

**Anna the Prophetess in the temple  
Jesus' Return to Nazareth  
(Luke 4:17-30)**

To focus on the familiar, even a topic as relevant as the incarnation, can create a catharsis for one who grows weary of repetition (though I confess the story never grows old for all of us). If the ultimate story line of the Bible is the quest of God to gather an adoring people forever, given also the disruptive and tragic events of human dereliction, there are three monumental in history. (1) The great promises of God to correct the denouement of mankind, which are found in the Hebrew Scriptures. (2) The coming of a redeemer/ king, which is declared in the gospel accounts. (3) The gathering of the people of God after the ascension of Jesus through the centuries culminating in the final triumph, the eternal state, the reversal of the Adamic crisis the new heavens and earth, with myriads of devoted subjects praising Him forever.

There was some logic in the five-lessons series this advent season, the emphasis being upon the person, character, and accomplishments of the one who would restore the habitation of God among his people.

- 1-2. We investigated the Old Testament which provides the foundation of all redemptive history. The covenants of God, the most central being Abrahamic, the others providing added details, and the words of the prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Micah) describing the promised one.
3. Then we looked at the preamble to John's gospel (1:1-18) again emphasizing the person, character, and accomplishment of the Lord.
4. Last Sunday, we looked at a contemporary of Jesus who held the one-month, ten-day old child in his arms, Simeon, a man who knew that he would see God's gift, the "Light" to Jews and Gentiles.

Today (5), I want to look at two passages that on the surface seem disconnected. The first is the witness of a prophetess, Anna, who encountered the baby in the temple after Simeon. The emphasis there is upon the perception of Jesus by those who longed for His coming. The second is a passage in which Jesus explains himself to people using an Old Testament anticipatory text.

## Anna, the Prophetess (Luke 2:36-38)

Anna's comments are briefer than Simeon's; further, her words are summarized by another.

1. The role of Anna, v. 36a  
Anna appears as a prophetess; this suggests that her insights are authoritative.
2. The heritage of Anna, vv. 36b-37
  - a. Her father is noted likely because she was a widow.
  - b. That she was from the tribe of Asher suggests that her family either returned from the Assyrian exile of the Northern Kingdom or fled from the chaos into the Southern Kingdom and returned.
  - c. She lost her only husband after seven years of marriage and remained in widowhood into her 84<sup>th</sup> year.
  - d. She devoted her life to worship and Temple service.
3. The insight of Anna, v. 38  
Luke tells us that she, and others, were "waiting for the redemption of Israel." She saw it that day in the temple and praised God. She recognized the baby to be the promised One!

## Jesus, the Perception of Himself (Luke 4:14-30)

According to Luke's narrative, which does not include Jesus' transition from Nazareth to Capernaum, Jesus simply "came to Nazareth (4:16)."

1. The coming of Jesus to Nazareth, vv. 14-17
  - a. Luke tells us Jesus returned from Jerusalem and began teaching throughout the Galilee with ever-increasing notoriety (v. 14).
  - b. We are also told that it was His habit to present Himself and His claims in the synagogues where the religious of the day, including the local leadership, would gather (v. 15).
  - c. Jesus in our story returned to His hometown on an unspecified occasion (v. 16a), to a town that knew Him and his family, having been raised there.
  - d. The incident occurred on a Sabbath day in the local synagogue (v. 16). The term means "a gathering place"; in the first century the synagogue was a multipurpose building (a school, a house of prayer, a place of reading and worship, a court, a community center).
  - e. Luke tells us that Jesus stood upon to read a portion of Scripture. Bible reading in such a service would include a portion of Moses (the Torah)

and the prophets. As an adult, male Jew Jesus could read and comment on His reading (v. 17). A service would look something like this:

Beginning: Pronouncement of blessings and the Shema (Deut 6:4)

Torah Reading

Prophet Reading

A short sermon (derashah) by any male (here likely Jesus spoke).

Benediction (Num 6:24-26)

- f. Jesus requested the scroll of Isaiah, unrolled it to what we would designate as chapter 61:1-2a, and began to read it (v. 17b).
  - g. Jesus read only 61:1-2a, stopping after the initial line of the second verse (vv. 18-19).
  - h. Re-rolling the scroll, He handed it to the person in charge, the attendant (the hazzan), and sat down (v. 20a).
  - i. The synagogue attendees sat in stunned silence (v. 20b).
  - j. With the synagogue attendees before Him, He made the claim that what He had read was fulfilled in their hearing (v. 21).
2. The claims of Jesus in returning to Nazareth, vv. 18-19
- a. What was Jesus claiming that Sabbath day in the synagogue?
    - 1) That Isaiah the prophet was speaking of Him when he predicted a day of future blessing through one who would be our deliverer.
    - 2) That Jesus claimed identity with the prophet's message. In John's story of Jesus, Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures, because you think in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of me (5:39). Luke tells us, "And beginning with Moses and with the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (24:27)."
    - 3) That He acted under God's appointment and authority with divine enablement to preach (v. 18)
  - b. What was the proof of His claims that Sabbath day in the synagogue?
    - 1) His words: "to preach the gospel to the poor and captive," "to announce the favorable year of the Lord (v. 18)." Jesus came to the dispossessed, the socially marginalized; He came to announce God's divine visitation (v. 19). "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them the light dawned (Isa 9:6, Matt 4:16)."
    - 2) His works: "to heal the blind and set free the downtrodden" (v. 20). His works explained His claims (Matt. 8-9), sustaining their validity! "And Jesus was going about all in Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease among the people... they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them (Matt 4:23-24)."

The Gadarene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). "They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the 'legion' (v. 15)."

The Paralytic (Matt 9:1-8). "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins- then He said to the paralytic- 'Rise, take up your bed, and go home (v. 6)."

The dead (Matt 9:18-26). "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her and she will live.... And the girl arose (vv. 18, 26)."

- c. Why did Jesus stop reading at 61:2a that Sabbath day in the synagogue and not read further?

He read no further because what we find in v. 2b could not have been truthfully said as having been fulfilled when Jesus spoke ("Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing [v. 21])."

The end of the verse speaks of the "vengeance of our God." Jesus did not come the first time to judge, but to heal and redeem. He will return to exact judgment and comfort.

3. The astonishment of the people in Nazareth, vv. 20-21

Amazement turned to rage for the people in the synagogue so that they became a picture of the nation. They took Him to the brow of a hill in Nazareth (v. 29) before the Romans nailed Him to a cross in Jerusalem.

What this passage teaches us is that we have come once more in our calendar year to a person: The Lord Jesus Christ; the end is the beginning. The prophets promised that he would come; He came to bring fulfillment to their predictions of a deliverer. He came to reveal the character of God to us and become our way of entrance into His presence. Jesus said it this way: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill (Matt 5:17)." The word "fulfill" can carry two nuances: first, it can mean to complete in the sense of bring to fruition what was promised, and second, it can mean to fill with meaning. When Jesus came to us in the great incarnation, we celebrate He did both. He fulfilled what the prophets announced, and He filled those predictions with more meaning than the prophets could grasp!

### Applications:

1. For us, Christmas is fundamentally about the adoration of God for the gift of His son. While there are many special family traditions including seeing lights, gift exchange, and family togetherness (and these should not be viewed as unimportant. We are not Ebenezer Scroogies!), please remember in your devotional moments that we celebrate Jesus' birth. I know we will not be neglectful in this matter, yet we all get caught up in the season and forget the reason? Family celebration and Jesus' birthday are not antithetical. We give because He gave; we give because we have been given; we make a big deal of the season because the object of our excitement changed all our seasons by coming into our season! Will you take time to meditate on the 25<sup>th</sup>?
2. We must not miss the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets; they spoke of a time when a deliverer would come. He would be identifiable by His compassionate and comforting words and His miracles. While His miracles are spectacular, witnessed by many, they are not an end in themselves. Jesus did humanitarian things, but He was not primarily a humanitarian; He came to redeem the soul and body, not merely to improve the temporal state of humanity. He performed lesser things, miracles, to arrest our attention to His claim to do greater things. He came to redeem us, but along the way He healed many, the invisible claim of inward healing sustained by the visible capacity to outwardly heal! Do you worship Him because He is benevolent or because He is the Son of God? Do you worship Him because He does beautiful things or because He is beautiful?
3. I think it is worth a pause to remember just how aware Jesus was of hurting people around Him. Christmas is a delightfully happy season for us, yet for many it is an exceedingly lonely time occasioned by the brokenness exhibited in many families, the scourge of divorce, and the general emptiness of many lives as the business world slows and people seem to have more leisure time and little to fill it. As our Lord was mindful of people around Him, such as the lady with the issue of blood on His way to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead, perhaps we are called to listen to those who are around us. Will you think about that in a long line at a checkout counter? It may be a moment to offer hope by extending a greeting to someone.