

What Child Is This?

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

December 31st, 2023

Luke 2:22-35

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Introduction:

Good morning, Cornerstone and Merry Christmas! Today is actually Christmas Sunday, all though, for many of us, given how the dates have fallen this year, it feels more like POST CHRISTMAS. We're all fasting – as opposed to feasting and we're all a little bit fuzzy after 3 or 4 or maybe even 5 days of eating, staying up late and spending time with family. We're in “RECOVERY MODE” as opposed to “WONDER MODE” – I get that – but maybe that actually puts us in exactly the right place for the passage we will be looking at today. If you have your Bible with you I'd love for you to open it now to Luke 2:22-35; that's on page 857 in the church Bibles.

This morning we are going to look at the story of Simeon's prophecy over the baby Jesus in the temple. The story takes place when Jesus is just a few days short of 6 weeks old. We know that because it takes place on the day when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to give the offering associated with purification after the birth of a child. Leviticus 12:6-7 says:

“And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, 7 and he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her.” (Leviticus 12:6-7 ESV)

However, if the mother is poor, the text says:

“she shall take **two turtledoves or two pigeons**, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” (Leviticus 12:8 ESV)

So that’s what this is about – Mary and Joseph are ceremonially unclean because they have just had a child. They couldn’t attend temple functions until about the 6-week mark, and when they do they bring an offering, scaled to their financial capacity.

Now, NOTICE that no mention is made of the redemption price that would normally be offered for a first-born male CHILD. In Numbers 18:15-16 it says:

“the firstborn of man you shall redeem ... And their redemption price (at a month old you shall redeem them) you shall fix at **five shekels in silver**, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.” (Numbers 18:15-16 ESV)

So, in the Old Testament, the priesthood, originally, was going to be made up of the first-born son of every covenant family. However, after the incident of the Golden Calf when only the Levites held their ground and stood with Moses against those committing idolatry, the priesthood was given to them and from that point on families had to “redeem” or “buy back” their first-born sons who would be replaced by a man from the tribe of Levi. Thus, when you had your first male child you would go to the priest, and you would give the 5 shekels and that would go to support the tribe of Levi in their liturgical duties.

Ok – fair enough.

However, NOTICE here that no mention is made of 5 shekels being paid to anyone in this story. The only offering mentioned is the “two pigeons” one for Mary. We usually see what Luke says about an offering being made and we just assume that the offering was for Jesus – but if we match what Luke actually says to what the Old Testament teaches about the various offerings it is crystal clear that the offering made in this story was for Mary, NOT for Jesus.

Why does this matter?

It matters because it means that Jesus isn't being REDEEMED – or bought out of the priesthood – quite the opposite actually – if Jesus is being presented in the temple with no redemption offering being made – it means that he is being CONSECRATED, like baby Samuel back in the Old Testament. I. Howard Marshall says here:

“The facts that the scene of the presentation incident is in the temple, no ransom price is mentioned, and the child is present, show that Jesus is not here being redeemed but consecrated to the Lord.”¹

This explains, by the way, why when Jesus was 12 years old and his family visited the temple, when THEY LEFT, HE STAYED and he said that Mary should have anticipated that. What he was saying, was that like Samuel in the Old Testament, it was now time for Jesus to begin serving his heavenly Father on a FULL-TIME basis.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Here in this story, Jesus is not 12 years old, he is 6 weeks old, and his parents are giving an offering for THEIR purification and JESUS is being consecrated to holy service.

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

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 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”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 25 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. 26 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. 27 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, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 117.

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”
33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And
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.” (Luke 2:22-35 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I want to ZOOM IN today on Simeon’s encounter with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We don’t know much about Simeon, other than the fact that, according to Luke, he was RIGHTEOUS and DEVOUT – verse 25 – and that he has been WAITING for the consolation of Israel – which is an Old Testament way of saying that Simeon has been waiting for the saving, strengthening and healing of the covenant community through the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. Simeon knew that a child would come who would BRUISE the head of our enemy, ATONE for our sin and rebellion and POUR OUT the Spirit of holiness such that all those who believe in him would be enabled to reclaim their original status and dignity!

Simeon has been WAITING for that – and when he sees Jesus being presented in the temple by his parents, Simeon realizes that God has SHOWN HIM THAT. He says:

“my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:30 ESV)

Praise the Lord!

Simeon says 4 things in this encounter; two while he is blessing God for the gift of the child, and two more when he is speaking directly to Mary. Let’s take a minute and walk through each of the things that the prophet says:

First of all, while he was blessing God, Simeon says that:

When blessing God he says that:

1. Jesus will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles

He says that in verse 32. What does that mean?

Well, it APPEARS to reference an Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah contained in Isaiah 49:6 where God says, TO the Messiah he is about to send into the world:

“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 49:6 ESV)

So, even though it was the Jewish people who were MOST EAGERLY watching for the coming of Messiah, the first thing we are told is that he will bring salvation to the Gentiles! That is a bit surprising. But it definitely FITS with how this story unfolds. In Acts 13, on Paul’s first missionary journey, he and Barnabas are preaching the Gospel in a Jewish synagogue, but most of the Jews resist and reject their message, so Paul says:

“Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:46-48 ESV)

Isn’t that interesting? Paul steps into this SAME prophecy and he says that just like Simeon said, Jesus is the light of salvation to the Gentiles, and it is HIS job as an Apostle to shine that light. When the Jews reject their own Messiah, Paul says, “No worries! The prophecy was ALWAYS that he would bring salvation to the NATIONS so maybe we’ll just go ahead and do that part FIRST!”

However, neither the outworking of the story, nor the original prophecy, imply in any way that the gift of the Messiah would BYPASS the Jews. Far from it. The second thing Simeon says while blessing God for the gift of the child is that Jesus will be for GLORY to your people Israel.

2. Jesus will be for glory to your people Israel

What does that mean?

Grammatically speaking, I think we could take that in two different ways. First of all, we could understand this as a reference to the glory that Israel will SEE in Jesus. We talked about this last Sunday. John said:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we have seen his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14 ESV)

So maybe Simeon is saying that the child that has been given will SHOW glory TO ISRAEL. They will look at Jesus and they will SEE the character and goodness of God! They will SEE the essence of God lived out!! They will see God in the flesh – full of grace and truth!!

It could mean that.

OR it could mean that Jesus will be glory FOR Israel. That is to say, he will DO what Israel never could DO. He will open up the wells of salvation that Israel always managed to foul and obscure. He will BE Israel, FOR ISRAEL and in that role he will make Israel GLORIOUS!!

Of course, we could be intended to hear it in BOTH WAYS! James R. Edwards seems to take that approach; he says:

“Jesus the Messiah reveals the heart of God and the essence of Israel’s Scriptures and prophecy”²

So Jesus REVEALS the heart of God TO Israel and he EMBODIES the essence of Israel’s message and function ON THEIR BEHALF. He IS ISRAEL and he brings glory to Israel as he encapsulates, perfects and clarifies the WORD and PROPHECY they were entrusted with by God.

Putting that all together, the substance of Simeon’s blessing is that he is thanking God for the gift of the child who will bring SALVATION to the nations AND give a clear revelation of God’s

²James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 86.

character and goodness TO THE JEWISH people FIRST and FOR the Jewish people ever afterward – praise the Lord!

Alright, after Simeon blesses GOD for the gift of the child, he turns and blesses Mary and Joseph. While blessing THEM he says to MARY specifically, a few more very interesting things about Jesus.

When blessing Mary and Joseph he says that:

Look at verse 34; Simeon says:

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ... (Luke 2:34 ESV)

And then we’ll skip the bracketed part and come back to that in a minute. Jesus is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed:

“so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:35 ESV)

1. Jesus is appointed for the fall and rising of many

Alright, what does that mean?

Once again, we are helped by the fact that what Simeon says about Jesus is filled with well-known Old Testament allusions, particularly that first part about many in Israel FALLING and RISING. Isaiah 8:14-15 for example says:

“And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many shall stumble on it. **They shall fall** and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.” (Isaiah 8:14-15 ESV)

The idea there is that Messiah, when he comes, will be like a big STONE in the centre of the road. Many people will trip on the stone because he is not what they were LOOKING FOR. They

will FALL and be broken. Jesus KNEW that imagery and Jesus OWNED that imagery – he said to a group of people offended by his teaching:

“What then is this that is written: ““The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”? 18 **Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces**, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” (Luke 20:17-18 ESV)

So Jesus understood himself as POTENTIALLY OFFENSIVE. He knew that some people would look at him and say: “No way!! That cannot be the way to eternal life!! No way!! I don’t believe in the way of the cross! I don’t believe in the suffering servant! I don’t believe that our sin is such a big deal that it requires a bloody cross!!! No! I find the implications of the Christian Way offensive!”

There are people who will say that – and they are not entirely wrong. Christianity IS offensive. The basic premise of Christianity, as revealed by the life and death of Jesus, is that YOU CANNOT SAVE YOURSELF. You are a SINNER. You are LOST. More than that – you are DEAD in your trespasses and sins – and so to become a Christian you have to admit to two very offensive things:

1. You have to admit you are a sinner.
2. You have to admit that you need help from God.

And if you refuse to admit those two things, there is literally NO WAY for you to be saved. If your PRIDE keeps you from admitting those things, then your PRIDE will DAMN YOU. Just like Grandma used to say:

“Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18 KJV)

You can only enter the Kingdom of God through the DOGGY DOOR – so if you won’t STOOP, if you won’t get down on your knees, then you will be forever outside.

Jesus is going to teach people that, Simeon says. He is going to strike a BLOW against human pride. He is going to push people DOWN but then, he is going to lift people UP. And it wasn’t

just Simeon talking this way, Jesus talked this way all the time! After telling the story of the PROUD PHARISEE and the HUMBLE TAX COLLECTOR in Luke 18 he said:

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14 ESV)

Human history is like a conveyor belt that is heading straight for the BAR of Jesus. So if you won't BOW then you will get knocked off – that's what Jesus is saying, and that's what Simeon prophesied.

Jesus is the LIGHT OF SALVATION but he is also the SWORD of DIVISION, as Jesus himself said to his disciples in Matthew chapter 10; he said:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:34–37 ESV)

Jesus said that his coming would divide families. Not because he wanted it to but because it was inevitable. If you BELIEVE who Jesus is and what Jesus said and what Jesus did and you BOW before all of that in humility and faith – understand that many of your family members will READ THAT AS JUDGMENT – because if you think YOU NEED THAT then obviously you think THEY NEED THAT. If you admit that YOU ARE A SINNER, then by implication, you must believe that THEY ARE ALL SINNERS – and if you think that you are DAMNED and helpless apart from Jesus, then you must think about them as well – and they may not appreciate that.

In fact, in all likelihood, the better they understand what you believe, the greater the impetus there will be for them to either JOIN YOU or REJECT YOU. As nominal Christianity begins to disappear from this country, prepare yourself to once again experience this phenomenon.

Jesus stands ASTRIDE the path of human history and he demands a response. If he is who he says he is then we are who he says we are and we should bow before him as our Saviour and Lord. And if we don't, then we will knock us out and cut us off – because HE IS who he says he is whether we acknowledge it or not.

That's what Simeon is saying when he says that Jesus has been appointed for the falling and rising of many – so that the hearts of human beings will be revealed. He is saying that when the conveyor built brings you before Jesus, how you respond to that encounter tells the truth about who you are. If you BOW – it says that you know you are a sinner in need of a Savior. You will go down and then up.

But if you stand in defiance before Jesus – then it says that you are a rebel and you are unfit for the eternal kingdom of God. And you will be knocked off and pushed out. Jesus is the ROCK that divides the river of human history.

The second thing Simeon says is not just TO MARY, it is FOR MARY. He says:

“and a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:35 ESV)

2. And a sword will pierce through your own soul also

Hmm. I think we know what that means don't we? Simeon is saying that NO ONE – not even the human being that Jesus loves the most – will escape the PAIN associated with this process.

Division is bloody and messy. We're all connected. We're more connected than we realize. Remember, back in the garden God said:

“It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18 ESV)

And we have NOT been alone! We have lived our lives CONNECTED to other people – so this process of redemption and separation is going to be painful!! And no one will be exempt – not even Mary. The sword will pierce her own soul too.

I confess that I have sometimes looked at people in this church whose children and grandchildren are all following the Lord and I've envied them. Many of you know that not all of my loved ones are walking with the Lord. I have an adult child that is not currently walking with the Lord and when she told me that it broke my heart – and I'll be honest with you, it made me angry. After the weeping, there was some gnashing of teeth.

“God! How could you do this to me? I did everything you said! I prayed, I read the Bible at dinner time, I taught, I loved, I led – did you not see all of that? And do you not understand I am 100% on Team Jesus? I'm not a Professional Christian! These people could fire me tomorrow and guess what? I'd wake up the next day at the same time and do the same exact THINGS! I'm all in, Jesus! So how come I don't get what that person over there gets? Do you love HIM more than you love ME? Is that what this is? How come I don't get ALL of my children and grandchildren following me eagerly, happily, easily into the Kingdom of Heaven?”

Hmm. God can handle conversations like that. He heard me, he felt me – and he gave me strength. I'm playing the long game and I have faith for a positive outcome – but I'm just saying: A SWORD HAS PIERCED MY SOUL TOO.

No one is exempt from this reality. If MARY is going to have PAIN in this process, I'm going to have PAIN in this process – and you are going to have pain in this process. There is no avoiding that.

Jesus is the SWORD THAT DIVIDES.

Everyone in your family is going to come face to face with this sword and they are going to turn one way or the other. And you can't let go of Jesus to go after the loved ones who turn away.

You've got to STAY with Jesus and you've got to pray. You've got to trust in Jesus to do things that you can't do; and to go into places you can't reach. You've got to stay here with Jesus and FEEL that mixture of emotions. JOY and PAIN. Gladness and sorrow. Faith and desperation.

No one is promised an absence of tears this side of eternity.

Do you know when do we get that? Do you remember when all the tears will be finally wiped away? If you are doing the RMM Bible Reading plan you read about it yesterday. Revelation 21:1-4 says:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4 ESV)

That's what is going on brothers and sisters. Through this child, whose coming we have talked about for the last 5 weeks, God is making all things new. In the process, Simeon says, there will be falling and there will be rising. There will be offense and there will be faith. There will be death and there will be life. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Are you ready for that? Have you counted the cost?

It's going to be hard. It's going to be long. It's going to be painful and blood - but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Even still, come Lord Jesus.

Will you pray with me?