

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

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Simeon's Encounter With The Messiah

We want to look at the Birth of the King, being that December 25 is the day that Emperor Constantine, in the early 4th century A.D., established as the traditional day of Jesus' birth. Whether it is the exact day or not is a matter of debate. We'll not enter into that debate today; suffice to say that the biblical and historical data can support a winter birth.

Today we want to enter into a passage not too well known; a passage that at a time of year when people can't decide which god they want to worship, is often passed over. So if you'll turn to the Gospel of Luke we'll be interested in worshipping the true God of the universe, Jesus Christ, without which it is impossible to exist, speak language, have stable categories and have meaning. People don't critically analyze things anymore and it's now part and parcel of the powers that be to keep people from critical thinking. They talk about critical thinking but while they're feeding you this line they're ramming, cramming and jamming paganism down your throat. So what I'm going to do is ram, cram and jam the truth of Christianity down your throat. And I'm not ashamed to do that. At least I'm telling you what I'm doing. And hopefully I give you something to think about. Who is this Jesus Christ that 2000 years ago changed the world forever?

You should be in the Gospel of Luke. Luke was an interesting guy; a medical doctor who is credited as being the human author of two volumes; Luke and Acts. We've been through the Book of Acts recently and the only regret I have is not teaching Luke before I taught Acts since many consider these to be two volumes of the same work. We'll be looking at part of volume one today. In volume one Luke compiles a chronological account of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the King. Luke's unique contribution is that he lays it down chronologically.

Another contribution of Luke comes from his background as a medical doctor. A medical doctor is involved in research, careful documentation, and as such we would expect Luke's gospel to be a very carefully researched, well-documented volume; which it is. He investigates thoroughly and he personally interviews eyewitnesses.

Finally, a third contribution of Luke is that, as a medical doctor he says more about the Birth of the King than any other NT writer. This is natural due to the fact that a medical doctor may see many births but if he was told about a virgin birth then he would want to investigate it thoroughly.

So we want to look at an event closely associated with the birth of the King and that's the King's presentation in Jerusalem. Luke was interested in something Mary told him happened at the King's presentation. See, Luke personally interviewed the mother of the King and Luke hints at that because in 2:51 he says Mary treasured all these things in her heart. And how would Luke have known what Mary treasured in her heart if she hadn't told him. And so from Mary Luke gets eyewitness testimony of something that happened when Mary and Joseph marched up to Jerusalem to present Jesus at the Temple.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem about five miles south of Jerusalem. And Micah prophesied seven centuries before that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. And it was the town where Joseph was born and where he had to return according to the decree of Caesar Augustus that a census be taken of all inhabited Rome. Therefore each Jew had to return to his own city, his city of birth. And God, in His providence, worked over, in and through the Roman Empire to bring about a decree by Caesar Augustus to have a census taken so that Joseph and Mary would travel 70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill Micah 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrethah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you one will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." The King, whose goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity, is the King who is born a man, but is eternally God. And this points to the incarnation, the biblical idea of the incarnation, the idea of God taking to himself humanity in hypostasis. Jesus Christ is undiminished

deity, united with true humanity in one person without confusion, forever. This occurred in the little town of Bethlehem in exact fulfillment of prophecy.

And when Jesus was born He was born under the law of Moses, under the dispensation of law. And therefore Joseph and Mary lived under the Law of Moses and so in our passage today you will observe throughout Joseph and Mary obeying certain laws, which were given by the Lord through Moses in the Torah, the first five books of the OT.

So let's come to Luke 2:21 **And when eight days had passed, before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.** In other words, he'd already been born. We don't know exactly what day it was; it may have been December 25, but we don't know that for sure. Emperor Constantine decided December 25, and that's possible but we just don't know exactly when. And it doesn't really matter because God never commands us to remember the birth of the King, He commands us to remember the death of the King. The death is what is central. Over 33% of the Gospels concern the death of the King, whereas less than 2% concern the birth of the King. So don't be shaken by the fact we don't know the exact date of the birth of the King, God was not interested in men enshrining a certain date for His birth.

Now observe the sequence in verse 21, first, the **angel** appeared and revealed to Mary that she would **conceive** a child by the Holy Spirit and that this child should be **called Jesus**. Second, the child was named **Jesus** on the 8th day after His birth; third, **Jesus** was **circumcised** also on the 8th day during the circumcision ceremony. The naming of the child was a part of the circumcision ceremony. The Jews did not name the baby on the day the baby was born, but at the ceremony where the baby was circumcised. Circumcision was on the 8th day and that has interesting medical implications: we've learned in the 20th century that vitamin K, which is essential to the blood clotting cascade, peaks on the 8th day in a male's life. That just points out the wisdom of God Today medical doctors do it on the first day and give them a vitamin K shot; you can avoid that if you wait till the 8th day. And it was that same day at the ceremony that they named the baby. The name was kept secret, known in many cases only to the father, until it was revealed at the ceremony. In Jesus' case, both Mary and Joseph were told by the angel the name they were to give this son. And He was called **Jesus**. And all this was

in accordance with the Law of Moses, so a major emphasis of verse 21 is that Joseph and Mary were in obedience to the Law of Moses. It's going to be an emphasis throughout the passage. One more question with respect to verse 21. Where was the circumcision ceremony held? We're not told. But we do know that there was no special place required, wherever there was a priest the ceremony could be held. And so presumably He was circumcised and named in Bethlehem.

Verse 22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVE'S OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." Now, we can gather quite a bit of information here. In verse 22, notice the days for their purification according to the Law of Moses were completed. What were the days of purification? Well, let's turn to the Law of Moses. The purification laws are part of the Law of the Lord in Leviticus 12. Joseph and Mary were very accustomed to the law. And there were certain laws of purification. Now you don't want to be confused by the purification ritual. In the translation we'll see that the woman who gave birth to a child became unclean and then you're going to see that the requirement for her was to bring a sin offering to become clean. But it would be wrong to conclude that having a baby is sinful. That's what you want to avoid in this passage. Having a baby is not a sin. But the translation can confuse you because it says that for the mother to become clean she has to offer a sin offering. And yet she committed no sin in giving birth. Giving birth is not sinful. In Genesis 1, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," giving birth is a divine mandate so it can't be sinful. And in Psalm 127:3 "Children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Having children is not sinful, it's a blessing. But in the process of giving birth after the Fall, in a fallen world there are now certain bodily discharges associated with giving birth and it's these discharges which God is saying are abnormal and incompatible with his holiness. The woman would bleed, bright red, then brown and finally pale over a period of time and this meant she was not "normal, not wholly healthy" at the time and so she was unclean and could not enter the Temple because God is holy.

Now this is all the Old Testament, so understand that what God is trying to say is that due to the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world when a woman gives birth these bodily discharges come forth and these are what render her ritually unclean and incompatible with My holiness. We can infer from this that had man not fallen in the garden and sin had not entered, then when a woman gave birth there would be no bodily discharges that would render her unclean. But don't think that because she has become unclean she has committed sin, she hasn't. It's simply that giving birth in a fallen world causes bodily discharges which render her unclean and incompatible with the holiness of God. And so a woman who gave birth could not go to the Temple until the days of her purification were completed and sacrifice was made. Now look at verse 2, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male *child*, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean.'" When a woman underwent menstruation there was a bodily discharge and this caused her to be unclean. This section is all about uncleanness caused by bodily discharges. Verse 3 'On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.'" We saw that in the gospel of Luke Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Verse 4 "Then," that is, after the eighth day, "she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. ⁵'But if she bears a female *child*, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for sixty-six days.'" Now, we don't know why if it was a male it was 33 days of purification and if it was a female it was 66 days of purification. There have been a number of suggestions made by godly commentators but no final certainty to any of them. Perhaps if medical science continues to advance we will discover certain reasons as we have with other of these laws. Verse 6, 'When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.'" So at the completion of the days of purification she would bring a sin offering and that may make you think that it was sinful for the woman to have a child but that's not what the Hebrew text is communicating, it would be better to simply understand it as she has become ritually unclean. Verse 7, "Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a *child*, whether a male or a female.'" Now look at

verse 8, and remember what Joseph and Mary brought as an offering, 'But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.'" What did Mary bring? A lamb? Or two turtledoves or two young pigeons? Two turtledoves or two young pigeons. So it tells you that Joseph and Mary were not wealthy. Why either one? Because of migratory patterns. Turtledoves and pigeons were migrating through the Promised Land at different times. And so God who wrote the law, and having written the laws of migration into the bird kinds, knows that in the promised land at one time of year the turtledoves will be passing through and at another time of year pigeons will be passing through and so to accommodate to women who give birth at all times of year He gave them the freedom to offer two turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Now let's come back to Luke 2:22. Let's put this together. First she was unclean for 7 days, as with menstruation, then on the 8th day the male child was circumcised and the ban on her uncleanness was lifted for this day so she could attend the circumcision, then she was unclean for 33 more days for a male child to complete the days of her purification. $7 + 1 + 33$ equal 41 days. So Jesus was taken to Jerusalem and presented on the 41st day of his life. This was the law. Verse 23, **as it is written in the law of the Lord, "every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord."** Why was this? Why was the firstborn male to be consecrated to the Lord? You should have some kind of a quotation if you have a study Bible in your margin. That's to give you a hint of where to find the answer. Exodus 13:2 and 12. What happened in Exodus 13? Passover, the first Passover. What does Passover commemorate? On the night of the 10th plague in Egypt the angel of death would go to every house in Egypt and if there was blood over the door then he would Passover that house and the firstborn son of man and cattle would be spared. But if there was not blood over the door then he would enter into that house and destroyed the firstborn son of man and cattle. The doctrine of judgment/salvation. Now in commemoration of this historic event every firstborn son of Israel was the Lord's, they belonged to Him for his service. Initially it was a firstborn son of every tribe; no matter which of the 12 tribes you were from your firstborn son would serve as a priest. Later the Levites were chosen to be the priestly tribe and so the law came about that you could redeem your son if you are of another tribe for five shekels of silver. Jesus was born of the tribe of David and therefore he did not

have to be consecrated, he could be redeemed, but Mary and Joseph chose to consecrate Him to the Lord for His service because ultimately He is going to be the Priest of His own sacrifice.

So, Luke reports the presentation of the King and now we're going to go into a very vivid picture of the events that occurred when Jesus was presented. Luke is a brilliant writer so far as painting pictures in our mind. So watch starting in verse 25, **and there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.** Let's take that sentence apart. First we have a man named Simeon. Simeon has as its root Shema which means to hear. His name means to hear and obey or to hearken. And then we have his character given. **And this man was righteous and devout.** **Righteous** is the term used for a Jew who was a part of the believing remnant. He was a Jew who believed as Abraham had believed. Abraham looked forward to the promised One and Simeon looked forward to the promised One and put his faith in Him and Him alone. So he was counted righteous. He was justified by faith and not by works. And he was also **devout**. By this it means he lived out the practical ramifications of his faith. In this context it means that he lived with constant expectation of God's promised One arriving. Then we have the participial explanation that explains his constant expectation. **Looking for the consolation of Israel;** what is the consolation of Israel? In later times the Jews called the Messiah the Consoler or the Comforter, and the reason they called Him this was because He would bring them rest from their enemies; He would restore the kingdom and He would give Israel rest on all sides from the four Gentile kingdoms that crush and oppress the Jewish people. So Simeon was looking forward to God's promised One coming and rescuing Israel from her Gentile oppressors and bringing Israel into her kingdom where she could have rest on all sides.

And the end of verse 25 says **and the Holy Spirit was upon him** which means that Simeon was a prophet. And later in the passage Simeon is going to prophesy. Verse 26, **And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.** Being a prophet God revealed himself directly to Simeon by means of the Holy Spirit; God the Father, if we are to think properly about God, in the Trinitarian model. One God in three persons. In this model, God the

Father is the Architect of the plan, God the Son is the Executor of the plan and God the Holy Spirit is the Revealer of the plan. And here we have God the Holy Spirit revealing to Simeon part of the plan, **that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah**. And some people suppose from this that Simeon was an old man but the text never says her was an old man. It just states that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah.

Notice the Messiah is called the **Lord's Messiah**, meaning He has been chosen by the Father to bring consolation to Israel. The word **Messiah** in the Old Testament or Christ in the New Testament is a very specific term that refers to the Anointed One. All the King's were anointed. Who anointed the King? The prophet. There was always a prophet who anointed the King. So always before the King comes the prophet. When Saul was anointed king who anointed Saul? Samuel. When David was anointed king who anointed David? Nathan. And when Jesus was anointed king who anointed Jesus? Who, in three of the four Gospels, is the first person introduced? It's not Jesus. It's John the Baptist. Why does John the Baptist precede Jesus? Because he's the prophet who anoints the King. Always the prophet is a forerunner of the King. He prepares the way so that the King, when he is revealed, is accepted by the nation.

Here we have the Lord's Messiah and he's being taken to the Temple in Jerusalem to be presented and the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon something very specific; that before he died he would see the Lord's Anointed One, the King.

With that said look at verse 27. The way this is written is in the aorist tense and what it means is that this is perfect timing; it's not by chance, it's by design. History is run by the Personal God, not chance, nothing happens by chance. You have Jesus Christ being carried by his mother, Mary, and they're walking into the Temple. Mary is going to the Temple because her days of purification are complete and she's taking Jesus down to present him, consecrate Him to God. They walk up the southern steps into the court of the Gentiles, up more steps into the court of Israel. And they're walking along and as they walk along Simeon's walking and he's also inside the temple, it says right there in verse 27 **he came in the Spirit into the temple**. So here he comes walking along, he's being led by the Spirit, and then in another

place you have Mary and Joseph walking alone and in verse 28 there's an interception. This is timed so perfectly. It's like God the Holy Spirit says all right, walk in and you can walk and there's all these people in the Temple, hundreds of people and Simeon, I just want you to walk and don't worry about a thing, you just walk and the first couple you bump into will have a baby and I want you to intercept the baby because that baby is the Messiah. And that's what he did, he just walked and God the Holy Spirit providentially controlling history caused him to walk right through hundreds of people wandering around in the Temple and he didn't have to slow down, he didn't have to speed up, he was on a perfect course that led right to Mary and Joseph carrying this baby and he was right there to intercept him right out of her arms. That's how controlled history is. God controls down to the number of steps you take, the rate of travel, the length of stride, everything such that no encounter is a chance encounter. And in verse 28 he's walking and the interception occurs, **then he took him into his arms, and blessed God, and said**, now right there in the Temple compound this man intercepted Mary and Joseph's baby and now he's going to prophesy about this baby. And notice the very first response he has to the Messiah. Notice what he does because this is the only proper response to the Messiah. Did he say, oh Mary thank you for bringing this baby here? Did he say, oh Joseph thank you for being so faithful in keeping the law that you would bring this child to present him to the Lord? No, he blesses God who "sent forth His Son in the fullness of times, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that he might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Always you bless God. God has done this. Mary hasn't done this. Joseph hasn't done this. God has done this and God alone is to be blessed, this is the proper response on the day we celebrate Christ's birth, we should bless God for sending His Son to die for our sins and rise from the dead.

Verse 29 we have Simeon's prophecy, **Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; ³⁰For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.** Now, think what you might think if someone just said that about your baby. Who is this guy? And how does he know so much about my baby? So let's look at what he says. Verse 29, **Now Lord**, at that instant Simeon was released and he could **depart in peace**, we don't know how long this guy had been around. He could have been 25 or

he could've been 85, we don't know. But the instant that he saw the Lord's Messiah he could have keeled over. God obligates Himself to keep His word and Simeon recognized that at the moment he saw the Lord's Christ he could now die in peace, according to God's word. Is God faithful? God is always faithful. He does exactly what he says He will do 100% of the time.

Verse 30 gives the explanation for why at that point Simeon could die in peace. **For my eyes have seen Your salvation**, what is salvation? Salvation is the person of the Messiah, Jesus. Salvation from what? From our sins. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And Jesus is the one who saves us from our sins. That's what His name means. Yeshua, YHWH is salvation. So to see Jesus is to see salvation. He is salvation. And if Jesus is salvation then good works cannot be salvation. Jesus equals salvation, good works do not equal salvation. This is why Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me." And this is why Peter and John said, "and there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." Not Buddha, not Confucius, not Mohammed, not Joseph Smith, there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved except Jesus.

Verse 31, **which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples**, very significant. Not only prepared in the presence of the Jews, but Jesus was prepared in the presence of all peoples, both Jew and Gentile. Luke is pointing to the universal availability of salvation. Who came from the East to find the King of the Jews? Who came from the East to worship Him? Gentile astronomers. And where was Jesus born? In Bethlehem of Judea. A small Jewish town in the Roman Empire. Salvation came to both Jews and Gentiles. This was not a private thing done in some private part of the world. This was a public thing, predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, proclaimed in Jerusalem, revealed to Herod the Great and presented publicly at the Temple. This was far from a private preparation, but rather a public preparation in the presence of all the peoples, Jew and Gentile.

And, verse 32 proclaims that He is for all the peoples, both Jew and Gentile. **A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.** Two things, **A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES.** The Gentiles were in the dark and therefore when Christ came He was a light to

those in darkness. He is the light of the world and He is the highest revelation of God, the purest, most intense revelation the world has ever seen. And second, He is **the glory of Your people Israel**. Israel is God's people. And the Messiah is the glory of the people of Israel. Despite the fact that they did not recognize their Messiah, that they did not recognize their glory, Jesus is still their glory and one day they will recognize him as Simeon recognized Him, as the glory of Israel. And so again, this verse stresses the universal availability of salvation in Jesus Christ, to both Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 33, **and his father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about him**. Why were they so astonished? It could've been because here's some unknown man who knows so much about their baby. Or it could be because they have not connected certain messianic passages from the Old Testament to their son. Whatever the case there are number of reasons why anyone of us would be astonished if such things were said about our son.

Verse 34, **and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed – ³⁵and a sword will pierce even your own soul** – in other words what that's saying in the parenthetical there is addressed to Mary. And what we think it's a reference to is the fact that ultimately her Son is going to be crucified and she's going to be standing there and it can be very painful for her to see Him die. A sword will pierce through her soul.

Let's conclude with the non-parenthetical portion of this prophecy. Simeon was a prophet and Simeon turns to bless Joseph and Mary and he says specifically to Mary that this child is going to be a stone of stumbling; that is, He has been chosen to divide the nation Israel. Some Jews will respond negatively to Him and others will respond positively to Him. God always has a remnant of those who believe. Those who reject will **fall**. Those who believe will **rise**. There's going to be a separation in the nation and God appointed His Son for this separation and if we read this without the parenthetical remark we'll see the separation. Jesus Christ divides men and we see it in our culture so clearly and either you will line up on one side believing in the Lord Jesus Christ or you line up on the other side and you reject the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's read this leaving out the parenthetical portion so we get

the flow. **Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed...to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.** In other words what is the purpose of this child? Whatever people do with this child is going to reveal the thoughts of their hearts. What did Jesus say in Matthew 16? What did He ask His apostles? "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." But he said to them, "who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." Everyone is on one side of the fence or the other in terms of how they answer that question. Who do you say that Jesus is? How you answer that question, ironically, doesn't necessarily tell us who Jesus is. If you think about the question, the logic of the question is that however you respond to that question tells us who you are. It gives us a commentary of your heart, it reveals the thoughts of your heart, it unveils how you are responding to Him, and how you are responding to the light of the world. Jesus is the light of the world but men love darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. And everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. He who believes in him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God. In other words, what the Scriptures are teaching is that men are naturally inclined to love the darkness because they're sinners and so when the light came into the world their response to the light is naturally to flee the light lest their deeds be exposed. But the good news is that Jesus Christ has borne our deeds and our sin on the cross that all who believe in Him might become the righteousness of God. He bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might become the righteousness of God. Who do you say that Jesus Christ is? However use the question reveals who you are. And it reveals whether God has opened your eyes to behold Jesus Christ for who He really is, the Son of the living God, who loved you and gave Himself for you. Do you believe in Him?

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