

God Redeems What Is Valuable

International Bible Lesson

Exodus 13:13-15 & Luke 2:22-32

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“Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons” (Exodus 13:13).

A donkey could be of valuable service to its owners and others. The Bible does not say so, but pictures show Mary riding a donkey to Bethlehem before Jesus’ birth. The Bible does teach that Jesus rode a borrowed donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. According to Jewish law, the donkey was an unclean animal. Through Moses, God said that if an owner wanted to keep and use his firstborn donkey, he would need to redeem it. He would need to sacrifice a lamb rather than kill his donkey. If he refused to redeem his donkey, he must kill it. God’s law about sacrifices pointed toward the reason for Jesus’ birth. We have all made ourselves morally and spiritually unclean by our sins. We have defiled the name of God and defied Him. We deserve death, because we have behaved like stubborn donkeys before God our Creator. Thankfully, God wants to save us from the death we rightly deserve. God wants to cleanse us and make us holy, restoring what He intended us to become. God wants to make valuable and useful what we have mistreated by our shortsighted self-interest and selfishness. To do so, Jesus came as a sacrificial lamb to die the death we deserve to save us from our sins. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus in the temple, the Holy Spirit inspired him to proclaim: “My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations” (Luke 2:30-31). As the owner redeemed his unclean donkey, Jesus came to redeem us, so we can joyfully serve God and others.

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Thinking Further

1. If you were an Israelite and wanted to keep your firstborn donkey, what did the Law of God require of you?

2. What two ceremonial rituals did Joseph and Mary perform after Jesus was born?

3. What type of sacrifice did Joseph and Mary offer at the temple, and what might that reveal about them?

4. How does the Bible describe the moral and spiritual character of Simeon?

5. What did Simeon say about Jesus when he held Him?