**[Pulpit Commentary](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/luke/1.htm)**

Verse 9. - His lot was to burn incense; more accurately, he obtained by lot the duty of entering and offering incense. The office of burning incense gave the priest to whom this important lot fell the right of entering the holy place. It was the most coveted of all the priestly duties. The Talmud says the priest who obtained the right to perform this high duty was not permitted to draw the lot a second time in the same week, and as the whole number of priests at this time was very large - some say even as many as twenty thousand - Farrar conjectures that it would never happen to the same priest twice in his lifetime to enter that sacred spot.

"There **were four lots** there, and this was

* the first lot (i.e. to cleanse the altar);
* the **second lot** was, who should slay (the sacrifice,) who should sprinkle (the blood), who should remove the ashes from the innermost altar, who should cleanse the candlestick, who should bring the members (or parts of the sacrifice) to the ascent of the altar----
* the **third lot** was, ye new ones, to the incense come, and "cast lots";
* **and the fourth**, ye new ones, with the old ones, who shall bring up the parts from the ascent of the altar to the altar.

**And this was not only the case on the day of atonement, to which these rules belong; but every day in the daily service and sacrifice, when the same rules were observed, as appears from the rubric of the daily sacrifice: (f).**
"the president said unto them (the priests), come and cast lots who shall slay, who shall sprinkle, who shall remove the ashes from the innermost altar, who shall remove the ashes from the candlestick, who shall bring up the parts to the ascent of the altar, &c.

Again, (g),
"he says to them, O ye new ones, to the incense come, and cast lots; and they cast lots, and he is worthy, whom he accounts worthy--and he that is accounted worthy of the incense, takes a vessel, and the vessel is like to a large golden bushel, that holds three kabs, and a bowl in the middle of it, full and heaped up with incense, with a cover, and a sort of a linen cloth put over it.

And it is afterwards said (h),
"he that is worthy of the incense, takes the bowl out of the vessel, and gives it to his friend, or he that is near to him; and if it is scattered from it, in the midst of it, he puts it into his fist; and they teach him, "saying", take care that thou dost not begin before thy face, that thou art not burnt: when he begins, he spreads it and goes out; and he that burns incense, may not do it, until the president says, burn incense.

The account Maimonides gives (i) of this matter, is as follows,
"all the services that they do every day, they do, by lot; and how do they do it? All the priests of the houses of the fathers, of the day, go into the paved chamber, after the pillar of the morning has ascended, and clothe themselves with the priestly garments; and the president who is over the lots is with them, and they stand in a circle; and the president takes a mitre from off the head of one of them, and goes round with it, and the man from whom he begins to number, and they cast lots, as has been explained----

**how do they cast lots?** they stand in a circle, and agree upon a number, eighty, a hundred, or a thousand, or whatsoever number they may agree upon; and the president says to them, put out your fingers, and they put out their fingers, one, or two; and if one puts out three, they number him three; and they do not put out the thumb in the sanctuary, because of deceivers; for the thumb is short, and easy to be put out, and to bend; and he that puts out the thumb, they do not number for him: and the president begins to number from the man that is known, whose mitre he took off first, and he numbers by their fingers, and returns in the round, until he has perfected the number they agreed upon; and the man that completes the number with his finger, he is he that goes out by the first lot to service: and why does he number the number they agree upon, by their fingers that they put out, and does not number them by the men themselves? Because it is forbidden to number Israel, but by means of another thing; as it is said, [1 Samuel 15:4](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/15-4.htm) "And numbered them in Telaim".

There were four lots they cast every day in the morning;

**the first lot;** was, who should cleanse the altar: they cast lots, and he was worthy that was accounted worthy to cleanse it; and he sets the row in order, and brings up the two pieces of wood to the altar, and he brings in the censer full of fire, from the outer altar, to the golden altar, to burn incense upon it:

**and the second lot**, thirteen were worthy of it, according to the order of their standing; how? the president says to them, put out your fingers, and he numbers in the way that has been explained; and he that goes out by the first lot, is he that slays the daily sacrifice of the morning;

* and the second that stands by his side, is he that receives the blood of the daily sacrifice, and sprinkles it;
* and the third that is next to the second, receives the ashes from the innermost altar, which is the altar of incense;
* and the fourth, that is by his side, cleanses the candlestick, and trims the lamps;
* and the fifth brings up the head of the daily sacrifice, and its leg to the ascent of the altar:
* and the sixth brings up the two shoulders;
* and the seventh brings up the extreme part of the backbone, and the other leg;
* and the eighth brings up the breast and the gullet;
* and the ninth brings up the two sides;
* and the tenth brings up the inwards;
* and the eleventh brings up the fine flour, and the drink offerings;
* and the twelfth brings up the things that were fried;
* and the thirteenth brings up the wine of the drink offerings:

**the third lot**, the president says to them, "even" to all the men of the house of the father of that day, whoever has never burnt incense, let him come and "cast lots"; and they gather together to the president, and cast lots; and he that goes out by the lot first, he is he that is worthy to burn incense;

**the fourth lot**, they all gather together, and cast lots to know who shall bring up the parts from the ascent of the altar, to the altar; they cast lots, and he is worthy who is accounted worthy: the daily evening sacrifice, they do not cast another lot for it; but every priest that is worthy of any service of the services of the morning, is worthy of the evening, except that of the incense; for they cast another lot for that in the evening; and every one may come, who has never burnt incense of the men of that house of the fathers, and cast lots for it; but if they have all of them burnt incense already, they all of them cast lots, in the morning, at the third lot; and he that is worthy of it in the morning, burns incense in the evening.

Hence it appears, that the burning of incense, as other parts of the priest's service, was by lot; and that they were new priests, or such who had never burnt incense, that cast lots for it: for it is a tradition (k), that no man ever burnt incense twice; the reason assigned for it is, because it makes a man rich; and therefore that every one might partake of the blessing in their turns, new ones were called unto it: whether Zacharias had ever burnt incense before, and whether he now did it in the morning or evening, is not certain,