

FOUR GREAT VISITS OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY  
2012

INTRO: When I began the ministry as pastor, for the first number of Christmas's I preached through Matthew 1 and 2. Then in 1998 I began in Luke. I am going from Luke 1:26 through Luke 2:38. I give this section the title, "Four Great Visits Of The Christmas Story."

- I. THE VISIT TO MARY (Luke 1:26-38)
- II. THE VISIT TO ELIZABETH (Luke 1:39-56)
- III. THE VISIT TO BETHLEHEM (Luke 2:1-20)
- IV. THE VISIT TO JERUSALEM (Luke 2:21-38)

We are now in the fourth great visit, the visit to Jerusalem. Last two Christmas's we considered the rites that take place in verses 21-24. There is the circumcision and the naming of the child which took place 8 days after birth, the purification of the mother, the presentation of the child at the temple and the sacrificial offering which took place 40 days after birth.

This morning we are to look at the man Simeon, and his meeting with Mary, Joseph and Jesus at the temple.

I. THE INTRODUCTION TO SIMEON

Now, interestingly, before Joseph and Mary can perform that which they came to the temple for, the account of this story is interrupted by a man. His name is Simeon. The name Simeon means 'a hearing' and implies a hearing by Jehovah. Maybe like Leah of old, some woman dearly wanted a child and when she received one in answer to prayer, she called him Simeon, the Lord has heard my prayer. But notice that it makes a point to say that he was a 'man in Jerusalem'. No doubt there were Simeons all over Israel and many in Jerusalem. Why is it pointed out here that he was a man in Jerusalem? Could it be that by the time Jesus was born there were few left in Jerusalem who were just and devout and waiting for the consolation of Israel? We do not know, but it is a possibility.

Regarding this Simeon, Albert Barnes says that some think this Simeon was the son of the famous Hillel. That Hillel is the one I have mentioned frequently in connection with the two major views of divorce and remarriage among the Jews. If that is so, then this Simeon is also the father of Gamaliel, at whose feet the Apostle Paul had been trained. However, I hardly think one would expect a godly man like this Simeon from a liberal man like Rabbi Hillel.

So, notice just how godly this man Simeon is. He is called 'just'. There was another Jew called Simon the Just, but this cannot be a reference to him, but he had the similar character of being just. The original word is for just is *dikaios*, and it occurs 81 times in the NT. 41 times it has been translated righteous; 33 times just, and 5 times right with 2 miscellaneous translations. He was a righteous man. He did what is right. We read of Joseph, the husband of Mary, that he too was a just man. God uses just men for His purposes of a nature such as we have in the Christmas story.

Furthermore, he was a devout man. He was a reverent, godly, or pious man. He did not play church, as we might say. He was genuine. He did not have to be babysat to keep his spiritual life vibrant. He lived inside. He was the kind of man who kept going spiritually no matter how hopeless things might look. As far as hopes for a Messiah, well, for over 400 years they had not heard from the Lord through a prophet. Though religiosity was there in Jerusalem by the tons, true devoutness or piety was almost entirely missing. But there were exceptions, and Simeon was such an exception. No matter where everyone else had wandered spiritually, he was on track. He was personally in touch with God.

It is then not surprising to read that he was also waiting for the consolation of Israel. Had news reached him that eight days earlier the shepherds of Bethlehem had witnessed a divine visitation? Had he heard that at Migdal Adar, a lamb of a different sort had been born? We are not told. What we are told is that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Now let me tell you about this word 'consolation'. We are more familiar with the Greek word 'parakleet' since the Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to in our hymns as the 'Parakleet'. That is the word, comfort or comforter. We call the Holy Spirit the comforter, for so the NT calls him in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7.

You see, Israel had been promised a Messiah. But the promise was older than our promise that Christ is returning some day. And many gave lip service to their religiosity, but few really believed it any more. For over 400 years God had not spoken to Israel through His prophets any more. To be honest, it looked quite hopeless that that promise would really come true. May I ask you a question? How anxiously are you and I waiting for the return of Christ? May I tell you this, that the Church today is in exactly the same sad state with regard to the return of Christ that Israel was with regard to the coming of the Messiah. We have given up hope and turned our attention to making this world a better place to live so that we might have it good for a long time yet.

But we are given yet one more description of this man Simeon. It says the Holy Spirit was upon him. Let me add something here with regard to the difference of operation of the Holy Spirit in the OT and in the NT. We read in the OT that the Holy Spirit came on people, and when He did, it had a dramatic impact on them. In the NT, when the Holy Spirit comes to a person He enters the person so that we speak of the filling of the Spirit. And what has exercised me over the past year or so is the name, "Holy" Spirit. That is His main name. Sometimes He is called the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of the Lord, or the Spirit of the Father, or the Spirit of glory, or the Comforter, or the Promise of the Father or the Spirit of Christ, or the One Spirit, or the seven Spirits, or the Spirit of life or of holiness or of wisdom or of faith or of truth or of grace or of adoption, or of power, or of love or of a sound mind; but usually He is called the Holy Spirit.

And let me say this, you cannot be a Christian without having the 'Holy' Spirit. And if you have the 'Holy' Spirit, one cannot be living in constant sin,

and one must be continually cleansed from sin. The chief characteristic of the Holy Spirit is holiness!

And in our text it says that the "Holy Spirit" was upon Simeon. The Holy Spirit is likened to a dove. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Him. Do you know what a flighty thing a dove is? I do not know much about doves but I have heard that any bit of roughness or anything that looks like it might be dangerous causes a dove to take flight. It likes the peaceful, the quiet, the gentle. And this Holy Spirit rested upon Simeon. That tells us a little of what kind of man this was. That is a good Christmas message, don't you think?

I feel that slowly, ever so slowly, I am learning to do that which allows the Holy Spirit to rest upon me, and ever so slowly I am learning what things cause Him to withdraw. Nothing is a greater blessing than to have the sense of the presence and approval of the HOLY Spirit.

## II. THE REVELATION TO SIMEON

Well, we have seen a little of what kind of man Simeon was. Now let us consider what he had been privileged to learn because he was in such close contact with God. Look at verse 26 (read). So, our text says that this Simon or Simeon had had a revelation by the Holy Spirit. We could spend the rest of this message on people receiving divine revelations. There is a clause that has become popular among Christians. It goes like this, "The Lord told me this..." Or, "The Lord told me that..." Or, "The Lord showed me that..." and so on.

I am no expert on the subject of the leading of the Holy Spirit and how God does it, but let me tell you this, I am very shy to use such words, "The Lord told me..." In the town where I grew up a certain Mennonite church came under charismatic influence and they had many people who said the Lord told me this or that or the Lord showed me this or that. I am told that one lady had a revelation from the Lord that another lady's child would not die as the doctors had indicated, but the child died. Now, if you say the

Lord told you that would not happen and it did, you have become a false prophet. That is very serious. This is a note of caution.

However, in our text is a statement by the Word of God that the Holy Spirit had given to Simeon a divine revelation, and it was that he should not die before the Messiah came. And the text calls this little baby that has been brought into the temple, 'the Lord's Christ.' That means, the Lord's anointed One. In the OT that would mean the Lord's Messiah.

Now one does not know what Simeon expected this day as he came to the temple. So let me tell you a little of what it was like to go to the temple. I think if you were to enter the Canadian parliament buildings, or if you were to go to the White House of the United States of America you would not yet have experienced what it was like to go to the temple.

When the Queen of Sheba, who was royalty and used to royal things went to Israel to see Solomon in Jerusalem and she saw this city and the king's servants and all the food they prepared every day, and how they were dressed and the cupbearers, and the Bible says when she saw the entryway by which Solomon went up to the temple, all spirit went out of her. She had never seen the likes. And I understand one of the reasons she mentions this entryway is because of the massive stones that were cut and laid out, stones of, I think possibly 20 feet in length, all beautifully laid out (1 Kings 20:1-9). And I am told that going to this temple after Herod rebuilt and beautified it, was even more spectacular than Solomon's temple.

And I suppose that Simeon came to the temple in the morning as the sun was rising over Jerusalem. Did he have a premonition of what he would encounter this morning? We do not know. We do know that he must have expected every day that today would be the day he would see the Lord's Christ. I rather sense that he expected something special this morning. It says in verse 27 that he came into the temple by the Spirit. It would seem the Spirit said, "Go to the temple today. You must go today."

And as he came this day, the gatekeepers recognized him immediately and he was allowed entrance without question. And no sooner was he in the temple, when he sees this young couple with a new baby. That is nothing new. All 8 day old boy babies were brought here if possible. But I suppose that immediately he recognized by that same Spirit that had said, "You must go today" he recognized that this was indeed the Lord's Christ. Finally! At long last! After 4000 years of waiting, the Messiah had arrived. He was there in the arms of that young couple!

Well, this young couple had come to do for their son what all Jews do, for it was according to the custom of the law. I wonder if you can picture the scene in your mind? Here is this young couple. They are poor. You can tell by the sacrifice they have brought. And maybe even their Sabbath best clothes indicated that they were not a family of wealth. But something goes through the mind of Simeon and to him, beyond all doubt, this child is the fulfillment of God's promise to him by the Spirit.

I think I know a little of what he felt. I am not sure. When we were in Jerusalem this last time, we were treated to a very special trip. In the evening, when it was dark, we were taken to the Western or Wailing Wall. This evening we were to be taken on a tour down to the bottom of the wall in an excavation and there we would follow the wall as it had been in Jesus day. There had been some kind of power outage and it was becoming doubtful if we would be able to go in. But the power was restored and we made an unforgettable trip down along the base of the wall. Here we saw many of the original stones that Solomon laid over 3000 years earlier. And even when I penned these words I was deeply moved in my spirit. Somehow, when we were there, I sensed that this is as far as you can go while here on earth. Up to here, every step was closer. Closer to something or Someone very special. From here, every step was away. Away from something or Someone very special. Only at death can one come closer.

Maybe Simeon felt something like that this day. And when he approached this young couple, he reached out his arms, and he held in his arms, that toward which

every step so far had taken him, and that from which hereafter every step was away, away from Someone very special. As long as he held this baby, he had as close to his heart, physically, the Ruler of the universe, the hope of Israel; as one can possibly have the Lord's Christ.

### III. THE WORDS OF SIMEON

And when he had taken up Jesus in His arms he blessed God, and we want to look at those words. Simeon began like this, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace..." He is saying, "Lord, my journey here on earth is done. I could not depart in peace. My people have been without the shekinah glory of God for all these years, though we have this beautiful temple. But now my eyes have beheld Your Christ. I can now depart in peace. I know that all is well. He is here."

And so he said, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word. Your word was that I would depart and take my long journey when I had seen Your Christ." And so verse 30 goes on, "For my eyes have seen your salvation." You see, Joseph and Mary had both been divinely instructed to call this little baby, "Jesus". That means 'Jehovah saves.' He was given that name because He was God's salvation. Jesus would save His people from their sins, I have mentioned this over and over, it was not in their sins but from their sins. This matter of saving people from their sins is that life-long process of being delivered from the bondage to sin.

Then Simeon goes on like this, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation..." and here is the addition regarding this salvation, It is that salvation, and I quote, "...which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

When Jesus was born, there in Bethlehem, it was not just for Israel. God had the whole world in view. When God chose Israel in the first place, He had the whole world in view. Israel was to be His witness to

the world. When God called Abraham it was that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed.

Not too long ago I spoke with Gershon Solomon of the Temple Mount Faithful in Jerusalem. And he spoke to me, a Gentile, most animatedly about God's plan to bless the Gentiles with the future temple that is to be built in Jerusalem. He, a full blooded Jew, recognized God wants Israel and Jerusalem and the temple to be a blessing to the whole world.

Let me tell you briefly what happened. When the Messiah came, which is our topic this Christmas morning, He came, grew up, and began to minister. But not only the Jews, but the Gentiles rejected Him as well. There were the Sanhedrin, the Jews; Herod part Jew as well, and Pilate, the Roman Gentile. They all had their hand in the death of Christ.

And then, when Christ was resurrected, since Israel was not ready for their Savior, the Lord's Christ, God began a new work we know as the Church. We are still in that work. But when it is completed, God will remove the Church. Then, during the tribulation, the Jew will bring the message of the Gospel to the world and all nations will be blessed. And when that time is completed, the temple of the book of Ezekiel will be built and the Lord's Christ will rule the whole world from there. The whole world has always been the scope of God's plan!

But notice once more Simeon's words, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." This salvation was the glory of God's people, Israel. Let us, as Gentiles never forget that we are indebted to the Jew for our salvation.

In November of 1993, I wrote this poem called, "Thank You Father For The Jew". It goes like this:

From German Gentile to the Jew,

I'm indebted to you Jews

For the One who brought good news.  
If it were not for you folk,  
I would die without a hope.

Yes, and...

I'm indebted to you too,  
For the Test'ments Old and New.  
If it were not for God's Word;  
I could ne'er have known my Lord.

So...

I'm indebted to the Jew,  
For my Savior, and this too;  
If it were not for this nat'n;  
Strang'r I'd be to God's salvat'n.

Yes!

I'm indebted to this race  
For salvation by God's grace;  
If it were not for the Jew,  
O my God, what would I do?

Thank you Father for the Jew!

#### IV. THE RESPONSE TO SIMEON

So, let's consider the response of Joseph and Mary to Simeon's message in verse 33 (read). Let me put that in perspective for you. I suppose that many a tongue wagged when Mary was expecting before marriage and when they had an early wedding. Thirty some years later, in my interpretation of John 8, the Jews still accused Jesus as being an illegitimate child. And now Joseph and Mary, knowing the whole story, but always fearful of the suspicion of others, maybe especially when they brought their child to the temple, saw this very godly elderly man come, and he took their child in his arms, favorably. And then they heard these most incredible words from a man whom they might not even have known! No wonder they marveled. Without being told anything, this man knew who this child was!

#### V. THE PROPHECIES OF SIMEON

And so last, this morning, let us look at Simeon's prophecies (read 35-36). I will only briefly mention a few things. These verses are beyond the scope of this message. Notice first these words, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel..." I cannot read those words without thinking of a book called, "The Fall and Rise of Israel." This book was written by a Canadian, probably one of the rarest and best works ever produced on Israel by a Canadian. This book went out of print and was reprinted by Heralds of Hope and I bought it, probably 30 years ago. And the forward to this book is penned by I.C. Rand. Let me read the last words of the forward so you will understand who I.C. Rand was. The forward is signed, "I.C. Rand, Supreme Court of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario." You see, we have had others like our own Stephen Harper.

And in this book is recorded the history of the fall and rise of Israel. The words of Simeon's prophecy here are simply incredible, and I cannot begin in this message to expound on them, only to tell you this, the fall is past and the rising is even now in progress!

Well, when I came to these words I was out of time for this message and I will consider, if I speak on a Christmas again, to do one message on verses 34-35. But notice just briefly verse 35. Simeon, addressing Mary, says, "...yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also..." Well, Mary would learn what he meant some 30 years later. And then the final words of our text, "...that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." What incredible words.

CONCL: And so, in closing, our subject this morning has been centered on that aged man, Simeon, who had been promised by the Lord that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. And this morning we saw what happened in that holy place when this young couple brought this young child to complete the prescribed rites for a Jewish male child.

May it be that we have some Jewish viewers this morning? From our text we wish to convey to you that Jesus Christ is

the Lord's Christ. He is Jehovah's Messiah, Yeshuah,  
Hamashiah.