**Exodus 13:1-3, 11-15**

The Lord said to Moses, **2**  “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” **3** Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. **11** “When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, **12** you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the Lord’s. **13**  Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. **14**  And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. **15** For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

**“An Offering Like No Other”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you in the child born of Mary, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen. The influence of our commercial culture has turned Christmas on its head. Many consider the twelve days of Christmas to be the last twelve shopping days before December 25th. Yet, the first Sunday after Christmas reminds us we are still in the season of Christmas. Gifts might be open, trees torn down, decoration dismantled and family festivities at an end, but the Church says, “Not so fast!” The focus remains fixed on this Christ child. There is much to celebrate about Him more than one night at the manger with Mary and Joseph. A birth is for a moment, but the life of this One even now so small speaks salvation to sinners.

Christmas moves from birth to a somewhat bloodier emphasis. Consider the festivals that fall during these twelve days. We have St. Stephen on Dec. 26h the first martyr of Christendom. Dec. 28th marks The Holy Innocents, the babies Herod slaughtered in Bethlehem. Lastly January 1, the New Year, celebrates the first blood shed by Jesus at His circumcision. Today, we have Jesus for the first time at the temple forty days after birth. What accompanies Him is a sacrifice of some birds, since that is all Mary and Joseph had. Yet, the ideal would have been a lamb offered for the sake of the firstborn son. Strangely enough, Jesus did not need a lamb. He came as the lamb in exchange for the lives of sinners. God chose His Son as the sacrifice and already in the Old Testament Israel had this witness.

1. God tied the firstborn of Israel to His deliverance from Egypt.

* It was quite a night in Egypt, NOT like Christmas!
* The Passover Lamb gave salvation to God’s people.
* Before crossing the Red Sea, God made the lamb to be life for Israel in their firstborn. (male sons and animals)
* The firstborn had a double inheritance, special blessing, and headship of family.

1. Yet, the firstborn need for redemption is deeper than freedom from Egypt.

* Look at how the one born first of Eve killed Abel.
* Esau the head sold his birthright to Jacob for a single meal.
* David sat in sackcloth and ashes over the death of his firstborn son with Bathsheba.
* If the first are not glorious neither is any born into this life of sin and death.

1. Christ’s birth declares Him the only Son of the Father sent to redeem more than the firstborn.

* The offering for purification at the temple is an announcement in the child Jesus that fulfills God’s lawful judgment.
* Simeon saw it, “My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples…”
* The Prophet Zechariah explains the unique character of Christ’s sacrifice, “…When they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn” (12:10).
* God’s one and only firstborn He gave up to set us free from the curse of our first birth.

1. Christ died as the Lamb to bring forth through Him the firstborn of a new creation.

* This holy consecration to life for sinners now comes from Jesus by the water and His Word.
* Forgiveness is what marks our existence so St. Paul says, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).
* Instead of a plague of death like in Egypt, we have the promise of life for St. John tells us Christ is, “the firstborn of the dead…” (Rev 1:5)
* We can speak without fear, like the widow Anna of the redemption that has come into the world.

1. Never tire of asking, “What does this mean?” about the Lord’s deliverance.

* This is what God wanted His people to treasure and pass on.
* Passover was once a year, but whenever a firstborn son came at any time they were to point to the Lamb.
* Jesus as the Lamb worthy who was slain reigns now from His throne has given us gifts of His deliverance to be in our life.
* What does this mean? Know what the Lord does! (Baptism, Absolution, Lord’s Supper)

1. More than teaching is to partake in God’s love for redemption.

* As the lamb given for the firstborn, so they were to look to the promise of the Christ.
* Yet, how remarkable that His place of sacrifice was outside the temple and His own did not receive Him.
* As Christ has come, we now look to how He redeems and makes us His people by the Word and Sacrament.
* There is no way to separate our life from Him. St. Paul says, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The first born of Mary lets us celebrate life by the way of His death. This is because He is the only-begotten Son of God. He came to save not just the first, but everyone including the last. Christmas is about cheerfulness, celebrating, comfort and Scriptures hold out that promise, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow…” (Isaiah 1:18). We see this in the Child Jesus born to be bloodied as the Lamb for our life. We now have an inheritance of heaven, adoption into His family, and blessed work to do in His Name. Amen. Now may the peace of Christ firstborn of Mary and the only Son of God, let you depart in peace. Amen.