

A Bible Lesson on Luke 2:21-38 (ESV¹)

This is a lesson on the presentation of Jesus at the temple and at what two Godly old saints have to say when they see the baby, Mary and Joseph.

Luke 2:21 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.

Jewish boys were circumcised on the eighth day. He was given the name "Yahweh saves." The emphasis here is on who He is from before birth. He is God's savior. He functioned in the role of teacher, example, etc. during His life on earth, but primarily, from before "day one," He was Savior.

²²And 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

Strictly speaking, it should be "her purification." Mosaic law (see **Leviticus 12**) provided that after childbirth, a woman was ceremonially unclean for a period of 40 days in the case of a boy child and 80 days in the case of a girl child. At the end of that time, she was to present an offering. This is one thing that is going on here.

²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")

What else is going on here is the fulfillment of the command that all firstborn males belong to God. In commemoration of the Passover and deliverance of Israel's firstborn, firstborn males were publicly consecrated to God and then bought back with an offering of 5 shekels when they were a month old. It looks like both of these rites were being followed in one trip to the temple and Luke sort of blends them together.

What does this tell us about Mary and Joseph? These are devout, serious, careful people. Humble people, yes, but solid, pious people who had hearts to please God. They were the kind of people who would teach the child the obedience and humble zeal that God desires. These were people that loved God and His people Israel.

²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

The standard sacrifice was a yearling lamb and a pigeon, but the Law also provided for the poor who couldn't afford the lamb. They could bring two pigeons instead. The inference here is again that these are humble people of extremely modest means.

²⁵Now 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.

We know nothing else about Simeon beyond what this passage tells us. But what we are told paints a most wonderful picture of the guy. Luke says he is "righteous and devout." The Amplified Versions says "cautiously and carefully observing the divine Law." There is nothing the least bit

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presumptuous or careless about this man. He knows who God is and who he is, and is living circumspectly moment by moment in the light of that knowledge. And he lives in anticipation of God's work in history. He was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," the coming of Messiah. He's been looking for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Simeon has not grown either too comfortable or tired and indifferent through life. Rather, he looks ahead to what God is going to do. There are a lot of ways to end up when old, many of them bad. God grant us grace to be like Simeon.

²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

What is it, more than anything else that we long for in life? What would give us the greatest joy? What is it that we most dearly hope to see come to pass? Here is the greatest reward possible for a real subject of the King. It is the chance to see God honored, His promises come true, and His name vindicated. Simeon will see God's Messiah!

²⁷And 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,

Mary and Joseph were there to redeem Him with the 5 shekel offering.

Ryle points to **Malachi 3:1b "... And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple ..."** As most things in God's plan, the prophecy isn't fulfilled in the manner we would have expected. Jesus comes as a helpless baby, attended by 2 poor Jewish peasants to be greeted by an old man and old woman. Jesus is brought in obedience to God's Law. It seems that His dedication and Mary's purification sacrifice were being combined in a single visit to the temple. And by the hand of God, Simeon knows Jesus when he sees Him.

²⁸he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

We're used to this because we've been reading about it since we were kids. But think about how wild it is. Two poor people from Nazareth come into the temple carrying their 40 day old son intent on offering the poor man's sacrifice for the occasion. A total stranger takes the baby into his arms and gives additional confirmation that this child is God's Messiah. Mary has heard from Gabriel. Joseph has heard from Gabriel. The shepherds have heard from the angels and have told Mary and Joseph. Now here this total stranger, by the inspiration of God's Spirit picks the baby out of the crowd and adds additional confirmation.

Luke says Simeon blessed God. Notice the language he uses in what follows. Just as Mary's response to Gabriel was phrased in Old Testament language, so also is Simeon's. This fellow's whole frame of reference is God's Word.

²⁹"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

(Sovereign) Lord. Indeed. This whole account takes the breath away from any honest heart. God does indeed rule in the affairs of men and act according to His good pleasure.

The phrase rendered "you are letting your servant depart in peace" carries the idea of loosing a person from a chain or giving a person release from captivity. Simeon has been a pilgrim and sojourner here in this world. He's fought the good fight and finished the course, and he's ready to go home. And what comes pouring out of him is a lifetime's worth of attention to the Word of God.

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

Simeon sees in this baby the fulfillment of passages like **these**.

Isaiah 52:10 The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

By the work of the Holy Spirit, Simeon sees in the baby the Glory of God and responds in language like Isaiah's.

Isaiah 40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 42:6 "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Isaiah 46:13 I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

Isaiah 49:6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Simeon sees (and says in verse 32) that Jesus will be both light for us Gentiles and glory for God's chosen people Israel. The Gospel is universal. From the beginning, God's plan of salvation has always included those of us outside of physical Israel. Clear back in **Genesis 12:3** God revealed His intention to use Abraham and his descendants to bless all the families of the earth. And God isn't finished with His people Israel. Jesus is their crowning glory, and Paul tells us plainly in Romans that in due time the nation will repent and turn to Him.

³³And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

Mary and Joseph have heard from angels and from shepherds who had heard from angels. But still they can't possibly understand the whole scope of this.

³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed

³⁵(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

The coming of Messiah, Jesus, God's own Son is completely good and wonderful. But we are fallen creatures that can, and in many cases do, choose to reject and defy their Savior and rightful King. Simeon tells the whole story here. Some will bow the knee, and for them this child will be a rising. Some will refuse Him, and for them He will become a stumbling block, one to hate and oppose. That's the nature of things and Simeon can see that. He knows and warns Mary that this is going to be no easy thing.

So now we hear about Anna. She has the same Hebrew name as Hannah, mother of Samuel in the Old Testament. She is presented to us as a second witness here in the temple to God's provision of Messiah. As in the case of Simeon, all we know about her is what we learn here from Luke. It's not much, but what there is, is wonderful.

³⁶And 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,

³⁷and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

Anna is old. Depending upon how the Greek is rendered, we take her to be 84 or to have lived 84 years as widow. Either way, she's been around a while. She's known sorrow and loss as a young woman, and quite possibly hardship. But that hasn't soured her. To the contrary, her heart is wholly God's. We find her constantly in the temple, in the God-ordained place of worship and with God's people, fasting and praying.

³⁸And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Whether she too knows by the Holy Spirit who Jesus is, or whether she has heard Simeon speak and immediately understands, out of this dear old saint comes pouring thanks to God. And she, like the shepherds, is an evangelist. To anyone who is ready to hear, she speaks. She tells what she knows about the child. With her knowledge came responsibility to let others know.