

## **Sermon for January 2, 2021: Luke 2:22-40 – God’s Intentions Toward Us Made Clear in Jesus the Firstborn Son**

**By Anthony Alvarado**

### **Introduction**

Good morning and Happy New Year. It’s been a crazy week and I’m happy to be with you here this morning. I think I’ve met most of you, and my family and I have appreciated worshipping here at St. Peter’s for about the last 3 years. My wife, Sam, and I just celebrated our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past week and, as of two weeks ago, we have five teenagers! Unfortunately, they all home sick, but don’t worry, I took a Covid test yesterday and today and tested negative! During the day, I work as a civil engineer, leading a group of about 25 other engineers working on projects related to rivers and water. Growing up, my dad was in the Marines, so we moved around quite a bit between Japan and the West Coast. I came to Fort Collins in the mid-90s to go to CSU and it was there that I came to faith. Now that you know a little more about the man before you, let’s start moving into our text for the day.

Today - we're going to continue our passage in Luke 2 that we read on Christmas Eve. Father Matt emphasized how Christmas can be so crazy in the culture we live in, how it can be messy, and how the circumstances of Jesus’ birth and the people surrounding it were messy as well. We want to slow down in Advent and be reflective, but chaos can easily eat that up. Now, as we shift to a new year and become reflective in a different way, we’re going to continue to see what God has for us in Luke. We’re going to learn more about Mary and Joseph, especially Mary, meet Simeon and Anna, and while we’ll pick up pieces about Jesus on the way, we’ll come back to Him at the close.

### **v. 22-24 and v. 39-40: Joseph and Mary’s Fulfillment of the Law of Moses**

- Timeline: The Christ child had been circumcised and given the name Jesus on the 8th day.
- Mary and Joseph and Jesus were almost certainly still residing in Bethlehem. This is before the visit of the wise men.
- This appearance in the temple was then roughly 40 days after Jesus' birth.
  - Leviticus 12: Mary had to present an offering for her purification after childbirth, 40 days after birth for a male.
  - The requirement was a lamb and a turtledove, two types of offerings, both for Mary. If you could not afford a lamb, two turtledoves or pigeons would suffice.
- Now Luke seems to confuse the sacrifices needed here. It was Mary who needed to be purified but Jesus was to be presented as the firstborn to be redeemed - which was different. Luke actually focuses on the presentation of Jesus as the firstborn male.
  - This redemption of the firstborn is described in Exodus 13 and indicates the offering needed was a lamb – or two turtledoves/pigeons. However, later in Numbers 3, the payment for any non-Levite was 5 shekels. This is where it can

get a little confusing – Luke focuses on Jesus but appears to mention only the sacrifice for Mary.

- But we see that Mary and Joseph could not afford a lamb for either Mary or Jesus but fulfilled the law of Moses as required. They also did not need to present themselves at the temple but they wished to fulfill the whole of the law.
- We'll come back to this.

### **v. 25-38: Simeon and Anna**

- Simeon
  - Described as righteous, devout, waiting for Jesus and waiting for relief for Israel. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the savior.
  - That waiting for in v 25 (waiting for the consolation of Israel) is a waiting for in the hospitable sense, almost a preparing for.
  - More than all these traits, what should stand out to us is the three times it describes Simeon as in the Spirit or the Holy Spirit being upon him in some form. This man walked in the Spirit. He was someone who understood what it meant to be filled with the Spirit.
  - His song that is in our book of prayer
    - The use of salvation in v30 - actually is the word for "defender"
    - This use of a person for defender then makes v31-33 a little different. Jesus is the Light and the Glory. And he is the one that has been prepared in the presence of all peoples.
  - What Simeon says to Mary! Note how this is stated clearly to Mary, not to Joseph.
    - We don't have enough time to dig into all of his statement here but the interjection is an striking warning to Mary. This is not going to be easy for her. This is her child but this is our Savior and the God of the universe in the flesh. And Mary will have to endure being treated differently by Jesus at times and deal with the tension. John 2, when Jesus turns the water into wine, seems to indicate that Mary knows he can do miracles, but John 7 shows how his brothers don't believe him and mock him. This tension is also seen in other gospel passages.
    - And she is to end up watching her firstborn son suffer a painful death before ultimately coming to grips with who he is.
- Anna
  - 84 years old, probably had been a widow since she was in her 20s
  - Serving night and day in the temple in prayer and fasting.

**What connects both Simeon and Anna are that they notice Jesus. Why?** Certainly not because of the appearance of Jesus or of Mary and Joseph.

Scripture says Jesus was of no outstanding appearance and even after he performs miracles, heals the sick, raises the dead, preaches the good news and wisdom, he is not recognized, certainly not by the Pharisees. Even his friends deny him.

Yet Simeon and Anna instantly recognize him and believe in him. And they only see a dad, a mom, and a baby. No miracles, no sermons, but they see it.

Why is this? The text emphasizes that they're in the Spirit, in prayer, and expecting Jesus - anticipating him.

- v. 25 and 38 repeat that phrase of waiting for the consolation of Israel. They're looking for him! Even in their older age, they have not given up or grown resigned in their faith.

### **Why is this account given to us?**

Why did Luke give us this account? We have very little record of Jesus between his birth and the start of his public ministry.

Certainly, we have some good challenges to us in this passage - can we strive to be in the Spirit more and in prayer more in 2022 and be expectant like Simeon and Anna, waiting for Jesus and not missing Him in our daily lives? I know that would be good thing for my life - to be pursuing God like those two.

Or maybe this passage is here to show us how devout Mary and Joseph were, to give us a little glimpse into their faith, in their striving to fulfill the law, and to bless Jesus as godly parents.

**But there's something else here.** Let's go back to v. 23. Again, Mary was the one who was supposed to present herself for purification not Jesus. But Luke here points us to the fact that Jesus is Mary's firstborn child. Jesus was supposed to be presented as the firstborn - and this leads us back to Exodus 12 through 13 - the Passover and the final plague to free Israel from Egypt - the deaths of the firstborn.

Let's remember what happened. Israel was enslaved by Egypt for 400 years after Jacob moved his family when Joseph was put in charge over the famine response by Pharaoh. After 400 years, Moses is then called to speak to Pharaoh and ask him to free Israel. Ten plagues are then sent to inflict Egypt to convince them to let Israel go. The final plague - the deaths of Egypt's firstborn.

*"And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead." (12:30b)*

Passover as a yearly feast of remembrance is instituted here, but also the consecration of the firstborn.

- *The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>"Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." (13:1)*

- *Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. <sup>14</sup>And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. <sup>15</sup>For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' <sup>16</sup>It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:13b-15)*

Here we have Jesus, presented as the firstborn to be redeemed. But he needs no redemption! He is the firstborn Son of God. So, for the payment to be presented in the temple to buy him back from God – there's no buying Jesus back – He is God Himself and belongs to God the Father. This is probably why Luke seems to omit the exchange – how they needed to give 4 turtledoves (2 for Mary, 2 for Jesus) but Luke only indicates 2.

From the sacrifice of the firstborn to free Israel from Egypt, the account of Abraham and Isaac, the celebration of the Passover, and the redemption of the firstborn - all of this is foreshadowing the Cross and why Jesus came.

**It is not a coincidence that the firstborn of Egypt would die to free Israel. It is not a coincidence that God would ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac (and then stop him at the last minute). It is not a coincidence that God would call the firstborn as holy and set apart for Himself.**

From the beginning, Jesus came to die, to be the perfect sacrifice, the firstborn who would willingly give his life so that we might be redeemed. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God; Jesus was coming to be our defender, our salvation, the light and glory, as Simeon says.

From the beginning, God planted the seeds of this plan to redeem us.

**Why would this be His plan?** Why have a plan that involved us falling into sin and need restoration, and the solution for us be the sacrifice of His only son on a cross, one of the most painful ways to die ever devised?

**God could easily show his power and might, himself as Creator, that he is all-knowing. But what is His greatest trait? A trait that we give lip service to but struggle to believe or get a hold of. His grace. It's His grace. This plan was to reveal to us the magnitude of his grace toward us.**

This is the mystery described as unveiled in the passage we read in Ephesians 1:

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:9-10)*

This was his plan from the beginning; his intentions toward us are good. Simeon and Anna rejoice that this mystery is revealed – that God would redeem us by sending our defender, THE firstborn Son of God who would lay down his life to restore us to Himself.

So, as we enter this new year let's remember that God is good, that his love remains the same, and that his grace is rich and will be lavished upon us for eternity. Pursue Him this year in that light. He loves you. May we rest in His love and in His grace.