

## Simeon Says (What Child is This, Part 1)

Luke 2:21-35

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, December 19, 2021

THANK KIDS FOR SINGING AND ALL. THANKFUL FOR SENIORS TODAY EVEN AS WE HONOR THEM WITH THE LUNCH AFTER.

TALK ABOUT CHRISTMAS SONGS, CAROLING FRIDAY NIGHT

- God's providence in 4 Seasons, staff at senior home, PA, invites
- Something about songs of Christmas that touches all ages, stages
- BRIDGE to young and old, how Christmas brings us together
- PLACERVILLE TREE LIGHTING, AND "SILENT LIGHT"
- Luke 2 shows young and old brought together by baby Jesus
- TALK Tuesday with little kids, talking Christmas characters
- Someone with baby Jesus who says more than Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, angels, and wise men (and has more verses about it)
- Luke 2 spends more time here than the inn, manger, fields, etc.
- Luke wants us to know the rest of the story of Christmas and he has more to say with this character than anyone else in the story

Luke 2:25 *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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

**What child is this? Simeon tells us.** Luke doesn't want this story to end in the manger or even with the Magi, he draws attention to a man about to die who meets this baby and makes Mary marvel. The climax isn't the nativity, it's the prophecy. Luke spends more time in the temple than in the stable. More verses in Luke 2 describe baby Jesus with this day in Jerusalem than in that night in Bethlehem. Simeon is important to God. He's an easily forgotten character in the Christmas story who God wants us to remember.

I love Simeon's story. It's a true story for young and old, of an old man and a young baby. It's about comfort and joy, and joy to the world. Alexander MacLaren said this 'scene, when the old man took the Infant in his withered arms, is one of the most picturesque and striking in the Gospel narrative.'<sup>1</sup>

The famous painter Rembrandt painted this story 5x, the last time the year of his death (self portrait?). Shakespeare paraphrased Simeon in one of his plays. Many poems and songs and hymns have been inspired by this man.

- Outline:**
1. What the setting is
  2. What Simeon says
  3. What this says for us

## 1. What the setting is

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon...*

- Time (v. 21, 8 days after birth, v. 22, days of purification, 32 more days)
- Place (v. 25 says he lived in Jerusalem, but his message goes far beyond the ancient walls of that ancient city to speak to the modern world)
- It doesn't say he was a noble, rabbi, priest, scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee
- Not many wealthy or wise, not many strong, God chose the weak, lowly
- We don't know how old he was, but v. 29 sounds like he's about to die
- Not a famous man, but faithful. It just says '*this man was righteous and devout...*' (he was living right because God had made him righteous)
- End of v. 25 says he was "*waiting/looking for the consolation of Israel*"
  - o This is parallel with the end of v. 26, Christ = Messiah-King
  - o *Consolation* is NT equivalent of *comfort* in Isaiah: "**Comfort, yes, comfort my people, says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem [KJV, prophecy of Messiah's coming]... the LORD...will have compassion on his afflicted**" (40:1, 49:13)
  - o Isaiah 66 uses this same word *consolation* for the comfort a baby receives when nursing, a consoling, nursing mother (66:11). Sometimes with a crying baby, dads do the best they can, but can't console like a nursing mom. That's the visual
  - o Isaiah 61 says Messiah would bring good news, set captives free, for Israel "**to comfort all who mourn**" (v. 2-3). **Mt 5:4**
  - o Rabbis looking for Messiah's consolation would swear by it or say 'by the consolation of Israel' - they saw that as sure
  - o A traditional Jewish prayer was, "May I see the consolation of Israel!" That prayer was answered for Simeon that day.<sup>2</sup>

O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Isra-el ...

That mourns [but they would be comforted and] rejoice, Emanuel has come

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free ...

Israel's strength and consolation ... let us find our rest in Thee.

v. 26: *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 [Greek word for Messiah].*

- o The Trinity is at work: Lord is God the Father, Christ is God the Son, God the Spirit told him he'd see Christ before death
- o This is a promise the greatest of all OT saints didn't have, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets all longed to see Messiah, but Simeon of all people gets to!

Notice in the end of v. 25 the Spirit is upon Him, in v. 26 the Spirit revealed he would see Christ, then v. 27: *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,<sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God ...*

Jesus had been **circumcised the 8<sup>th</sup> day**, Paul later said He was born under the Law, to redeem us who were under the Law, as He fulfilled all the Law.

What were they doing in the temple according to the Law? Look at v. 22, it says:

*'the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord<sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")<sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

The **firstborn male was considered holy**, meaning set apart to God. In Ex 13 God said to Moses, “Consecrated to me the firstborn ... Every firstborn among man among your sons you shall redeem” (v. 2, 13). The Law talked about how they would pay a redemption price for the firstborn son who had been devoted to God, to buy him back (Num 18:15-16). That’s what v. 23 is talking about, v. 24 is talking about Lev 12 where a mom brought sacrifices to the priest at the entrance to the holy place, for ceremonial purification. Lev 12:8: ‘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.’

We have a few pigeons around here, and would be happy to sacrifice some! Pigeons in Israel’s place of worship were killed, but that’s another story!

Maybe you hear ‘two turtledoves’ and think of a partridge in a pear tree? But how that really ties in with Christmas traditions is it shows Mary was too poor to afford a lamb, so she had to bring a sacrifice of birds instead. If the wise men had come, they would be rich with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Mt 2 says when they came it was to a house, it wasn’t to a stable.

Sorry if that bursts your bubble or breaks up your Nativity set, but **the wise men didn’t come till later** (probably months to travel from the East, maybe even 1 year old based on Herod’s order for those 2 and under to be killed.

(I move the wise men to the other side of the room, so can you if I visit you:)

But in all seriousness this also **shows us that Mary was not sinless** -- she was in need of atonement like everyone else, as she brings an offering for her atonement. **She wasn’t immaculately conceived** free from sin as RCC falsely teaches, she needed God as her Savior and says so in Luke 1, v. 47.

Just pause for a moment to consider the imagery and irony here:

- Mary offers a sacrifice (v. 24) for Jesus who is to be the Ultimate Sacrifice, the only sacrifice that could ever do away with our sin
- They can’t afford a lamb but Jesus Himself was the perfect Lamb of God who would take away the sins of all who know they cannot pay for or earn God’s favor, but who trust Jesus alone to save them
- Mary had delivered a baby who would become *her Deliverer!*
- His parents “redeem” their son who would be *their Redeemer!*
- They bring to the temple the One who would be the replacement of the Temple, a new center of worship for God’s people (Jn 2, 4)
- An old man of the old covenant sees the New Covenant’s maker
- And here in v. 28, Simeon carries in his arms the very Lord who carries us in His arms; Simeon holds the Lord who holds all things!
- **He lifts to the heavens the One who created the heavens and earth**

That’s what the setting is, now

**2ndly notice what Simeon says**

As kids we played the game “Simon says.” Well this is what Simeon says:

<sup>29</sup> “Lord, **now** you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your **salvation** <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of **all peoples**, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the **Gentiles**, and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother **marveled** at what was said about him. [What child is this?]

This babe the son of Mary, on Mary’s lap sleeping, this is Christ the King!

This is the glory of Israel, the promised consolation and salvation is here!

Simeon's words in v. 32 are from Isaiah: "***the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it...***" (Isa. 40:5 NIV).

Isa. 42:6 says Servant-Messiah would be "***a light to the nations***"

Isa. 49:6 says Servant-Messiah would be "***a light of the nations So that [God's] salvation may reach to the end of the earth.***"

52:10 says God shows His strength "***In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.***"

Simeon is talking about us in v. 32, and so is Isaiah, and so is God! Not just the glory of Israel, Simeon says 'to the Gentiles' and even 'all peoples'!

Even the pagans, the pig-eaters, the publicans, people groups they hated!

TALK ABOUT TEMPLE SIGN HERE ABOUT FOREIGNERS

Jesus cleaned this temple as an adult, a "house of prayer for all nations"

In v. 10 the angels announced good news of great joy for *all the people*, now in v. 31 Simeon announces God's salvation is prepared for *all peoples*

- Next chapter, Lk 3:14, Roman soldiers ask how they can repent
- In the next chapter, Lk 4:25-27, Christ's first hometown sermon goes from Isaiah to highlight Gentiles in the OT who God saved, a Gentile widow and leper -- a hated enemy Syrian soldier Naaman!
- In Luke 6, Jesus calls the Jews to love their enemies (6:35)
- In the next chapter, Jesus says of a Gentile Roman centurion who came to true faith, "*I have not found such faith even in Israel*" (7:9)
- Next chapter, He heals demon-possessed in Greek territory (8:26)
- Next chapter, He sends His disciples out to preach everywhere
- Next chapter, He tells the story of a Good Samaritan (Jews hated)
- Next chapter, Jesus compares Himself to Jonah (greatest Gentile conversion ever) and mentions Arab Queen to testify on final day
- In Luke 14:23, Gentiles are invited to come to the Lord's banquet
- He heals 10 lepers and only a foreigner leper worships (Luke 17)
- On His way to the cross, an African is called to help Him, and at the cross a Roman centurion praises God, perhaps in saving faith
- Last chapter of Luke is Christ's great commission for all nations

**The good news (the gospel) of great joy**, *unto you is born a Savior*, it's for *all people*; barren women like Elizabeth, lowly shepherds, Gentile wise men, widows like Anna (next week), young teenage moms like Mary, men like Simeon.

**His name in redemptive history shows God's plan for all:**

- Simeon was a tribe of Israel, but here Simeon sees a Savior for every tribe, tongue, color and country. As Jesus goes to the cross 33 years later, a man from Africa also named Simon (Greek, Hebrew *Simeon*) gets to carry the cross for the Savior of all nations.
- In the OT when Gentile sons of Joseph's African wife are adopted into Israel by Jacob in Genesis 49, Jacob says "*Ephraim and Manasseh are mine as Reuben and **Simeon** are*" (2 firstborn sons of Jacob, half-African sons of Joseph get same status as Simeon, adopted into family of faith)
- Acts 13:1 says in the church of Antioch, the first church that bore the name "Christian," the leaders of the church included a man from Africa (Cyrene) and "Simeon also called Niger" (a black African?)

- In Acts 15, at the Jerusalem Council where apostles met to discuss how to handle Gentiles converts, the leader of the church, James stands up and says to all *“Brethren, listen to me. **Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. “With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’ SAYS THE LORD...”*** (v. 13-18)
- It’s fascinating how God in His Providence uses ‘Simeons’ and how He uses normal people like us in His plans for all

<sup>34</sup> *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 <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*

TALK ABOUT MANY RISING UP, BUILT UP IN CHRIST THE SOLID ROCK AND CORNERSTONE, BUT OTHERS WILL STUMBLE OVER

TALK ABOUT V. 35 “PIERCE THROUGH” – PART OF PROPHECY IN ISAIAH OF MESSIAH BEING PIERCED THROUGH FOR OUR SIN, SIMEON SAYS MARY’S SOUL WILL BE PIERCED THROUGH TOO

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you.  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary.  
...This, this is Christ the King ... Come peasant [or] king to own Him;  
The King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

**We’ve seen what Simeon says,**

### **3. What does this say to us today?**

v. 35 ends with the thoughts of many hearts being revealed by this child.

**What are your thoughts of Christ?** Do you marvel at Him like Mary and Joseph did? Do you rejoice to see Him as Simeon did? Are you looking for Him? Is He your comfort, your consolation, your salvation? Does your loving heart enthrone Him as the King of Kings? Has His Word pierced through your heart so you’ve repented? Acts 2:37 uses that language.

**The Word exposes as sin the thoughts of your hearts**, and it will in eternity. If it’s pierced your soul for your sin, repent, look to Jesus. Look to the One who was pierced for our iniquities so that by His death and by His rising from the grave He would justify many who will rise with Him. Look to Him not in the manger, but where Simeon points us to: Christ on the cross

In v. 29 **Simeon was ready to die** ... are you? How can you be ready like he was in v. 29? If you’ve trusted in Christ as your salvation (v. 30), if you have peace with God through Christ, you can depart in peace. Have you put your faith in Jesus as your personal consolation and King, as Simeon did?

**Do you see glory in Christ**, like v. 32 says? Have you confessed Him as Lord? To call Him “Lord” means Sovereign Master and you’re His slave. Those who know Him as Lord like Simeon did have peace w/ God.

**Calvin:** ‘if the sight of Christ, while he was yet a child, had so powerful an effect on Simeon, that he approached death with cheerfulness and composure; how much more abundant materials of lasting peace are now furnished to us, who have the opportunity of beholding our salvation altogether completed in Christ? True, Christ no longer dwells on earth, nor do we carry him in our arms: but his divine majesty shines openly and brightly in the gospel, and there do “we behold...the glory of the Lord,” such a sight brings peace to our minds, and make us go cheerfully to death’<sup>3</sup>

**May Simeon’s heart and prayer be ours this Christmas Day, amen?**

We don’t have to go to a temple; Christians are temples of the HS!

We can see Christ, the Word made flesh, in the pages of this Word.

Even though we can’t embrace Jesus as Simeon did physically, we can embrace Christ spiritually by faith, and can say and pray like Simeon:

O, Lord, Your servants meet You in every holy place  
Where Your true Word has promised that we should see Your face.  
Today You still do grant us who gather around You here  
In arms of faith to bear You as did that aged seer ...

Let us, O Lord, be faithful like Simeon to the end,  
So that his prayer exultant may from our hearts ascend:  
“O Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, I pray,  
Since I have seen my Savior and here beheld His day.”<sup>4</sup>

When you look to Jesus do you see glory, beauty? Are you ready to die, as Simeon was, seeing Christ? Is He the one your heart looks to and longs for as Simeon did? Do you as he did, embrace Christ in faith and want to lift Him up?

**May God make us like Simeon this Christmas** (Anna, next week)

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions on Holy Scripture*, Lk 2:29–30.

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Lk 2:21.

<sup>3</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume 16: Harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Baker 22 vol. ed.), p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> “Thou Light of Gentile Nations,” Johann Franck, 1674, translated to English by Catherin Winkworth, 1863, English pronouns updated by Pastor Phil.