

Sermon on Luke 2:22-40

by John R. Collins

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Luke 2:21-38 (CEB)

²¹ When eight days had passed, Jesus' parents circumcised him and gave him the name Jesus. This was the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived. ²² When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (²³ It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") ²⁴ They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. ²⁸ Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

²⁹ "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word,
³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation.

³¹ You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.

³² It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

³³ His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. ³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel [FAN-yoo-uhl], who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. ³⁷ She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

SERMON

Verse by Verse Exposition:

^{Luke 2:21} When eight days had passed, Jesus' parents circumcised him and gave him the name Jesus. This was the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived. ²²

Faithful and devout, Mary and Joseph follow the prescription of the law and the instructions of the angel Gabriel.

²² When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (²³ It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.")

Luke says that Jesus is brought to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord. According to the Torah, the first born was to be consecrated to the Lord, but then redeemed or bought back from God's service for the price of five silver coins.

It's interesting that Luke never mentions the family ritually buying Jesus back from God's service. Perhaps they were too poor (which we'll touch upon in the next verse). Perhaps it was a detail that Luke didn't know about (Luke was a gentile), or perhaps Luke intends us to read between the lines and catch the implication that Jesus' life would be dedicated to God's service.

²⁴ They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

This is not the standard sacrifice, it's the alternative sacrifice for those too poor to pay the standard sacrifice of a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon. It's an indication of Mary and Joseph's economic status—they were poor.

²⁵ A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

In this story, Simeon is waiting, it would seem that he has been waiting a long time, just as Israel had been waiting a long time. Simeon as an individual and the people as a whole are both waiting for God to restore Israel.

²⁶ The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Generations of Israelite's had waited for the Messiah. Simeon is blessed that the Christ came in his lifetime.

²⁷ Led by the Spirit, he [Simeon] went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. ²⁸

The Holy Spirit arranged a meeting. It's best to listen for and respond to the prompts of Holy Spirit, whether it be a direct command or merely a nudge.

Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

²⁹ "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word,
³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation.

Simeon is at peace and ready for death because he has seen God's salvation. There is something profoundly awe inspiring about a person who's relationship with God is such that they can calmly face death.

³¹ You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.

³² It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

Note here the universal scope of salvation. It is not only a glory for God's people Israel, but a light to the Gentiles. Not everyone will accept this salvation, but God is determined that it be offered to all. Israel's glory was not that salvation was for them alone, but that they were the bearers of the promise, the people from whom God's Messiah would arise.

³³ His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. ³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

In our responses to God's Messiah we reveal our inner thoughts. Confronted by the Christ child we cannot remain indifferent. Will King Jesus be the cause of our rising or of our falling?

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel [FAN-yoo-uhl], who belonged to the tribe of Asher.

Anna is designated a prophet. When we think of prophets we normally think of OT figures who came long before Jesus, men like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah. But Luke labels Anna a prophet. It's a reminder that God's salvation is not only for both Jew and Gentile, but for both male and female. Mary, Elizabeth, now Anna, and later other women all have a part to play in the unveiling of God's glory in Jesus Christ.

She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. ³⁷ She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day.

Luke hints that Simeon is old, but he comes right out and tells us that Anna was. If you think you are too old to play a role in what God is doing, think again. And if you are over the age of 84, well the Greek is ambiguous, it might mean that she had lived 84 years after her husband's death.

³⁸ She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna does not keep what is happening to herself. She does not bottle up the Good News for a select few. She's instead making the most public proclamation she can manage.

³⁹ When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

Mary and Joseph "completed everything required by the Law of the Lord." Luke refuses to portray the Gospel of Jesus Christ as some sort of repudiation of the Torah. Jesus fulfills and completes the law, he does not denounce or deny it.

IN CONCLUSION: THREE POINTS

There are a lot of points that could be made about this passage. I've chosen three:

1. Anna was a prophet—the Christian faith stands for the full inclusion of women in all areas of the life of the church and life in general. Full Stop. This is true even though some branches of Christianity have yet to realize it.
2. Jesus and his parents were poor—the Christian faith stands with the poor from who Jesus came. The poor are not to be held in contempt or looked down upon. The Christ who grew up poor gives his followers no choice but to care for the less fortunate and the least of these. A Christian "Gospel" that does not lift up the poor betrays Christ.

3. Jesus was a Jew from a devout Jewish family. He fulfilled and completed the law. Some parts of the NT can be read as hostile to Jews, but the hostility is usually limited to the leaders and authorities. Instead of thinking about scribes and priests as “Jews” think of them as the equivalent of pastors and devout lay people.

And remember that at the time the NT was being written, Christianity was still a sect within Judaism. The early Jews who chose to follow Christ did not think they had left Judaism, they believed they were following YHWH’s Messiah. Paul is an example, he saw himself not only as a Jew, but as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). So the quarrel was a family squabble.

Christianity is no longer a sect within Judaism. It is no longer a family squabble, we must be careful to avoid anti-semitism.

Any Christian who knows the story of the Old Testament and how the people of Israel served as the bearers of the promise, the nation from which Jesus came, cannot disparage Jewish people. There is no room for anti-semitism in the Church.

CONCLUSION: to quote Simeon, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.”

We have a decision to make about whether we will rise with Jesus or fall opposing him. Will we go our own way, or will we, like Simeon, heed the promptings of the Holy Spirit and rise with Christ?

If we choose to rise with him, this passage from Luke demands that we lift up the roles and contributions of women, embrace the poor, and refuse to disparage Judaism. Amen.