

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

²¹And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus^a, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb^b.

²²And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord^c ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD^d"), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS^e."

²⁵And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.^f ²⁶And it had

^a 2:21 **when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus.** Jesus means "salvation" (see Matthew 1:21 and my note on Luke 1:31). This event gives us a glimpse into the way first century Jews applied Torah's command to circumcise. Like John, Jesus was publicly named just before He was circumcised. The name was a personal identity and the circumcision was a national identity.

Why was Jesus circumcised? Because the law of Moses commanded it. Specifically, circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Joseph and Mary lived in obedience to the law. They were not rebels nor was the Son of God. Similar to the reason Paul wanted Timothy (Acts 16:3) to identify with Israel in this way, the circumcision of Jesus prepared Him for ministry to Hebrews.

^b 2:21 **the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.** Both John and Jesus were named by the angel Gabriel before they were conceived (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:13, 31).

^c 2:22 **when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.** The law of Moses required that a woman who gave birth to a male child remain ceremonially unclean (not morally unclean) for a total of forty days (Leviticus 12). After that time she was required to bring a sacrifice to the temple.

^d 2:23 **EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD.** The firstborn sons were holy to the Lord, which means they were set apart. Consequently they had to be "bought back" from the Lord (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 18:15). That claim on the firstborn explains why it was not unusual for Hannah to let young Samuel serve at the tabernacle instead of redeeming him.

^e 2:24 **A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.** Luke repeatedly demonstrates the way the Lord Jesus was attracted to poor people. He certainly started out in a poor family. The sacrifice mentioned here is one of two that could be offered. The standard sacrifice for this ceremonial cleansing was a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon. Those who were too poor to afford a lamb were permitted to just offer a pair of the birds (Leviticus 12:8).

^f 2:25 **Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.** Simeon has been identified by some as the son of the great Rabbi Hillel and father to Paul's mentor Gamaliel. While we cannot prove that, we do know that Simeon had a sterling reputation and was one of the people convinced that the time of Christ was near. Acknowledging the imminent coming of Messiah changes the way you live.

"The Consolation of Israel" could be considered one of the names of Jesus, but it is more a description of what Isaiah prophesied about Messiah and His forerunner:

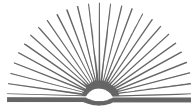
"Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD'S hand double for

The Gospel of Luke
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been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ^a. ²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law^b, ²⁸then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God^c, and said,

²⁹"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,

According to Your word^d;

³⁰For my eyes have seen Your salvation^e,

³¹Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples^f,

³²A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,

And the glory of Your people Israel^g."

all her sins." A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see *it* together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 40:1-5

The statement that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon is a reminder that Jesus called the Holy Spirit the "Helper," using a similar word to "consolation" (John 14:26). God's Consolation would come as a permanent resident through the work of this Child.

^a 2:26 **it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.** It is a rare thing to get such a specific message from God, but God communicated to Simeon something that would happen before his death. In the same way, God communicated with Paul through an angel that no passengers on his ship would die before it ran aground (Acts 27:23-26).

^b 2:27 **he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law.** Simeon was "in the Spirit" here in the same way as John was in the Spirit when he received the vision on Patmos. This was no unconscious trance, but it was a definite moving of God.

This may be the fulfillment, or at least a partial fulfillment of Malachi's prediction that Messiah would come suddenly into the temple:

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts." Malachi 3:1

^c 2:28 **then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God.** We are not told that Simeon was one of the attending priests, so it may have seemed unusual to Joseph and Mary that this old fellow would take their baby. On the other hand, there had been nothing "usual" surrounding the child so far.

^d 2:29 **Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word.** Until this time Simeon had known there was a purpose he had to fulfill before he ended his life. Matthew Henry pointed out that prophecy makes a man "enabled to speak things above himself."

^e 2:30 **For my eyes have seen Your salvation.** Remember what "Jesus" means. Simeon realized that he was looking at the Glory of Israel, the Savior of the world.

Jacob said something similar when he saw Joseph after so many years (Genesis 46:30).

^f 2:31 **Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples.** This was not done in a corner. The entire public ministry of Christ was just that: public. Paul pointed this out to Herod Agrippa (Acts 26:26).

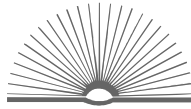
^g 2:32 **A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel.** This quotation is from Isaiah 49:6. Simeon knew what Messiah was more than the Redeemer of Israel. The entire Old Testament pointed to the nations gladly serving under the reign of Jesus Christ.

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³³And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him^a.
³⁴And Simeon blessed them^b and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed^c—³⁵and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed^d.”
³⁶And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher^e. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ and then as

Light is always a picture of life and hope. It stands in contrast to darkness, which is a picture of death and despair. That is why another traditional Christmas text begins with these words:

But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. Isaiah 9:1-2

As Simeon and Isaiah prophesied, the light would extend beyond the house of Israel. Paul saw this fulfilled in part at Antioch in Pisidia when a crowd from the community packed the synagogue and he had to explain why he was preaching about Messiah to Gentiles:

For so the Lord has commanded us, “I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.” Acts 13:47

Then Luke went on to add:

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48

^a 2:33 **His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.**

Notice that Luke calls Joseph His father. There is a significant difference in the texts that stand behind different translations. One family of texts says “Joseph” and another says “His father.” This debate is worth having, but please note that later in this chapter—in any translation—Joseph and Mary are called Jesus’ parents (2:41) and Mary calls Joseph Jesus’ father (2:48).

Consider all the witnesses to the identity of this Little One. The angel spoke to Zacharias. The angel spoke to Mary. The angel spoke to Joseph. The angel spoke to the shepherds. The angelic choir sang to the shepherds. The shepherds saw the baby and confirmed the message. The shepherds told everyone around the news. Now Simeon.

^b 2:34 **Simeon blessed them.** Compare this to Simeon’s blessing of God in verse 28. It is the identical word. When you bless, you speak well of what you bless. If we claim to follow the two great commandments then the words of our mouths will reflect that. Praise works like love. People who find it difficult to praise men from the heart probably find it difficult to praise God from the heart.

^c 2:34 **Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.** The Lord Jesus brought men out for what they were. There could be no middle ground when He came near. His identity and call to discipleship divided families and communities. He was either the Savior or the Judge, the fragrance of life or the stench of death, the cornerstone or the stumbling block.

^d 2:35 **a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.** This sounds like Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

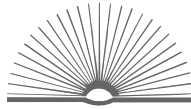
^e 2:36 **there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.** What is a prophetess? Does God approve of female preachers? Yes! Preaching is an activity, not an office. Prophesying is simply carrying a message from God. The fact that Anna did this did not put her into a position of leadership in the assembly.

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a widow to the age of eighty-four^a. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers^b. ³⁸At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem^{c, d}.

Asher is one of the “ten lost tribes” after the Assyrian captivity, but there must have been records still in existence when Jesus was born.

^a 2:36-37 **She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.** This means she had been a widow longer than she had been single. She could have served the Lord as a widow for sixty or more years.

^b 2:37 **She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.** Luke’s statement that Anna never left the temple could tell us that she actually had living quarters there.

Anna was a woman of self denial and holy discipline. Participation in the liturgical parts of Israel’s worship was a good thing, but Anna spent herself in personal prayer as well as corporate prayer.

Compare Anna to the “widows indeed” Paul said should receive congregational care (1 Timothy 5).

^c 2:38 **At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.** There is no mention of her speaking words to Joseph and Mary. She talked to God and to anyone who would listen.

^d 2:21-38 People get depressed when they start analyzing what their real purpose is. People reach a certain age or experience one of life’s many upheavals and start wondering why they are even here. Simeon and Anna had this problem buttoned up because they knew how to answer these questions:

- a. What are you looking for? Compare this with what everyone else is looking for.
- b. What kind of God do you serve? He is a covenant-keeping God. Compare this with the things others promise us.
- c. What is God’s opinion? Compare this with the way we fear man and men’s opinions.
- d. What are God’s future plans? This stands in contrast to our often-idolatrous dreams and goals.
- e. What has God’s done in the past? This is important because we often define ourselves based on our past failures or successes.

Wherever you happen to be in your life, you have a stewardship. You have something to manage. A second application of this text points us to Esther, another biblical character who was placed by God in a position of influence. Esther became a queen, which looks very different from Simeon and Anna’s life circumstances. All three, however, were given positions that made a difference in the lives of others.

When God places you into a position of privilege He does not do so in order that you may have self-centered pleasure. Mordecai challenged Esther that her rise to stardom was more than an example of personal advancement (Esther 4:14).

Whether you have arrived at the golden years or are just starting the green ones, this text carries a powerful example for you. Regardless of the quantity of water under the bridge, you can finish well for the glory of God. If you are among the redeemed, observe and imitate the way Simeon and Anna ended their lives:

1. Assume that God is going to do great things. That is the kind of God He is. His “great things” may not result in your comfort, but “great” is bigger than your comfort. What do you anticipate from God?
2. Train your tongue to bless. How do you use your tongue? Pray. Teach. Bless God. Speak what God has spoken. Bless people. Proverbs says the lips of the righteous feed many.

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3. Develop routines that benefit others. What kind of routines have you developed? Self-focused routines never satisfy. I have been known to send depressed people to visit nursing home residents as homework.
 4. Find a purpose bigger than your career. Where do you fit into God's work? Your life work has to be more than what you get paid to do or your purpose will end when your job ends.

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