice that of male babies? And because no reason is expressly stated, we can really only guess at the reason. And commentators offer several suggestions but I believe that the reason that fits best with all we have seen is that every female child was a potential life-bearer, who would be subject to the same bleedings as her mother. So it was because of the preciousness but also the difficulties associated with motherhood that the purification time was doubled.

* 1. Well, when the time of purification came to an end, notice in verse 6 that “***she*** *shall bring to the priest*” at the tabernacle or temple, the prescribed offerings. And the offerings she had to bring were a lamb for a burnt offering, as a symbol of her renewed total devotion to the Lord, and a turtledove or pigeon as a sin offering, remembering that a better name for the sin offering is a ritual purification offering. And if she was poor, the offering could be two turtledoves or two pigeons. And having presented those offerings, she was returned to the state of being ritually pure – able to enter into the presence of God.
     1. And this is why we read **Luke 2** earlier in the service. For eight days after Jesus was born, He was circumcised, as verse 3 required. And 33 days later, “*when the time came for [Mary’s] purification according to the Law of Moses, [she and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord … and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*”
     2. So there is a direct line between Leviticus 12 and the birth of the Saviour, Jesus. And **Galatians 4:4-5** puts this into a salvation context: “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*.”
        1. Think about this for a moment: Jesus was born the same way that you were born. There was an unclean blood flow that accompanied His birth just as it accompanies every birth. What an act of astonishing love on His part to go through this!
        2. But Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He is fully man *and fully God*. He was without sin. And yet, because He was fully human and because He was born, He was subject to all of the demands of the law. But while the law reveals our guilt, it revealed the righteousness or perfection of Jesus. Every law, including this one in Leviticus 12, that is relevant to humans, was fulfilled in relation to or by Jesus.
        3. And did you notice what sacrifice Mary offered? The offering of the poor. **2 Corinthians 8:9** says, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich*.”

So, while we have every reason to give thanks for advances in medicine and the safe birth of children, there is no need for a purification ritual or a churching of women service today ☺

Instead, take the birth of every child as a reminder that because Jesus was born of a poor woman and born under the law, you can become an adopted child of God; you can enjoy the riches of life and eternal life with Christ!

* Have you believed in and received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Have you recognized your sin and guilt and confessed it to God?
* I hope that you have or that you will do this today. Amen.