

LUKE

“Simeon’s Song”

Luke 2:21-40

Sunday, January 1, 2017 (Christmas Season, Feast Day of the Circumcision of Christ)

By David A. Ritchie

“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 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. 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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phineas, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 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. 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. And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:21–40, ESV)

I. Introduction

- Last Sunday, was a pretty fun day in the Ritchie household, because our boys are beginning to enjoy Christmas day. And they are enjoying it because they are beginning to anticipate it.
- This was the first year that Solomon, the five-year-old, felt like the anticipation was unendurable. On the 15th, he asked me how many days there were until Christmas, and he said ten was just way too much.
- This was also the first year, we had to hide the wrapped presents in a closet instead of putting them beneath a Christmas tree, because the three-year-old Samuel is, shall we say, lacking in the spiritual fruit of self-control.
- But on Christmas morning Samuel was also the first to wake up, and on his way to our room he ran by the living room and saw all the presents for the first time, and suddenly my wife and I

- heard him run back into his room and tell his big brother, “*Somlie, it’s ‘Mismas!’*”
- It was a beautiful, spontaneous outburst of joy; that at long last – at least in his mind – what was once anticipated had now arrived.
 - Christmas season is of course about a much greater longing than toys and presents. It is a season that celebrates that the long awaited messiah has come in Christ. For this reason, as Advent is meant to be a season of longing Christmas is meant to be a season of feasting and joy.
 - In fact, in the old church calendar Christmas was a season of 12 days – as in the 12 days of Christmas – to celebrate the fulfillment of Christ’s first coming.
 - Today’s text paints that picture of fulfillment vividly.
 - An old man, who has spent his whole life longing for the “consolation” of Israel is nearing the end of his life. For years he has poured over the promises of God’s words. For years he has prayed for those promises to become reality. In the secret place of prayer, he has heard the Holy Spirit of God whisper that he will before he dies see with his own eyes the Lord’s messiah. And then at long last that day – the day that he had been looking forward to all his life – finally comes.
 - This is why the scene of old Simeon is so moving; he holds the fulfillment of all the longing of Israel and the whole world in the form of this newborn infant.
 - Thus, with a greater joy than we could probably comprehend, he bursts into a joyful, spontaneous, and Spirit-filled song – “Simeon’s song.”
 - For the rest of our time today, I would like to spend some time unfolding three themes of this text about how Christ is the fulfillment of our deepest longings: **1.) The Hope of Salvation, 2.) The Holy Spirit of God, and 3.) The Humble Humanity of Christ.**

II. Text

1.) The Hope of Salvation.

- Simeon, the elderly man who longed to see the faithfulness of with his own eyes, instead of just trying to get comfortable in his old age (Lk. 2:25-26).
- Anna, the elderly widow and “prophetess” who prayed for fasted for and longed for the redemption of Israel, instead of just trying to find a man (Lk. 2:36-38).
- Craddock: “These two aged saints are Israel in miniature, and Israel at its best: devout, obedient, constant in prayer, led by the Holy Spirit, at home in the temple, longing and hoping for the fulfillment of God’s promises.”¹
- Likewise, these two people together are able to provide an effective witness to the true identity of the this baby.
- Marshall: “[Anna’s] presence provides the second of the two witnesses required to testify to the significance of Jesus (Dt. 19:15).”²
- Now, we don’t have access to Anna’s exact words, but we do have direct words from Simeon – particularly the words his song, which illustrate the specific nature of his hope. Simeon’s song is *drenched in the language of Isaiah 40-55*.
- He hoping to meet “the Christ,” the messiah, the anointed one, the one who will bring about age of Israel’s “consolation” or comfort, after years of oppression and pain (Lk. 2:25).
- It was the job of the Messiah to bring about Israel’s “salvation” (Lk. 2:30). Now, this is a word

¹ Fred B. Craddock, [Luke](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 40.

² I. Howard Marshall, [The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 115.

that Luke as a gospel-writer uniquely likes to use. And when we here this word, we think of simply going to heaven when we die. But in the Bible it means more than that.

- For Israel at this time “salvation” meant deliverance from oppression, a return from exile, a vindication from all wrong-doings.
- Moreover this salvation wouldn’t only be for the people of Israel. It would also give light to the gentiles, and by giving light the gentiles, this salvation would bring Israel glory (Lk. 2:32). This was always the purpose of God’s covenant people since the time of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:2).
- Simeon’s hope points beyond his own needs and wants; this hope is a hope for cosmic justice.
- What does this show us? It shows us that Simeon and Anna’s hope flow from knowing, believing, and trusting in the promises of Holy Scripture.
- **Simeon and Anna show us how our hope is to be formed and fashioned, not by the world, but by the word of God.**
- Depression can arise when we place our hope in the wrong thing.
- **“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12, ESV).**
- Your circumstances will let you down. There will be pain and disappointment and pain in your life. Like Simeon, your health may be failing. Like Anna, you may have lost your spouse.
- In the midst of our pain, we are invited to place our hope in the promises of God’s word that will not fail. As Romans 5:5 tells us, his hope “does not put us to shame.”
- *So ask yourself: what is forming your hope? Where are you placing your hope?*

2.) The Holy Spirit of God

- Luke has a unique, consistent emphasis on the Holy Spirit in his gospel and its sequel (the book of Acts). Already we have seen the Holy Spirit mentioned four times in chapter one of Luke alone (1:15,35,41,67).
- And it is this same Holy Spirit that tells Simeon he will see the Lord’s Christ and then lead him to encounter him in the temple.
- This provokes the question: *What does it look like to be led by the Spirit?*
- Is being “Spirit-led” like having access to a mystical radio-wave that tells us spiritual secrets, almost like a Christian version of a psychic or palm-reader? From the Bible, that just isn’t the picture we get.
- Let’s take a look at how Luke has presented the Holy Spirit thus far. *In Luke 1:15, the angel Gabriel says that John the Baptist will be filled with the Holy Spirit so that he can prepare people to worship Jesus. Luke 1:35, that same angel says that the Holy Spirit will overshadow Mary, so that she will conceive and give birth to Jesus. In Luke 1:41, when Elizabeth, the mother of John, meets Mary, the mother of Jesus, she is filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaims that Mary’s child is the Lord. In Luke 1:67, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesies about the salvation Jesus will bring.* What does this show us?
- **In the Bible, the Holy Spirit seeks to reveal and glorify Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus, so that they we acknowledge and worship him as Lord.**
- Likewise, this passage shows how the Holy Spirit always works in and through the word of God, not against it. If you were to be able to do a long study of this passage, you would find Simeon’s Spirit-filled words sound a lot like Isaiah.
- Sometimes it is easy for people within the church to somehow pit the word of God and the Spirit of God against one another. But the word of God testifies to the reality of the Spirit, and the Spirit authored the word of God.
- Finally, it should be said that Simeon’s being led by the Spirit is not a Christianese trump-card that validates whatever he wants to do, simply by saying “God told me.”
- The opposite of being led by the Spirit is not being led by rationality, as if the Holy Spirit has to

make us inherently irrational or ant-intellectual. Rather, Galatians 5 would suggest that the opposite of walking in the Spirit is walking in the flesh.

- ***So what are you being led by?***
- ***On this day when we often make resolutions, ask yourself: what would it look like for 2017 to be a year in which you are more led by the Spirit?***

3.) The Humble Humanity of Christ

- The Law of the Lord is a very important theme laced throughout this passage. Fred Craddock notes: *“No fewer than five times in this text Luke tells the reader that they [Mary and Joseph] did everything required in the law.”*³
- Jesus is circumcised according to the Law (2:21).
- Jesus is dedicated in the temple according to the Law (2:22-23).
- Mary’s makes a sacrifice for her cleansing according to the Law (2:24).
- And they don’t leave Jerusalem until they “performed everything according to the Law” (1:39).
- Now, lets unpack the significance of a few of these actions.
- First, let’s look at Mary’s sacrifice.
- This sacrifice was offered not because there was something sinful about having a baby. In fact, the Bible consistently has a very high view of children. However, as Mark Rooker notes, *“Because [the Law of the Lord says] life is in the blood (17:11), the loss of blood required some purification to acknowledge the sanctity of life.”*⁴
- Moreover, because of the details Luke provides, we know something of Mary and Joseph’s financial condition. Luke quotes a law from Leviticus 12:8: *“...And if she cannot afford a lamb, then 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).
- We can surmise from this sacrifice that Jesus was born into poverty. Biblical scholar Mark Rooker notes: *“This indicates that the Savior of the world, who created all that exists, not only humbled himself in becoming a man but was born in the most meager of circumstances in ancient Israel.”*⁵
- As parents, Mary and Joseph seek to honor God with holiness in terms of the Law. This sets the tone for Jesus’s life in terms of his righteousness before the Law.
- Lastly, I want you to look at verse 21, the first verse of our reading: *“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”*
- Today is the feast of “The Circumcision of Christ” in the old liturgical calendar. Now why would Christians throughout the centuries find it necessary to celebrate this event, especially on the first day of the year?
- **The answer is that Jesus’s circumcision shows us that he has not only embraced the humility of his humanity, he also submitted himself obedience to the law. In other words, he did not just become human – he became the first ever totally obedient and righteous human. He lived under the Law of as a servant, so that we can receive gift of his righteousness and the new identity as children of God.**

³ Craddock, 38.

⁴ Mark F. Rooker, [Leviticus](#), vol. 3A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 184–185.

⁵ Ibid., 185.

- As the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”* (Galatians 4:4–6, ESV).
- **This is of the utmost importance because the cross of Christ and even the resurrection of Christ are meaningless without his righteous life of Christ. He did not just die and substitutionary death; he lived a substitutionary life.**
- He is not just the true and better Israel, and temple, and sacrifice.
- *He is the true and better you!*
- *And his righteousness – freely offered to us in the gospel – is the fulfillment of our deepest and truest longing.*

III. Conclusion

- But we must not respond to Jesus neutrally. As our text shows in verse 34 and 35, “Jesus will bring truth to light and in so doing throw all who come in contact with him into a crisis of decision. In that decision, rising and falling, life and death, result. Jesus precipitates the centrally important movement of one’s life, toward or away from God.”⁶
- I urge you, respond to Jesus today and this New Year by moving toward God.
- I do not know that he does not promise an easy life (Mary’s example of watching Jesus be misunderstood and murdered); it is costly to walk in faith with Christ. But it is worth it.
- So Redeemer Christian Church, as we go into this next year, may we be a people with hope formed by the word of God. May we seek to be a Spirit-led people. May we be a people who walk in the righteousness of Christ, for the sake of the one who lives righteously on our behalf.
AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Questions

- 1) *What is forming your hope? How might a habit of daily Bible study help focus your hope on God?*
- 2) *What does this passage teach us about what it means to be led by the Spirit? Where does the Spirit lead Simeon?*
- 3) *How is the humility of Christ revealed in this passage?*
- 4) *Why is Christ’s righteousness according to the law so significant for our salvation (see Gal. 4:4-7)?*

⁶ Craddock, 39.