

“A Longing Fulfilled: Simeon’s Delight”
Luke 2:21-35

Martin Luther posed a question before his congregants at St. Mary’s Church in Wittenberg centuries ago. It is still pertinent today. If Jesus were born today, would it be any different than 2,000 year ago? If Mary and Joseph arrived for Caesar’s registration, the city would still be overwhelmed with the descendants of David. “No Vacancy” signs would dominate the city’s hotels and motels, Airbnb’s would be filled and families’ homes would be filled with relatives to capacity.

The text tells us “There was not room in the inn.” Luther then posed this question, “Would you have given up your comfortable circumstance for a poor couple in significant personal distress?” His reply was that they would claim proudly that they would have gladly; only because we knew who the child was, the Son of God. However, had they lived then the answer would be a resounding “NO.” The only way you would be so generous is that you now know who the child would become.

It was true then and it is true now. “He came to His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11).” The client king, Herod, saw the quest of the Magi as only a threat to his hegemony and later sought to kill Him. The scribes, the teachers of the Law, knew where their hope would come but had no interest in seeking Him. Augustus Ceasar never knew He had come to us. The Sadducees saw deliverance in political concession. The Pharisees anticipated a conquering king that would restore the glories of the Solomonic era. The Essenes gave up on public dialogue and took refuge in isolation at Qumran awaiting a king.

Why was Jesus so unheralded? Why was the land so quiet?

Phillips Brooks, a nineteenth century Boston pastor posed the issue in an old hymn. “How silently, How silently, the wondrous gift is given when God imparts to human heart the blessing of heaven.”

The couple that God chose to bring the gift of His son into this world were anything but noticeable.

1. They came from a despised town in the Galilee, not Bethlehem, fulfilling the promise of Micah 5:2.

2. Their financial situation was near impoverishment as revealed in the sacrifice they made for Mary's purification; they offered not a lamb which was not a luxury item in that day.
3. He came not from within the upper class or the middle class, but to a godly and devout couple of the Jewish poor.

Of course, there were the shepherds though it is interesting that they were suspect by the religious intelligentsia of the day. Then, of course, there were the Persian astrologers, the Magi, though they were Gentiles.

Among the few that were "true" sons of Abraham were Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, as well as Anna and Simeon.

The Encounter with Simeon in the Temple

1. The context (2:21)

Luke tells us more about the events in baby Jesus' life than any other writer.

- a. Eight days after our Lord's birth, Joseph brought Jesus to be circumcised (Lev. 12:3). On the occasion, the male child would be assigned his name by the father; in this case, His name was given by an angel to Joseph (Matt. 1:21) and to Mary (Luke 1:31).

(God is said to have named only six people in the Bible: four in the OT [Issac, Josiah, Ishmael, and Cyrus] and two in the NT [John the Baptist and Jesus]).

- b. The mother was considered ritually unclean from birth to the fortieth day, so Mary did not attend the ceremony. We do not know who performed the ceremony.

2. The encounter (2:22-27)

- a. The purification ritual of Mary, accompanied by the presentation of the babe to the Lord, required a trip to Jerusalem since a sacrificial offering was required, a symbol of her cleansing (Exod. 13:2,12, 15; Luke 2:22). Galatians 4:4 verifies this in stating that Jesus was born of a woman, born under the Law. The couple were devout keepers of the Mosaic Code.

The emphasis in the passage is upon Jesus' presentation to the Lord. This is made clear by the quotation; the offering was dedicatory in nature and, in a sense a substitution for Jesus (it was not a burnt offering for the offering would be killed). The purification ritual is not described so it was not Luke's major point!

This, also, suggests that the couple remained in the environs of Bethlehem for over a month before fleeing to Egypt. We do know they were residing in a home when the Magi arrived.

- b. The offering stipulated was normally a lamb, but impoverished they could only offer two pigeons or two doves (Exod. 12:6, 8). There was also a five-shekel tax (Num. 18:15), but Luke does not mention it.
 - c. We are told that Simeon, if he was a priest, as most assume, was retired (post fifty).
 - d. Simeon was a devout man looking for the advent of the “Consolation of Israel” deliverer.
 - e. It was revealed to him by the Spirit (I take it through the study of the messianic passages such as in Daniel and the prophets), that the redeemer was not only imminent, but that he would see Him with his very own eyes.
3. The discovery (2:28-35)
- a. After years of waiting, it happened. The babe in Mary’s arms was the One! He asked permission to hold the gift of God (2:25-28).

The repetition of Simeon’s insight through the Holy Spirit indicates that it was authoritative!

- b. Simeon’s first response: The Praise of God for fulfilled prophecy (2:29-32).
 - 1) His first response is exclamation; his dreams have been fulfilled and he was ready to be “dismissed” from public service.
 - 2) This child is “A light of revelation to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6).” While Mary’s and Elizabeth’s speech is Jewish in orientation, Simeon’s is the only one in the birth narratives that addresses the non-Jew.
 - 3) This child is also the future “glory of the people of Israel, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (“I will make of you a great nation (Gen 12:3).” He could have began singing, “The hope and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.” His insight destroys the notion forever that God’s people are only ethnic Jews (the Samaritan woman at Sychar, Cornelius, another at the foot of the cross). This verse goes a step further than the angelic song found in Luke 2:14 and is the clearest indication so far in the Scriptures of the universal dimension of Jesus’ redemptive work.
- c. The reaction of Mary and Joseph, v. 33
Amazement at Simeon’s words stunned the couple. Though the message to Joseph (Matt. 1:19-25), to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), as well

as Mary's testimony (Luke 1:46-55) should have given them a clue. But, this was beyond their conception

- d. Simeon's second response: The blessing of Mary about her son and herself (vv. 34-35).
 - a. This child will divide humans; He will judge mankind. He will be the one who both lifts mankind and condemns others.
 - b. While Mary's heart is full of joy now, it will not always be the case, "a sword will pierce your soul." Mary will watch her son die as the enemy of Israel, and a threat to the empire. He will be called a lunatic, a Samaritan, and a son of the devil. A son's suffering never leaves a mother untouched.
(It is interesting that Joseph is not included in Mary's grief. Perhaps we have another clue that Joseph pre-deceased before the crucifixion when Jesus gave the care of his mother to John).
 - c. Peoples attitude toward Jesus are never neutral. When people see Christ suffer, their reaction shows on which side they stand. At the cross passersby ridiculed Jesus. Mary, Salome, and Mary Magdalene wept.

Applications

1. While there was vast misperception in Israel concerning the promises of the coming redeemer, there was also a believing, insightful remnant, even in the darkest days. In Simeon, we see a great example for us today. All is not dark, the Lord is not inept in fulfilling His promises, godliness can be still found among us. The light has not gone out!!
2. In Simeon, we can learn the power of hope to keep us going. We may not live to see the second coming of our Lord, but we will see Him. Do you and I have the burning hope that inspires our lives like this dear man?
3. He is an example to us of the insight that can be gained from the Scriptures. This man knew the Holy Scriptures that spoke so clearly to Him of the coming One, so clearly that he saw Him in his own arms. Someday we will be seen of Jesus in His arms!!!
4. Simeon tells us that Jewish believers had a good understanding of Christ's work before the cross, particularly that God's people are limited to Israel. The ethnic divide between Jew and Gentile would one day be merged into the one family of God.
5. If Simeon waited in hope for his "dismissal" from this life, how much more should it comfort us to know that our times are in His hands. He has a purpose for us, and when it is accomplished, we will be called away to see the one we serve. Are you waiting patiently? Do you know that God has a purpose in keeping you among us? Is your purpose the service of others?