

The Exposing Light of the World
Luke 2:22-28

So far we have seen the responses of various people to the incarnation, the taking on of flesh by Jesus.

- Elizabeth
- Mary
- Zechariah
- Angels at announcement of birth

We'll see a few more this morning...the main focus of the text being the response of a man named Simeon...Simeon is a great character in Scripture, and in a weird way, Simeon makes me think of the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees...

The year 1919 began one of the most notorious droughts in all of professional sports. The year before, in 1918, the Boston Red Sox, won the World Series. In fact they won five of the first fifteen World Series. But in 1919, the owner of the Red Sox sold a player named Babe Ruth, aka "The Great Bambino," to the New York Yankees. After the sale of Ruth, the Red Sox would go decades without ever winning another championship all the while the Yankees, who had never been in the World Series before then, would win 26 World Series titles in the same time span. This turn of events birthed the folklore known as the "Curse of the Bambino."

However, things eventually started to look up for Boston and in 2004, the Red Sox won their first title in 84 years. If you are a Boston fan, you were no doubt elated with what you were seeing. You were able to witness something that hadn't happened in nearly a century. Well, in 2005, a popular sports writer and life-long Boston fan, Bill Simmons, wrote a book about chronicling the events leading up to their elusive World Series win, and the title of his book was, *Now I Can Die in Peace*.

In our text this morning, we are going to see a host of people anxiously awaiting the promise of a Messiah, a promise that had come many, many years before, and at the sight of the baby Jesus, one man, Simeon, joyfully declares, "My eyes have seen my salvation. Now I can die in peace."

SETTING - TEMPLE

Luke 2:22-24

22 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.”

So, at this point in Luke’s gospel, Jesus has been supernaturally conceived and now has been born. Joseph and Mary, because they are careful to follow Jewish law come to the temple for two reasons 1) for the purification of Mary and 2) for the presentation of Jesus.

Purification

The Jewish law stated that any woman who gives birth to a male child is unclean for 40 days after his birth (Lev. 12). The law called for new mothers to bring a lamb and a young pigeon or turtledove as an offering, however, since lambs were expensive the law did allow for a smaller offering for those who weren’t as wealthy. So Joseph and Mary brought the smaller offering of two pigeons or two turtledoves.

Presentation

But they also brought Jesus to the temple for presentation. If you remember the final plague of the exodus, God killed the first-born of everyone in Egypt except those in Israel who had followed God’s instruction to kill a lamb and spread the blood on the door frame. In response to this God declared in Exodus 13 that all firstborn in Israel would be consecrated to him.

So, here they are in the temple in Jerusalem for Mary’s purification and Jesus’ presentation...

SIMEON

Luke 2:25-26

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.

So, here is Simeon, and all we know of him as revealed by the text is that he is “righteous and devout” waiting for the promised Messiah. He is presumably old, and because of his anticipation he is hanging out at the temple every day. He is the season ticket holder who goes to Fenway game after game prior to 2004 with great anticipation that maybe this would be the year. However, he was given the privilege of knowing by God that he would, in fact, see the Lord’s Christ before he died.

At this point in time, thousands of people every year are making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to visit the temple and we can imagine Simeon’s curiosity as he sees parents carrying their children. Is this one the Messiah? Is this the One who will be King? Is this the One for whom my heart longs?

And by direction of the Holy Spirit Simeon comes in at the right time and sees Jesus, recognizes him for who he is and he replies with beautiful words of praise...

NUNC DIMITTIS

Luke 2:27-32

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
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.”

This is often called the *Nunc Dimittis*, Latin for “now dismissing” or “now departing”

He is saying, I can die now, and I can die in peace because I’ve seen him, I’ve seen the Messiah!

But notice Simeon declares this child, Jesus, is the “light of revelation for the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.” It follows after Zechariah’s words in chapter 1, that through Christ, they would see the sunrise and find light while in darkness. That description of Jesus (Jesus is light) is very important in better understanding the gospel story.

Light is a major theme in Scripture

We see light first mentioned in the creation story, the opening verses of Scripture. In fact, the first few verses of the Bible foreshadow the entire story of the gospel. In creation, God overcomes the darkness by speaking light into existence. God dispels darkness with his light. However, in the storyline of the Bible, as one commentator puts it, the light in creation was more like the dusk of day because night was soon coming with the fall.

In the fall, night had arrived. With Adam & Eve’s rebellion against God sin and its curse had arrived, bringing death and broken relationships. The world was plunged into spiritual darkness. However, God, in his grace and mercy, does not leave his people alone in the dark of the night. We see God act in various ways throughout the Old Testament that show God bringing light to his people. For example, just in the Exodus story...

- We see God speak through the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-6)
- We see God provide light for Israel while he brought the 9th plague of darkness on the land in Egypt. (Ex. 10:23)
- We see God as the pillar of fire that lights the way for Israel to walk through the desert. (Ex. 13:21)

And we see God promise that there would be a day when he would bring an end to the night forever...the prophet Isaiah prophesying on the coming Messiah...

Is 9:2

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Then later, prophesying what it will be like when God renews all things...

Is. 60:19-20

19 The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. **20** Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

This is exactly how Revelation describes the new creation, the new Jerusalem at the return of Christ...

Rev. 22:5

5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

The story of the Bible is all about how God overcomes the darkness brought on in the fall in Genesis 3 and more than restores it as seen in Revelation 22. The question is how does he do that?

Well, the last chapter of the Old Testament leaves us waiting with anticipation...

Malachi 4:1-2

1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **2** But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

Who, then, is this “sun of righteousness” that will rise? Who is the One who will bring light into the darkness and be the means through which God will act in a New Creation story?

John 1:1-5, 9

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. **4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... **9** The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

And so that there is absolutely no confusion as to who this light is, Jesus plainly says later...

John 8:12

12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The work of God in the Gospel, is that through Jesus, darkness is overcome. Jesus is the light of the world and, that day in the temple, Simeon recognized that...

RISING AND FALLING

Luke 2:33-35

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.”

Previous announcement of Christ’s birth said he would be a king who would bring peace, but now Simeon reveals something a little less joyful: Jesus is the light of the world, but not everyone will respond positively to the light.

So while there are many who joyfully celebrate the coming of Jesus, there are also many who see the light and, rather than enjoying the sunshine, would rather hide in the shadows.

Imagine a house with children of various ages. For the small child, the dark is unsettling, they want a night lite and when the sun rises, they are the first ones up ready for day. For them, light is comforting, there is a sense of peace and security. But imagine the teenager who when the sun rises or Mom or Dad flips their lights on so they get up, rather than finding joy in the new day, they cover their head with their pillow or pull up the blankets over their head.

Simeon prophesied, not everyone will love this light. And there is a reason for that. Jesus explains...

John 3:16-21

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Why do some resist the light? Because it exposes those parts of our lives that we don’t want exposed. And many people think it is easier to live in the darkness where their sin is not acknowledged rather than face it, because then they would be forced to recognize they need saving. Most will not embrace the light because the light is humbling. You can’t submit to a King, even a good one, until you acknowledge that you aren’t him. You can’t accept a Savior until you admit that you need saving. The light reveals that you aren’t perfect and you do need a Savior. Jesus is both

Lord and Savior for some and at the same time a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” for many.

Because of this, the exposing nature of Jesus as the light of the world, it is tempting, we could say, for many to adjust the light of Jesus. Rather than stepping outside and turning their face to the warmth of the blazing sun, they would rather sit in a windowless room with lights on a dimmer switch so they can control the amount of light that they want. But understand, Jesus cannot be controlled with a dimmer switch. When we open the Word we are exposing ourselves to the light of the world, and we are forced to either accept everything that he is and taught or reject him completely. There is no neutrality in respect to Jesus.

-Alessandro’s claim, “I am a Christian, because Jesus was a good, moral teacher. But I don’t believe he was the Son of God who needed to die for my sins.” That is an answer a lot of people give, isn’t it? They like a little bit of Jesus, but not all of him. You might think the same this morning, but, if you like the teachings of Jesus you will have to come to terms with the fact that Jesus taught he was more than just a good teacher.

As Christians, we acknowledge that Jesus demands a lot. The light is bright. It is exposing. We are called to deny ourselves. We are called to repent of our sin and take up our cross and follow him. But we joyfully do so because we know that in him we receive more than we could ever hope. It is in dying that we actually find life. It is true that being exposed to the light will reveal all of our sinfulness. In the light we find hard to accept truths about our unrighteousness. But the good news of the gospel says that as we turn to Jesus, the light, we also find grace and acceptance. In the gospel, Jesus doesn’t shine the light on our hearts and quickly turn it off out of disgust for what he sees. The light of the world is the light that *welcomes* the world.

So, as the light of Christ shines on your life and exposes those areas of your heart that need repenting of, I want to exhort you to not turn away but to humbly accept what Christ says about you and your need for Him. Doing so, as Simeon said, will lead not to your falling but to your rising (the same word used for resurrection in other places). We will die to self, but we will live forever in Him.

ANNA

Dr. Luke, who remember is trying to give a full account of all of these events, tells us that it wasn’t just Simeon there. There were others, for example there was a woman named Anna who saw everything...

Luke 2:36-38

36 And 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, **37** and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** And 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.

So, Simeon was not alone, there were others, others who had been waiting with great anticipation to see and know that God had not forgotten them, that he would really fulfill his promise to bring redemption for his people.

You might be growing with despair this morning at the state of the world or the state of your life, and you are asking why in the world are things like this? Why can't I find satisfaction, why can't I find peace, why can't I find hope?

Far worse than any curse of the Bambino, our world is under the curse of sin, the curse of the fall. But through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we have been redeemed from that curse, and for those of us who have responded to the light of Christ in repentant faith, like Simeon, say, "My eyes have seen my salvation, I can now depart in peace."

If this morning you have never put your faith in Jesus, know that all of the longings of your heart for peace, joy, acceptance, and so much more are found in the one for whom you were created. The Bible says that God put eternity in the heart of man, and the ache for the eternal can only be satisfied with the Eternal One. You didn't even know it but everything you've longed for is found in Jesus. You have been waiting in the temple without knowing why you were there and who or what you were waiting for. The good news is that the light has come and he has come to shine brightly in the darkness of this world and in the darkness of your life. Come out of the shadows and put your faith in Christ.

For those of us who have put our faith in Jesus, we see a beautiful picture here in our text of a life characterized by expectant hope. Anna, goes and tells all of those who are also anxiously awaiting the Son of God, that he is here. God has provided light for this dark world. And every time we gather we are reminding each other of the same thing. Jesus has come, and even more than what they experienced that day, we remind each other that he also died and rose again, and is one day coming again. So now, we wait with eager anticipation once again for the light to overcome the darkness, but this time for all of eternity.

Though not everyone will love him, Jesus, the light of the world, has come, and we through repentant faith no longer have to live in the shadows but in the marvelous light of our Savior.

VERSES

Luke 2:22-24

Luke 2:25-26

Luke 2:27-32

Isaiah 9:2

Isaiah 60:19-20

Revelation 22:5

Malachi 4:1-2

John 1:1-5, 9

John 8:12

Luke 2:33-35

John 3:16-21

Luke 2:36-38

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Jesus the light of the world? What does that metaphor communicate about the person and work of Christ?
2. In what ways does culture try to “dim” the exposing light of Christ? In what ways do *you* try to “dim” the exposing light of Christ?
3. Simeon declared that Jesus had come to be a light for the whole world, not only Israel (Lk. 2:31-32). Spend some time in prayer for Grace Road missionary partners. Pray specifically for the people of their fields, that they might see the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).
4. Simeon, Anna, and all those who were at the temple that day had been patiently waiting for God’s fulfillment of His promises. Would you consider yourself patient with God? If not, why?