

## **Simeon Luke 2:21-40**

### **Introduction**

It's been said there is nothing that takes longer to arrive or quicker to leave than Christmas. For weeks we prepare for its coming: shopping, putting up the decorations, cleaning, and baking. We sing the familiar carols and hear the familiar Christmas readings.

And then the big day, the moment we've all been waiting for, finally comes. Adults and children alike rip through the artistically wrapped packages in a matter of minutes. The Christmas lunch that took days to plan and cook is devoured in no time at all. Before you know it, the day is over and done. The mess and the bills are the only things that remain.

And then comes the Sunday after Christmas. While a little bit of a breather is always nice, such a drop-off, whether in excitement or activity, can be disturbing. What can a preacher say after the angels have departed and the shepherds have gone back to their flocks? What images are there left to ponder after the Holy Family has moved out of the stable and that touching image is but a memory?

Christmas is over. The Sunday after Christmas has arrived; perhaps one of the most unremarkable of days of the year.

Traditionally the almost forgotten story of Simeon is told on this day. While he is usually not the subject of Christmas cards or carols, he is an important part of the story just the same.

So often we hear it said that, "Christmas is for children." That may be true of the secular Christmas, but the Biblical account of the nativity the narrative is loaded with adults. Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men and an innkeeper. These two individuals we rarely mention in the run up to Christmas, both of them elderly and both blessed of God, namely Simeon (who we read about in our text) and Anna (who we will consider next week).

Maybe the church is guilty of forgetting about the elderly. God is interested in all of us regardless of our age or what stage we are at in life's journey, and God cares for us from the cradle to the grave.

I am sure many of us remember the BBC TV comedy series "Waiting for God." It centred upon two spirited residents of a retirement home who spent their time running rings around the home's oppressive management and their own families. The title of the show intimates that retirement homes are but waiting rooms for eternity, and the residents are sitting around waiting to die, waiting for God.

In Luke 2 we have two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, waiting for God. They are not waiting for God to take their lives; they are waiting for God to act upon their prayers.

### **Simeon**

Simeon is a man who appears out of nowhere. We don't know a lot about him, we don't know from what tribe he is from. We know nothing about his family, whether he was married or had any children. We are told nothing about his occupation.

What we do know is simply inferred from this one and only reading. Although his age is never mentioned, one gets the impression that he was quite old. He held no office or title that we know of, nor did he do anything to distinguish himself in Jewish circles.

The only things we are told about Simeon are those things which matter most to God, things which pertain to his faith and his character, things which tell about his relationship with God.

We are told **there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.** Luke 2:25

This speaks of his personal walk with God and his integrity among men, he was a man of faith and hope, for he **“was waiting for the consolation of Israel,”** an expression which summarizes the faith of the Old Testament saint in the promises of God concerning the restoration of Israel through the coming of the Messiah.

Simeon and Anna (who we shall look at next week) may have much to say to our culture, and especially to Christians who are captive to it. The appearance of these two godly saints in the temple, where they recognize and proclaim Jesus as Israel's Messiah, is the event which Luke chose to record, in addition to the visitation of the shepherds a few days earlier.

There are some people in the world who feel they might be too old, too limited or too marginalized to be of much use to God. Simeon is proof positive that God uses anyone who is submitted to the Holy Spirit. This offers great hope, confidence and assurance that God continues to use the weak of the world to shame the things which are strong.

After just a few verses Simeon fades from the scene and we do not know what happened to him.

## **Circumcision**

But first let's put today's reading into context.

The birth of a Jewish son was celebrated with "sons week". For seven days friends came to the home in the evenings. But all Mary and Joseph saw were a few shepherds, and maybe a few other visitors. They were poor and certainly could not lay on some impressive party. On the eighth day a few would have gathered to celebrate the infants initiation into God's covenant people by circumcision and the naming of the child. In Biblical days the father had the privilege of naming the child, acknowledging that it was his own. Few would know Joseph and fewer still if there were any prominent Joshua's (Jesus - Jehovah is salvation) in his family.

Everything was done in full accordance with the Law. Jesus was a Jew.

Every child is important to God – and a child of the covenant especially so. A child is a gift of God!

## **Purification**

Four weeks later they travelled the 5 miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem.

The mother had to wait 40 days, it would have been 80 days for a girl, following the birth of a child before going to the temple to offer sacrifice for purification. A lamb (for a burnt offering) and a dove or Pigeon (for a sin offering) was the norm, but the poor need only offer two pigeons. Mary and Joseph are poor - not laden with Magi gold!

At the same time was the ceremony for the redemption of the firstborn.

Partly as a result of the final plague in Egypt, a firstborn son was considered sacred and belonging to the Lord. As God had set apart the Levites for priestly service, all other firstborn could be redeemed, the price according to Num.18:15-16 was 5 shekels (two ounces) of silver which was paid to the priest.

## Enter Simeon and Anna

For Simeon and Anna Jesus was the fulfilment of Malachi 3:1 "Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple."

**Simeon** Luke 2:25-35

The name Simeon means "hearing." The Bible says that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Perhaps this suggests that Simeon spent much of his time pouring over the Scripture.

To most in the temple, Jesus was just another baby. But not to Simeon. He was indwelt and directed by the Holy Spirit and saw that under the blanket of this poor couple was one special baby.

He was one of a few Jewish believers, holding on to God's promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament. They prepared spiritually for the coming of the Redeemer. This group was apparently known as "The quiet in the land". William Barclay writes "Unlike the Zealots who wanted to usher in the kingdom by the sword, "the Quiet in the Land" believed that the Messiah would only come with their "constant prayer and quiet watchfulness."

Simeon was waiting for and saw the consolation of Israel v.25 The coming of the Messiah. How important it is for people to see God's salvation before they see death.

Simeon - led by spirit of God, taught by the word of God, obedient to the will of God, was privileged to see the salvation of God.

**Simeon's song** No 4

Simeon's song is the 4<sup>th</sup> of Christmas. Mary No 1 Zechariah No 2 Angels No 3

Filled with the insight of one who is open to God's Holy Spirit, he began by telling that puzzled couple that in this tiny child the world would find its salvation. With words that have come to be known as the Nunc Dimittis.

Latin Nunc Dimittis meaning (You) now dismiss

Worship v.29-30 God had kept his personal promise to him. God had sent the Messiah. He praised God for privilege of seeing the Christ.

Salvation Dismiss/depart = "set free; to release a prisoner; to acquit one accused of a crime and set him at liberty; to release a debtor." untie a ship and set sail; take down a tent; unyoke a beast of burden.

Death, an enemy, is used to lead us into blessings of next life. "To die is gain"  
How important it is to have been delivered from the fear of death and by faith received God's provision of salvation.

To be ready to leave this world, to depart in peace.

The Bible doesn't say to "Get Ready", it says, "Be Ready." Death can come at anytime. Always to be prepared to meet the Saviour by making the correct preparations. Simeon was ready to die and depart in peace and his life encourages us that the same can be true for us even if death should come unexpectedly.

It has been said, "Only those by faith that have had a sight of Christ, can, with courage see death and look it in the face without terror." The Christian ready to meet the Lord can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Missionary A devout Jew in Jerusalem at this wonderful time for Israel sees also salvation for Gentiles, as well as for Israel.

After the song he speaks words of Prophecy to Mary concerning the fall and rise of Israel. To those who believe this child, Jesus is the resurrection and the life, to those who do not, he will be the rejected corner stone who was to become a stumbling block.

He will be a sign to be opposed. Even though that sign, was a demonstration of power and a revelation of God.

But also he speaks of a sword to pierce Mary too. Little did Mary realise then, that she would stand at the foot of the cross watching with horror as his blood was spilled and his life ebbed away. Had she been struck by a real sword, it would heal, in time. This kind of wound remains open and tender no matter how many months go by. No matter how many tears are shed or prayers uttered.

All parents suffer because of their children when they are hurt, sick, unpopular, fail, walk in sin or ungratefulness. A child's love for darkness sends stabbing pains into your chest, as they run from Christ into sins of the frightful abyss. Maybe all we are able to do is give a sympathetic ear, and offer us a prayer for mercy.

Lowly poor undistinguished parents - had this profound message given to them by a stranger who knew nothing of their circumstances!

We see that God has believing people in the worst of places and in the darkest times. However small the church may be - the gates of hell will never overcome it.

## **Conclusion**

We may not keep or even remember our New Years resolutions. They matter little.  
But do we remember to do all that we know that God requires of us?  
Are we as faithful Christians as Mary and Joseph were Jews?  
Are we as faithful as Simeon was?

For those of us who are parents/grandparents or great grand parents, will we do everything we can to make real faith easy for these little ones?

The quiet in the land were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. They were not looking for the spectacular, but they did find Jesus.

Jesus said he is coming again one day - 2000 years sooner than it was then. Are we ready and looking for his coming - are we Maranatha people? (Come O Lord -1.Cor.16:22c)

We do not know when or how Simeon died. All we do know is that his encounter with the Holy Family in the temple courtyard helped Luke move the story's focus from the glow of the manger to the light of the world.

What might be considered the most unremarkable Sunday after Christmas calls us to shift our focus, to move beyond the sentimentality of Jesus' birth to the proclamation of Jesus' life, to remember that the wooden manger is just the start of a journey that leads to a rock-hewed tomb.

This day calls us to let an old man be our example, To live lives that are righteous and devout, to look forward to that time when God will make things right, and to be so open to the Holy Spirit that we might see the Messiah wherever and whenever he may appear.

Thanks be to God for the patient spirit filled old man Simeon. God kept His word to this old saint of His, and He will keep His Word to you and me also. Simeon is proof positive that God is concerned for all people, young and old.

Thanks be to God for those who follow in this way, waiting for God's timing even though it may be difficult, and who trusts God because he knows what is best.

So many people bought toys for Christmas not noticing that in fine print on the package were the words: "Batteries not included." Think what that meant? It meant that you have the toy, but the power to make it work is not included. That is not the kind of gift that God gave, when He gave us Jesus. God's gift includes the power of the fullness of the Holy Spirit – the power to make this Christian life work. It worked for Simeon, and it can work for me and for you?

May we live in a way that is pleasing to Him, faithful in prayer and patient for answers. May we trust in His Word, obediently act upon it, and be the kind of person the Spirit of God can fill so we hear God's voice speaking to us.

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