

Waiting for the King: The Prophecy Coming True

Luke 2: 22-40

²² Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³ The law of the Lord says, “If a woman’s first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD.” ²⁴ So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared for all people.

³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

³³ Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

³⁶ Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸ She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Jesus’ parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him.”

So, 40 days after Jesus’ birth his parents take him to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill Jewish law. Mary needs to be purified after childbirth through an offering and Jesus, being the first-born son, needs to be presented at the temple. They bring two doves with them for an offering. The basics of this story tell us two things. One, Jesus’ parents are obedient Jews. And two, they are poor. First, they are being good Jewish parents and obeying the law. They are satisfying two requirements in Jewish law. Purification of a woman 40

days after childbirth (Lev. 12) and presentation of the firstborn son to God at the temple (Ex. 13). This is interesting because the Pharisees will spend most of Jesus' ministry criticizing him for breaking the law. But he isn't. As Jesus says in Matthew 5, he is not there to abolish the law or the prophets but rather to fulfill them. And that begins here, at the very beginning of his life, his parents are following the law. If Mary and Joseph and Jesus did not follow the law, his being Messiah would not be legit. If Jesus is to be the Messiah he has to be obedient to God. Otherwise, the Pharisees will have real reasons to debunk his claim and ministry. If this Jewish family doesn't follow the law from the beginning, the Pharisees win. Everything has to be done in obedience to God. So this passage, which sounds obligatory at the beginning, is part of Luke establishing that Jesus really is the Messiah. This is Luke's purpose for this Gospel.

The other fact that this passage gives us is that Mary and Joseph are poor. Normally the sacrifice offered would be a lamb. But Jewish law did allow for two doves if the couple could not afford a lamb. And this passage clearly indicates they brought two turtledoves. So Jesus' life is beginning as obedient to Jewish law, but not wealthy. The important things are here and the unimportant things are left out. He is being presented at the temple and it is being done at the right time and with the right offering. Everything having to do with relationship with God is present. And wealth and status, those are not present because they don't matter to God. The Messiah does not have to grow up in a prominent family or with all of the advantages that wealth would give him. Those things are not necessary. What matters is obedience to God. This is noteworthy for us. If wealth and status were not important for the Messiah, maybe we should not obsess about them either.

This whole scene in Luke of bringing a baby before God and the need for a sacrifice may seem odd or disconnected for us because we don't do this anymore. We don't make animal sacrifices anymore. That ended with Jesus on the cross. But the concept of making a sacrifice to be with God is one that should not be lost to us. Even though we don't NEED to make sacrifices to be with God anymore, shouldn't we still have that attitude? Making a sacrifice for something means we give something of us to God and that God is a priority. Shouldn't that still be the case? Isn't God still that important? I can only use myself as an honest example here. I think that the thing God wants me to sacrifice the most to be closer to God and the thing I tend to want to sacrifice the least is time. Getting to know God takes time. We do have to sacrifice the time we would spend on all of the other things that the world offers us and give some of it to God. I struggle with this. I can always think of a million things I need to be doing. And I do have to intentionally set aside time for God. I have to force myself to do it. It IS a sacrifice. Of course, I am in conversation with God a lot throughout the day. But setting aside time for undistracted prayer, and reading the Bible, and reflecting with the Holy Spirit, that takes time. We still have to make sacrifices to be closer to God. Think about what you might need to sacrifice to be closer to God. That is something each one of you needs to answer and the answers will be different for different people. But the principle is the same.

Continuing, Mary and Joseph enter the temple grounds and there is Simeon. We don't know who Simeon is. We just know he is devout. They must have run into him in the outer court where Gentiles would be allowed because Mary is present. She would not be allowed in an inner court. So Simeon could be anyone. He is not high up as a priest or temple worker. He is not in the inner courts where higher ups would have been. He is on the outside. All we know is that he is devout and waiting for the Messiah and the Holy Spirit has led him to the temple that day. And then there is this wonderful confirmation of who Jesus is by Simeon. Now Mary and Joseph have both been told by angels who Jesus is going to grow up to be, and a bunch of shepherds showed up the night he was born and told them about the angels singing in the sky, but how wonderful for them

to have this confirmation by Simeon. God does affirm us when we need it. This young couple is probably still very unsure about what God is doing. And they go to the temple that day out of obedience. And God takes the opportunity to affirm them and bless them, even though not all of the information is easy to hear.

Let's look at the first section of what Simeon says. Verses 30 through 32.

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared for all people.
³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

Simeon calls Jesus the light, a theme already established in Luke chapter 1. Simeon also seems to quote Isaiah which was one of their most important prophets, Isaiah chapter 60. So this devout man recounting prophecy from Isaiah not only makes sense, but is just another confirmation that Jesus is the one who is fulfilling all of the prophecies.

Then Simeon's words become more difficult. Verses 34 and 35: "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul." Here Simeon seems to refer to Isaiah 8 and 23 when his comments get dark. Not all is happy at this blessing. But Simeon's description is so accurate to what will happen. He is definitely full of the Holy Spirit. Some will rise and some will fall. That becomes completely true as Jesus will champion the poor and meek as he condemns the actions of the religious leaders. Simeon says people will oppose Jesus even though he is right. That happens throughout Jesus's ministry and leads to the cross. And then Simeon says that a sword will pierce their souls. Although Jesus is good news, the Messiah has come, he will cause his parents pain. The journey will not be easy. Being a follower of Jesus does not mean things will be rosy. In fact, we are promised that we will suffer in various ways. And Simeon does not hold back any punches. He predicts the pain Mary will feel when she watches the crucifixion of her son.

Then Anna comes along while Simeon is talking with Mary and Joseph. She had been a widow at the temple for a long time. She had been focused on prayer and fasting. She is considered a prophet. When she sees and hears Simeon she starts to praise God and tell everyone at the temple about Jesus. Now, there are several aspects of this event in the early life of Jesus that I just love. One, God uses both a man and a woman to affirm who Jesus is. That did not have to be the case. This could have ended with Simeon or gone on to the priest next. But God chooses both Simeon and Anna, Anna who is a prophet. God uses anyone to fulfill God's will, male or female it does not matter.

But the thing I love even more is that these two confirmers of the Messiah are elderly. We are told they are both old. We are never too old to be ministered to by God and we are never too old to participate in God's ministry. I think pastor Steve said this last week, if you are not dead you are not done. God still uses us and is in ministry with us no matter what age we are. You know there are two elderly ladies in our church that are coming close to the end of their time here in this life. They have both had a tough week. And both of them are probably completely unaware of what they have taught me. They probably do not realize how they have ministered to so many people even in their elderly years. God has used them despite age or infirmity. One is D'Anne Chapman. I know I have said this before, but D'Anne has the gift of making whoever she is with feel

like they are the most important person in the world. She has the ability to not only be completely selfless, but also the smarts and the heart to dig into your world and how you are doing and what is going on in your life. God uses her as a porthole into the lives of others. And she has always been like this. I was talking to her son this past week and I hope he doesn't mind my sharing this, but he told me that when he was a teenager it was before the days of cellphones. I am in the same age bracket and so I remember when you left home for the day you didn't talk to your parents again until you got home. And he was supposed to meet up with a friend at this house and got delayed and didn't show up for an hour and a half. So his friend was there with his mom waiting for him for an hour and a half. When he finally got there he apologized and his friend said, no problem. I have been visiting with your mom. Now what teenage boy wants to visit with his friend's mom for an hour and a half? Well, when your friend's mom is D'Anne Chapman, you are happy to visit with her because she is making you feel like the most important person in her life. D'Anne, despite age or infirmity, thank you for letting God demonstrate through you the art of being selfless and the art of truly caring about people.

The other elderly lady that has struggled this past week is Mary Kloer. And Mary probably doesn't realize that she has helped teach us all something that both Simeon and Anna teach us as well. The practice of faithfulness. Mary is a long time faithful part of First Presbyterian church. The last few years her walking has gotten less stable. She has been on dialysis for 9 years. She has every excuse in the book to not come to church. But she does. Not only does she come to the 9AM service but on communion Sundays she walks down that isle for communion even though she can barely do it. And she does it without complaining and she does it with a darling smile on her face. She is faithful to her relationship with God and for her it includes her church community. Mary, despite age or infirmity, thank you for being an exemplary demonstration of faithfulness.

All of us can learn from this. If you are elderly, God is still able to use you in ministry. And God is still blessing you no matter what age you are. And for us that are not elderly yet, but will be eventually, we need to look for the ways God is blessing us through our elderly brothers and sisters. There is a treasure trove of lessons about God in them.

Simeon and Anna, an elderly male and female, from the common folk in the outer court of the temple, they have much to teach us. And the last thing I want to mention that they teach us is how to wait for God. They both waited a long time to see the Messiah. A very long time. How good are we at waiting for God? Honestly, how good are we at waiting for anything? In talking about waiting for God John Ortberg gives a quiz to test us. He writes this: "You've been sitting in the waiting room of your doctor's office for an hour. How do you respond? A: You're grateful for the chance to catch up on the 1993 Reader's Digest. B: You take the opportunity to invite the staff behind the counter to Christmas Eve Services. C: You tell the other patients you have a very highly contagious and fatal disease in an attempt to empty the waiting room. Or if you have little more flair for the dramatic, D: You force yourself to hyperventilate to get immediate attention."

Which one were you? I can honestly say I was not A or B. But Simeon and Anna would have been. They waited and they didn't wait begrudgingly or impatiently. They waited with excitement and anticipation of what God was going to do. Verse 25 says that Simeon was "eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah." Verse 37 says Anna "never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God" They were not waiting for a long time unhappy and whining. They were waiting with positive anticipation and worshipping God in the meantime.

I don't know about you, but that is how I want to enter 2021. With positive anticipation of what God is going to do and joyfully worship God in the meantime. A lot of people are going to make New Year's resolutions in the coming days. In a recent poll the top three resolutions for 2021 are no. 1, exercising more and losing weight, no. 2, saving money and getting out of debt, and no. 3, traveling more. Those make sense. We are all waiting for this pandemic to be over. We are all waiting for when finances will be more stable. We are all waiting for when we can travel safely and see people we miss. We are all waiting for things to get better when it comes to politics and social justice. But are we actively anticipating and waiting for what God is going to do in our lives? Are we eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come again? First Pres, let's enter 2021 with the eyes and hearts and attitudes of Simeon and Anna. Let's be faithful, let's not let any limitations of our lives limit our relationship with God, let's keep worshipping God in all circumstances, and let's positively wait for what God is doing and going to do. If Simeon and Anna could trust God while they waited, so can we. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.