

June 10, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 2:21-40.

1. Why were Joseph and Mary concerned to keep the Mosaic Law if they lived in New Testament times?
2. Describe the character traits Luke listed for Simeon.
3. Why is there no lineage stated for Simeon or connection with “famous” people?
4. What about Simeon’s declaration about Jesus must have frightened Mary?
5. Does the “redemption of Jerusalem” have any impact on us modern Christians?
6. Explain how Jesus *grew and became strong, filled with wisdom*.

FRIGHTENING NEWS OF GREAT JOY **Luke 2:21-40**

I heard a secular news commentator state what I consider to be a remarkable conclusion for a man in his position. He was commenting on the Supreme Court’s recent decision in favor of Jack Phillips, the now famous Colorado cake baker, and concluded, “No one can live out the truth of the Bible in this world without facing conflict.”

If you try to live out the principles and truths you find in the Bible, and if you pay attention to the ceaseless mockery, rejection, and persecution of Christians who try to live honoring lives for Christ, you know that is an accurate conclusion. It seems like such a paradox. Last week we studied about the good news the angels announced to the shepherds. We learned that it was wonderfully good news for people on earth who are promised peace with God. And who are the recipients of that peace, who are the people who rejoice? They are people with whom God is pleased (Luke 2:14).

And that discrimination is why the good news is also frightening news. God is not pleased with everyone in the world. Every single person in the world is born at odds with our Creator. This has been the case since the births of Cain and Abel. The good news is that out of the mass of humanity that is born opposed to God, God graciously pours out His grace on particular individuals who hear the good news, embrace the good news, are born again by the miracle of regeneration, and, as a result, love Jesus.

The people of the world who do not know or recognize God’s grace are always at odds with the people with whom God is pleased. At best, there is always an uneasy peace between the two groups. At worst, there is outright physical warfare as the children of Satan attempt to silence the wonderful truth, the good news that Jesus is the Savior from sin.

When Joseph and Mary took eight-day-old Jesus to the temple to fulfill the requirements of the law, they met a couple of senior saints who demonstrated this conflict regarding the good news. Anna was a prophetess who was delighted to see the fulfillment of God’s long-awaited promise with her own eyes. Simeon was a devout believer in God and His promises. He, too, was delighted to see the fulfillment of God’s promise, the Savior. But he also prophesied some very frightening news about the work Jesus would do.

The text is a good reminder to us that, while we love and embrace the “Good News” that Jesus is the Savior from sin, not everyone is excited to hear that. Satan fears Jesus more than we can imagine. He cannot strike at God the Son because He is no longer on earth. Therefore, Satan hinders, tries to interrupt, and persecutes the people among whom Jesus is doing His work. This resistance should

be expected as the Savior continues to carry out the amazing work of redeeming the fallen creation.

According to the Law.

Mary and Joseph did what God required. By the time baby Jesus was eight days old, His parents had Him circumcised and named Him. *And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb (v.21).*

That Jesus was circumcised reveals His complete identification with humanity. His circumcision was an act performed on the human flesh, the same flesh principle of which we all are made. More than that, circumcision was an act that identified Jesus with the Jewish race, who God marked off from others by the rite of circumcision. That is precisely what John declared when he wrote, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him (John 1:11).*

At the same time when Jesus was circumcised, Mary and Joseph gave the name God's messenger had authorized. Jesus was God's chosen name for His Son. Through Gabriel the messenger, God even explained the meaning: *for he shall save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)*. Gabriel also connected the particular name with the house of David and the divine kingship when he explained to Mary, *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).*

Obviously, Mary and Joseph trusted God's message through messenger Gabriel implicitly. They did what God said and named the baby Jesus. Luke's story about the Good News is full of promises made and promises kept according to God's perfect timing. Indeed, that is the story of salvation.

Notice the next verse in which Luke affirmed that, because Mary and Joseph trusted God, they were quick to do what God's Law required. *And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (v.22)*. The phrase *when the time came* is so significant,

not only in this text but throughout Luke's writings. The Greek word is *pimpleimi* which means to fulfill, fill up or complete. Between this Gospel account and *the Acts of the Apostles*, Luke wrote this word twenty-two times. The word shows up only two more times in the rest of the New Testament. In telling the Good News, Luke could not escape the fact that God was bringing every detail to pass according to His plan and perfect timing. Luke told us the story of God filling up every detail of the Good News.

God's law through Moses required, *(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”)* (v.23). Joseph's and Mary's action with Jesus was a general fulfillment of the law stated in Exodus 13, 34, and Leviticus 5. It seems obvious in many examples that the application of Moses' law had changed some in the days of the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, what Joseph and Mary did was a combination of three different required offerings: the purification of the mother, the presentation of the first born, and the dedication of the first born to the Lord's service (practiced since the time of Samuel). And it is possible that their visit to the temple might have even included an offering for Joseph's purification since he was involved in the delivery (cf. *their purification*).

Joseph and Mary obeyed because they lived under Moses' Law. They were obedient to *offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord (v.24a)*. They offered according to the current application of the law. They did this because, while the narrative of Luke takes place in what we call the New Testament, the people at the time were still under the ceremonial law which Jesus had not fulfilled yet by His death.

Something about the offering Mary and Joseph offered might indicate that they were relatively poor people. They offered *a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (v.24)*. The turtledoves or pigeons were allowed as a substitute for the lamb. In the context of the statement of the requirements, the exception was allowed because of poverty. Although by this time period some middle-classed people offered the same thing.

There was a Man Named Simeon.

In the context of Joseph and Mary going to the temple to circumcise Jesus and to offer the required purification sacrifice, God led Simeon to the temple. We read here that he was righteous, devout, and trusting. *Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him (v.25).*

Notice the statements that describe for us Simeon's character. He was righteous. That means that he was fully aware of God's law, precepts, rules. And not only was he aware of these truths, but Simeon was ordering his life according to God's rules. Second, he was devout. He was reverent toward God or, we might say, he was fearing God in a mature sense. It means that Simeon was a man of deep faith and trust in God. Third, he was under Holy Spirit influence. That is not to say that the Holy Spirit was in residence within him, as with born again members of the universal Church. Rather, as was common in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit strongly influenced and led him.

Luke mentioned three different times in this passage that the Holy Spirit was ministering with Simeon. He wrote that the Holy Spirit was upon him (v.25), that the Holy Spirit promised him that he would see the Christ before he died (v.26), and that the Holy Spirit led him to the temple at precisely the right time (v.27).

Because Simeon was a devout man, and because he was under the continuing influence of the Holy Spirit, he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Greek word for *waiting* is *prosdecomai*, which means to be waiting with expectation for a promise to be fulfilled. Again (as with the word that means to "fill up") Luke is responsible for half the New Testament uses of this word (i.e. in Luke, Acts). In reporting the Good News and the response to the Good News to his friend Theophilus, Luke had to talk about all the people who trusted God and who were waiting for the fulfillment of the promised Savior. That is what Simeon was patiently waiting for in deep faith that God would keep His promise.

Simeon was waiting in full expectation for the *consolation of Israel*. That is, the "encouragement" of Israel. God's nation needed encouraging. But the focus here is not on pitiful Israel. The focus is HOW God would encourage His people. The "Encourager" is the promised Savior from sin. In fact, the word for *consolation* is

parakalew which is the same word used for the "comforter," the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to send who is just like Himself. Simeon was a great picture of us Christians who love and trust God and, therefore, we patiently wait for our Savior to come again the second time.

Notice that it wasn't the scribes, chief priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, or Lawyers who were waiting. They didn't need encouragement. In their opinion, they were doing just fine without the promised Christ.

Simeon knew something others did not know. *And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law (vv.26-27).* The Holy Spirit had revealed that Simeon would see the Christ (the promised and anointed Savior). How the Holy Spirit revealed this we do not know. A dream or vision would be consistent with Old Testament precedence. Or the Spirit could have spoken audibly to Simeon. We know that for us, the Holy Spirit speaks plainly through the Bible.

At precisely the time Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to fulfill the law's requirements, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the women's court at the temple complex. This is the place where they would have to be because Mary was a woman.

Simeon's response at seeing the promised Christ was rejoicing over the good news. Simeon was rejoicing that God keeps His promises. *He took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word" (vv.28-29).* To bless God is to acknowledge the righteous majesty of God and give Him the glory He deserves. Why did Simeon acknowledge the blessing God deserves? Because God acted "*According to your word . . .*"

This is one of the most precious blessings toward God in human language. To witness a clear and direct fulfillment of God's Word increases our faith dramatically. If we are not familiar with God's words, we will not be impressed when He works out His will in real life. The more familiar we are with God's promises and principles, the more we see Him working in life "according to His word."

Furthermore, Simeon was rejoicing in God's salvation. God has prepared salvation for all to see. He declared, "*For my eyes have seen*

your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (vv.30-31). Simeon saw the Christ, the only God-ordained means for winning salvation from sin. It is doubtful Simeon understood all the ramifications of Christ’s substitutionary atonement. However, he knew that God would bring salvation through Christ. And not only for the Jews but for all peoples.

Simeon understood the incredible breadth of God’s salvation. He knew that God had sent *“a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (v.32a).* This was so contrary to the error the religious leaders, especially the Pharisees, taught. They were convinced that only the Jews would go to heaven. And not all the Jews, but only those who believed and acted according to their preferences and traditions. That conclusion sounds a lot like the various arrogant errors of Christian sects today.

Simeon knew also that God has sent light to Israel. Salvation was light for the Gentiles *“and for glory to your people Israel” (v.32b).* The glory of Israel is that they, being sinners, could be saved by grace through Christ. The glory of Israel is also that Gentiles (the outsiders) could be saved the same way. And hearing such incredible news, Mary and Joseph marveled. *And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him (v.33).* They were continually learning more and more about the character and work of their promised child.

They were about to learn more than they wanted to as Simeon went on to promise the amazing work of Jesus. He told Mary in particular that baby Jesus would be responsible for the rise and fall of individuals. *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (v.34a).* He said that this little baby was appointed to determine the eternal destiny of many in Israel. Actually Jesus determines the destiny of all. Many rise in faith to eternal life through Christ. Many fall because they stumble over the humble and suffering character of the Messiah.

But now Simeon shared the frightening news when he told Mary that baby Jesus is a “sign opposed.” *“And for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (vv.34b-35).* Jesus’ presence was the sign of the Kingdom of Heaven. So John the Baptist

preached, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).* And Jesus preached, *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).* And so the people acknowledged that their King had come when He entered Jerusalem on a colt.

Jesus was the sign of Jonah, the fulfillment of the picture of God keeping His word to save some and condemn others. And so Jesus is the sign of the unchanging, irrefutable difference between right and wrong, righteousness and evil, truth and error. Satan hates it and all the people who are under His influence hate the sign. The thoughts of their hearts were revealed as they tried to kill the sign of truth. There is no doubt then that along the way of Christ’s ministry the sword pierced Mary’s heart. She watched the religious leaders attack her Son relentlessly. She watched as multitudes walked away (John 6). She watched as they humiliated, tortured, and crucified her Son, the sign of truth.

There was a Prophetess Named Anna.

Anna was a devout servant of the Lord, a seasoned mouthpiece of the Lord. Luke wrote, *And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four (vv.36-37a).*

As a prophetess, God revealed His word through Anna. She came from a significant family and could trace her lineage. She had been a widow for many years. Widows in first century culture were most vulnerable. But God had cared for this widow who was extremely devoted. *She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day (v.37b).* Apparently, Anna occupied some position of caring for or working at the temple complex where she lived. She was devout in worship of God, prayer to God, and fasting.

We should not be surprised then to read that Anna was led by the Holy Spirit to the right place at the right time. Obviously, the timing was of the Lord as we read, *And coming up at that very hour (v.38a)*. This meeting with Jesus was no accident. This was God's intentional blessing for His faithful servant. God so graciously rewards His servants.

Meeting Jesus, Anna spoke as a prophetess would speak. *She began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (v.38b)*. She was thankful for God keeping His word to send the Savior. She was thankful that God allowed her to see the Savior, because she would not live long enough to see Him as an adult. Surely then Anna was thankful that God provided salvation for His people.

Being thankful to God, Anna shared the good news with all the people who were waiting for God to fulfill His promise. The verb used here for *waiting* is the same word used to describe Simeon's wait (*prosdcomai*) (v.25). But the redemption of Jerusalem would be a far larger redemption than just one city, one nation, one people group. When Jerusalem is bought out of sin and slavery, all creation will be.

Epilogue.

Mary and Joseph completed their requirements. They obeyed all that God required. *And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord (v.39a)*, then they went home. *They returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth (v.39b)*.

At Nazareth, God the Son grew. *And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him (v.40)*. That statement might strike us as odd. God the Son was co-equal with the Father – “fully God.” It is true that the Son voluntarily placed His divine prerogatives under the Father's care. He still could think and act according to His “God-ness” but only within the will and permission of the Father. And yet at the same time, God the Son was co-equal with us – “fully man.” He experienced all the “flesh-ness” of humanity. That is not to conclude that He was ever for one moment controlled by or governed by the flesh like we are. But Jesus

grew, learned, matured in the flesh like we all mature from childhood to adulthood. And along the way, He experienced every temptation of the flesh that is often such trouble to us. Yet He never yielded.

That God kept His promise and sent the Savior from sin is Good News. That we can express our faith in God and, confessing our sins, receive forgiveness of sins through the price of Christ's sacrifice on the cross is Good News. That embracing Jesus Christ by faith identifies us with His sacrifice and salvation is Good News. That by being identified with Christ we will suffer with Him is frightening news. We still live in a world that hates the truth about Christ because this world is under Satan's influence. But if we suffer with Him in this life, we are encouraged to know that we will also reign with Him in eternity. That is Good News.