

Nuc Dimittis

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²² 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

²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")

²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

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.

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.

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,

²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

³⁴ 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

³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,

³⁷ 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.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

(Luke 2:21-40)

Prophecies of Jesus

In his book *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, [Walter Kaiser](#) identified [65](#) direct prophecies of Jesus' comings in the Old Testament.¹ Kaiser is an *extremely* conservative scholar on such things, refusing to acknowledge the remainder of the [127](#) predictions (in some 348 verses) listed by [J. Barton](#)

¹ [Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.](#), "Appendix 1: Chart Of New Testament Fulfillments Of Old Testament Predictions," *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 237-40. For a short discussion see Kaiser, "Jesus in the Old Testament," *Gordon Conwell* (2009), <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/jesus-in-the-old-testament/>.

Payne² or the 456 (75 Pentateuch, 243 Prophets, 138 Writings) supported by more than 558 separate Rabbinic quotations recognized by Alfred Edersheim.³ Today, it is common to hear of “more than 300” prophecies of Christ, and you can find lists such as one prophecy for each day of the year on the internet.⁴

Even with 65 specific predictions, that’s still a lot of prophecy. Looking back on it, it is easy as Christians to read the prophecies and then their fulfillments as given in the New Testament and ask, “How couldn’t anyone believe in Jesus? The odds alone are so astronomically overwhelming it couldn’t be anything other than true.” Of course, skeptics will always have their rebuttals. But no matter how plain a truth may be, at the end of the day, especially with something as important as the deity of Jesus Christ, believing it is at the heart a moral issue, because if the heart hates God, the mind—like a knight in shining armor, will always find a way to defend it.⁵

² J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1973).

³ Alfred Edersheim, “Appendix IX: List of Old Testament Passages Messianically Applied in Ancient Rabbinic Writings,” *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, in 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912, 1883), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.xi.ix.html>.

⁴ For example, “365 Messianic Prophecies,” *Bible Probe*, <http://www.bibleprobe.com/365messianicprophecies.htm>.

⁵ This reminds me of a couple things Bahnsen once said, first about the rationality of questioning truth, second about how our epistemology (our view of knowledge) is informed by morality. In a note on Scripture’s self-attesting authority he writes, “Ronald Nash argues against Van

I'll likely do a sermon later, around Jesus' crucifixion, on his fulfillment of so much prophecy and how objectively astonishing that all is. For today, I'm more interested in the idea of how clear they were and, more to the point, if any Jews could possibly have known the things that we know today on this side of the cross.

While prophecy this side of the cross seems almost absurdly obvious to us Christians, at least some of it was not so to the disciples. And this after being with him for three years! For instance, repeatedly Jesus tells them of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. But each time he tells them, they

Til's claim that Scripture carries self-attesting authority: "As I see it, a self-attesting truth is one that cannot be questioned. A good example . . . would be an analytic statement like 'All bachelors are unmarried men.'" But Nash needs to rethink, for this is *not* a defining mark of a self-authenticating truth, as Nash's own example shows. Individuals can (and have) questioned the truth or certainty of "All bachelors are unmarried men." Nash would respond that the only ones who question it are poorly trained students, muddled thinkers, or those not yet adept at the English language. Perhaps so, but the claim is "questioned" nonetheless. Nash more likely meant that his example of an analytic truth cannot "rationally" be questioned—that is, cannot properly be questioned *within the context* of certain fundamental convictions or linguistic stipulations (certain presuppositions!). But the fact remains that a self-evident truth does not gain its self-evidency from the impossibility of questioning it or the impossibility of being confused over its meaning. The fact that non-Christians ("irrationally") question biblical authority, and the fact that Christians sometimes misinterpret the Bible's meaning, take nothing away from the Scripture's own possession of self-attesting authority (authority for which there is none higher)." About how men's knowledge and choices about religion are always informed by morality, "Their epistemology is informed by their ethical hostility to God... the question of knowledge is an ethical question at root. It is indeed possible to have theoretically correct knowledge about God without loving God. The devil illustrates this point. Yet what is meant by knowing God in Scripture is knowing and loving God: this is true knowledge of God: the other is false." "In their moral and intellectual rebellion against the revealed truth of God, unbelievers differ from each other in the degree of self-conscious opposition." Greg Bahnsen, Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998). 200, n. 86; 157 (Van Til), 448, n. 74.

become incredulous. Paul explains why. Had anyone understood it, “**they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**” (1Co 2:8). This leads me to wonder, if that was so obscure, was everything? Could anyone have actually known that the coming Messiah would be God in flesh until after the fact?⁶ I believe the answer is yes, they could. More importantly, **yes, they did**. And the story Luke tells us in this part of his infancy narrative proves it beyond a shadow of doubt. And he tells this to us so that we might believe that Jesus is exactly whom the prophets predicted.

Luke 2:21-40. Context and Structure

With the **birth of Jesus now in our rear-view mirror**, we arrive at what little information we have from his earliest of days in the Bible. For what we will look at today, the most important thing to keep in mind from what Luke has already discussed is the fact that we have seen **three songs about Christ**, all filled with OT Scripture, as if the singers all understand the fulfillment of so much of God’s word is at hand—

⁶ I thought about tackling the question of Jewish Unitarianism vs. OT Trinitarianism here, and that is certainly an important sub-point to the one I’m looking at here. If all Jews were Unitarians, how come so many so easily converted to Christianity in the days of the Apostles? The answer is, they weren’t all Unitarians. There was a powerful undercurrent of Binitarian or even Trinitarian thinking demonstrated by the Rabbis and Philosophers like Philo and into this current, one could easily have believed in a God-man, if their eyes were opened by God. They had all the intellectual tools to be able to accept it.

before they happen. These songs were Mary's *Magnificat*, Zechariah's *Benedictus*, and the angels' *Gloria* (the shepherds also sang, but we do not know what their song was). Today we will see the fourth of the four songs, the so called *Nuc Dimittis*, named after the first words in Latin of Simeon's song: "Now let me depart." Let's look at the context in which this song is situated.

The passage ends right after Jesus is named (Luke 2:21). Joseph and Mary bring Jesus over to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The opening section (21-24) is dominated by "the law" (3x—22, 23, 24). The passage ends in vv. 39-40 with them "finishing everything required by the law of the Lord," thus making a nice bookend. After they carry out the legal purification rites, they are greeted by a man named "Simeon" in "Jerusalem" in the "temple" (25-27). This is matched after his song by a woman named "Anna," also in the "temple," who praises God for all those who were waiting for the redemption of "Jerusalem" (36-38). More parallel language.

The middle of the passage sees our fourth and final song arise as a kind of closing benediction of a two-chapter infancy liturgy praising God for bringing us the Messiah. It begins with Simeon singing (28-32), centers upon Joseph and Mary marveling at what was said about Jesus (33), and ends with

Simeon speaking directly to Mary (34-35). As such, we can diagram it as follows:

- A. Joseph and Mary obey God's law of purification (Luke 2:21-24)
- B. The man Simeon in Jerusalem at the Temple "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (25-27)
- C. Simeon holds Jesus and sings the Nuc Dimittis (28-32)
- D. Joseph and Mary marvel at the words (33)**
- C'. Simeon blesses Mary (34-35)
- B'. The woman Anna at the Temple "waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (36-38)
- A'. Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth after obeying the law, Jesus grows strong and wise (39-40).⁷

As the center, we should ask, **what are they marveling at?** The answer is, the incredible prophetic words of this righteous old devout man. How could he have known such things? That's the very question we are asking today, and it is at the heart of what Luke is trying to teach us in this passage. As such, it is a most relevant question for anyone who would seek to know the truth about this most important of all people.

⁷ Koplitz sees the very same chiasmic structure: [Michael H. Koplitz](https://www.academia.edu/35552627/Hebraic_Analysis_for_Luke_2_22_40), "Hebraic Analysis for Luke 22 40," (12-28-2017), 11-12, [1-22], https://www.academia.edu/35552627/Hebraic_Analysis_for_Luke_2_22_40. Another way of seeing it is:

- A. Piety of Parents (2:21-24)
- B. Simeon's Piety (25-28a)
- B'. Simeon's Song (28b-32)
- A'. Piety of Parents (33-35)

[John DelHousaye](https://ps.edu/john-del-housaye-praying-nunc-dimittis/), *The Fourfold Gospel: A Formational Commentary on Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, vol. 1: From the Beginning to the Baptist* (Wipf & Stock, 2020), <https://ps.edu/john-del-housaye-praying-nunc-dimittis/>.

Purification and Obeying the Law (2:21-24)

Though we ended last time on **vs. 21**, because it rounded out the completion (*pimplēmi*) of Mary's **pregnancy** (6) with the completion (*pimplēmi*) of Jesus' **circumcision**, this verse is also **transitional** to the passage this time, because circumcision comes from *the law*, and this first section is all about the law. “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” (21). “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’” (22-24).

We've got all kinds of **legal stuff** going on here. First, the word law (*nomos*) appears three times. It is called the Law of Moses once, and the Law of the Lord twice. Moses' law comes from the Lord; he did not make it up. Several years ago, when we are going through Leviticus, I made a point about red-letter Bibles. I said that if we were to make a true

red-letter Bible, where every word of Christ was in red, virtually the entire book of Leviticus would be red. At least 33 times we read in that book, “The LORD spoke to Moses...”

The first verse says, “The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying...” (Lev 1:1). Two of the three targums of this verse read a little different. “And *the Word* of the Lord called to Mosheh; for *the Word* of the Lord was altogether with him, from the tabernacle of ordinance, saying...” The LORD becomes the Word of the LORD. This is John’s *Logos*, the one who in his only birth-of-Jesus verse says, “Became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14). I find it endlessly fascinating then that Luke calls it “the Law of the Lord,” for he uses the very same word for “Lord” that has just been used for Jesus (Luke 2:11). I wouldn’t make a huge deal of this, because “Lord” also clearly means the Father in vs. 22. However, In all of Luke’s writings, he only uses this phrase here, and he uses it three times (see also 2:39). This is not a popular phrase even in the OT, being found only 13 times (see esp. Ps 1:2; 19:7; 119:1.) It is also found 18 times in the LXX). So it begs the question, *is Luke trying to tell us that they were obeying the very law that the Son gave to Moses* before he took on human flesh? What an incredible question to ponder.

So what did they do? First, we have seen that they had him circumcised. **Leviticus 12:3** says, “on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” When the Son of God gave this command to Moses and Abraham, he knew full well that one day he would himself endure it.

Second, they came **for their purification**. It is in this same chapter of Leviticus that we find the for purification for a mother who has given birth. In Leviticus, only the mother must be purified. However, Luke says “**they**” came for purification. Who is “they?” Some have thought it is **Mary and Jesus**, assuming that the law of the firstborn (**Ex 13:1-2**) seems to require his purification. But it doesn’t actually say that, and as we will learn throughout this Gospel, Jesus is never unclean, even ritually. In light of this, “they” appears again in the second half of the verse, where it clearly means **Mary and Joseph**, since Jesus didn’t bring himself to Jerusalem. Perhaps the ritual developed to include the husbands or perhaps Joseph had himself contracted uncleanness. The point is, **they going for purification according to the law**.⁸

Something else here may be on Luke’s mind. Notice again, this takes place at **the temple**. We’ve seen the temple once in this Gospel, when **Zechariah** entered it, and the angel

⁸ **Wayne Douglas Litke**, “Luke’s Knowledge of the Septuagint: A Study of the Citations in Luke-Acts,” a Thesis to McMaster University (1993): 231-32.

Gabriel came and spoke to him. When all those events were happening, Luke was very careful to give us **time frames**. We saw that Mary came to visit Elizabeth after **six months**, or 180 days (using a lunar calendar). This very moment, she understood that she had conceived. This means Mary was to be nine more months pregnant, or 270 days. Now we have seen that on the **eighth day** after his birth, Mary and Joseph had Jesus circumcised. Finally, he says, “**When the time came for their purification.**” In the law, this is very specific—thirty-three days later (**Lev 12:3-4**). Curiously, that gives us exactly 490 (180 + 270 + 8 + 33) days or **seventy weeks**.

Why is that curious? Because it is this same Gabriel who once appeared to Daniel *at the exact same time* he appeared to Zechariah (“**evening offering**” (**Dan 9:21**; **Luke 1:10**) and told Daniel that in seventy weeks “**a holy of holies will be anointed**” (**Dan 9:24**).⁹ Most people focus on this as seventy weeks of *years*, though it doesn’t say years, and calculate it from Daniel’s day to the **crucifixion**. However, it could be

⁹ I discovered this in an off-the-cuff statement in the *ACC* on Luke. The editor says, “**Seventy weeks after the announcement of John’s birth to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel and forty days after his birth.**” After searching a little, I discovered several have discussed it. See **Arthur A. Just**, *Luke*, vol. 3, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 3* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 46; **Pablo T. Gadenz**, *The Gospel of Luke*, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), Luke 1:19-20; **Andrés García Serrano**, *The Presentation in the Temple: The Narrative Function of Lk 2:22-39 in Luke-Acts* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2012), 224-26). 2018).

seventy weeks of *days*, and in giving us all this detailed timeline information, Luke might be saying that the moment is now upon us. Purification has come and Jesus is being set apart for his great work. These need not be mutually exclusive.

Second, they present baby Jesus, because he is the *firstborn*. Luke now alludes to at least two passages, “As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’” (Luke 2:23). This combines Exodus 13:2, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine,” and Num 18:17, “But the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy.” The redemption price was five shekels of silver given to the temple (16).

Finally, returning to the purification ritual, Luke says, “... and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2:24). Though we have seen probably dozens of allusions, this is the first actual quote in Luke’s Gospel. So it must be important. Lev 12:8 says, “And if she cannot af-

ford 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.”

Some have noticed that **turtledoves** is something required in *sin* offerings, and thus they want to say that Mary is coming to be cleansed of her sins. While that might be tempting in light of the whole immaculate conception debate, that isn't what Luke has in mind. Many purifications in Leviticus have nothing to do with sin, and everything to do with sacred space and the need to be ritually clean to be around the God of Israel. Ritual cleanliness has to do with being purified of things that die, not sin, and the death here is that her body has just bled greatly, losing life.

What is much more on Luke's mind is that **Mary cannot afford the regular offering!** The turtledove exemption was given for those who were *poor*, and this clearly shows that Jesus not only came to bring the gospel to the poor and outcast, but that he came *as one of them!* This was both in economic family and a poor town (**Micah 5:2**), as Origen notes of **2Cor 8:9**, “**though he was rich ... he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich**” (**Origen**, *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.4.3). Jesus does not exempt himself from his own

sayings later on! Even though his family may have been descended from royalty, thereby giving him the birthright of a king, his mother and adopted father could not even afford a single lamb. Perhaps this was God's providence, since **the Lamb was himself their own son**. Whatever the case, Luke is making sure that we know that his parents loved God and therefore loved God's law. Jesus would not be born to pagans or degenerates, but to a family devoted to the Lord, no matter how poor they may have been. Poverty is never an excuse to sin.

Simeon Meet's Jesus

It's at this point that Luke **turns his attention to someone** who is present at the temple while they are performing their required duties. This surely was just a chance encounter, and yet, as we will see, it was providentially arranged by the only Sovereign God. There is **no such thing as "chance"** with God.

"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" (**Luke 2:25**). There's a lot going on here. First, his name is **Simeon**. His name means **"Harkening; Hears and Obeys."**

Just like Mary and Joseph! He is said to be righteous and devout; this most likely refers to his obedience to the Torah, like Paul says of himself as a Pharisee, “As to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Php 3:6).

Who was this Simeon? Church tradition has said he was a high priest and the successor of Zechariah (ProtJam 24:3-4) or the son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel the Elder. The *Acts of Pilate* has a story wherein Jesus later raises his two sons from the dead (Acts of Pilate 17:1). But we really don't know much for certain. It is probable, however, that this man is quite old. This is because of what Luke says next. “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” (Luke 2:26). The beginning of his song is the Departure, “Lord, now you are letting your servant *depart in peace*” (29), and this makes us think he has been waiting for this moment his entire life. Now he can go.

Back to our verse introducing him. It says he has been “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” This may refer to Jeremiah 38:9 LXX (31:9 Hebrew), “They went forth with weeping, and I will bring them back with *consolation*.” It could refer to a passage related to both Jesus and John, Isa 40:1-11, “*Comfort, comfort*, says your God. Speak tenderly to

Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins” (Isa 40:1-2). Curiously, the word for **consolation** (*paraklēsis*) is very similar to the word Jesus will use for the Holy Spirit in John, “**Helper/Comforter/Counselor**” (*paraklētos*; John 14:26).

It is into this that we can now talk of him having **the Holy Spirit upon him**. We’ve now seen John (Luke 1:15), Elizabeth (41), and Zechariah (67), all filled with the Holy Spirit, and Mary had the Spirit come upon her (35). Almost every time this has happened, God does something remarkable through them, just like he did when the Spirit came upon those in the OT, to give them amazing **artistic abilities** (Ex 35:31) or **physical powers** (Jdg 14:6) or inspired **song** (1Sam 10:10). In other words, this is **not the Spirit regenerating** and saving the person. That had already happened. This is a special work whereby the Spirit empowers the person to speak forth prophetic words about Jesus.

Before we get to that, we notice that Luke says the Holy Spirit had **revealed to Simeon** that he would not die before he saw the Lord’s Messiah. How this happened, we can only guess. But Johannes Brenz gives us the true importance,

Behold here what an excellent gift was given to Simeon beyond all the patriarchs and prophets. Christ was promised to the patriarchs, and his coming was revealed to the prophets. However it was not promised to any of these that they would see Christ in this world with their physical eyes, although they greatly desired it. But both of these things happened to Simeon.

(Johannes Brentz, *Luke 2*)¹⁰

Luke now tells us that “He came in the Spirit into the temple.” He was somewhere in Jerusalem, but the Spirit prompted him to go visit the temple. It doesn’t say he was working there, nor that he had to go for some personal reason. Rather, it just so happened that “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...” (Luke 2:27-28). What an incredible event. He most likely doesn’t know Mary and Joseph from Adam and Eve. And there’s nothing about this baby that should draw him to him. It’s just another day at the temple offering purification. And yet, the Spirit not only directed him to go to the temple, he directed his gaze towards the baby, so much so that he went over and took him up in his arms.

¹⁰ Beth Kreitzer et al., eds., *Luke: New Testament*, vol. III, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 60.

What a thought. An old man, promised in some intimately personal way by God himself that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's (Father's) Messiah. Somehow, he was so intimately **in tune with the Spirit's promptings** that he goes over and picks up the Creator of the Universe in his arms! **The creation holding the Creator**, even as Mary had done many times already. It's almost too staggering to even speak, to backwards to even say. But it causes me to return to my original question. Could Simeon have actually known any of this?

Nuc Dimittis

To begin to answer, we must turn to **his song**. The fourth and final song of the Infancy Narrative, and it is appropriately called *The Departure*, for more than one reason. The song begins, **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word”** (**Luke 2:29**). Simeon is now ready to depart this earth. But through him, we will be able to **depart Jesus' early life**, and together as a church, having heard these words, we will depart our own worship service in peace. The only question left is, will you depart being at peace with God through faith in Christ?

Peace. God is with us in Christ for peace. Not just the absence of war, but the presence of love and grace and friendship. This is something you do not have apart from the Lord Jesus, because you have sinned against him. But if you belong to Christ, then you are at peace with God, because of his grace.

Here's where it gets interesting, though. First, this language reminds us of Christ's *promise to Abraham* ... in the word, the Scripture. "*You shall go to your ancestors in peace*" (*Gen 15:15*). Tipping the hat like this to Abraham reminds us of the *covenant* and that this peace will be for all nations, not just for Simeon.

"*For my eyes have seen your salvation*" (*Luke 2:30*). For some tedious grammatical reasons,¹¹ it appears that this is coming from Isaiah 40 again, "*And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken*" (*Isa 40:5*). Curiously, the "*mouth*" of the Lord is the Word of the Lord (Memra, Targum)—Christ. And Simeon has said that he knew this because it was "*according to your word*" (*Luke 2:29*). Simeon seems to know more about the Word of God incarnate than many Christians today know.

¹¹ The form of the word he uses for "salvation" is found only two other times in Luke's writing, wherein he is quoting or alluding to *Isaiah 40:5* (*Luke 3:6*; *Acts 28:28*). See *Pao*, 272.

The song continues, “... that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples” (31). In this Isaiah passage, all flesh see it together—Jews, Gentiles. Thus, he continues, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (32). Vs. 31 reminds me of Psalm 23, “You have *prepared* a table for me *in the presence of my enemies*” (Ps 23:5). All peoples were his **enemies**. But he has come to his enemies and offered **peace** through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Vs. 32 again calls Isaiah to our ears, “I will make you *a light for the nations*, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). This is **the Suffering Servant** who will do this, but just here, he is an innocent baby in the arms of an old man.

Let’s not miss what he has said. **Through this baby, comes peace and salvation**, and salvation is what God himself will do. Light and Glory, this is what God is! And he says *he knew this because of the word!* He knew his Holy Scripture. You don’t think people could have actually known who this boy was? We’ve already seen it with the songs of Mary and Zechariah and the proclamation of Elizabeth, for they did not just get a “word of knowledge” and speak off the cuff by the Spirit. No. Their language was peppered with God’s word and seasoned with the Salt of prophecy about this God-child.

Simeon and Mary

We come to **the center of the passage**, a brief interlude between Simeon's speeches. **"And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him"** (**Luke 2:33**). Let us marvel with them. How did he know such things and how did he know them about this baby? He couldn't possibly have known about the virgin birth, could he (see **Isa 7:14**). He couldn't possibly have known about the visitation of the shepherds, could he (see **Micah 4:8; Gen 35:21**)? I'm not saying he did. But **I'm not saying he didn't**, either. It's all there in the Holy Book. But clearly, without the Spirit telling him in a miraculous way, he could not have known. Yet, here he is, holding the Son of God in his arms, singing such a song as this. Mary and Joseph can only stare at him and then at Jesus and then at each other and shrug in astonishment. Especially Mary I must think, she had this happen to her with the angel out of the blue, then Elizabeth out of the blue, the Shepherds out of the blue, and now with Simeon out of the blue. What an astounding grace of God to this woman to confirm the things she has been told. Truly, **God showed great grace to the mother** of Christ. He confirmed just this one event multiple times in miraculous ways so that she would understand early on what was happening to her.

But also to *Joseph*, who gets very little play time in any of the Gospels. This man who has obeyed God at such a price. A girl, pregnant, he didn't do it. Seeks to divorce her, but doesn't. Takes her on this journey while pregnant. Adopts this child as if his own. He is there too, and what astounding words he was hearing from this old man.

But we must turn back to *Mary*, for this is what Simeon does. “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’” (Luke 2:24-25). While the aged wonder blesses them both, he has special words for the Mother of God.

Many have seen in these words the sharp echo of *Isaiah 8:14-15* (one chapter after the virgin birth). “And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall *stumble* on it. They shall *fall* and be broken; they shall be snared and taken” (cf. *Ps 118:22*). These words are also found in Paul (*Rom 9:33*) and Peter (*1Pe 2:7-8*). Jesus is going to come and divide the people

of Israel in his ministry. Some will follow their Messiah. Others will reject him to their own eternal damnation. These are serious words that Simeon is now declaring, and I can just see him handing the baby back to her while looking into her eyes young bewildered eyes, so that she can see the seriousness of his words through the lines and wrinkles on his face.

I want to spend **just another moment on Isaiah**.¹² You need to know that the Jews themselves saw this passage as Messianic. The Targum says, “**If you do not attend, his *Memra* (Word) will become among you an avenger, and a stone of smiting and a rock of stumbling to the two houses of the princes of Israel, a breaking and stumbling.**” Isaiah’s “**he will become**” becomes “**the *Word* will become,**” and this Word becomes an avenger.

It is without question that in Memra theology, the Memra was viewed by at least some as **a second God** (*deuteros theos*), even though there is **only one God** (see **Philo**, *Questions on Genesis* 2.62; *Confusion of Tongues* 146). So for the Jews to say that the Memra will do this, it is quite remarkable. Luke, of course, substitutes Isaiah’s “he” with “*this child*.” “This child” is their “Memra!”

¹² You can compare the following biblical passages and Jewish interpretations in the appendix at the end of the sermon.

In other places, the Memra is *the Messiah!* Micah's "Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head" (Micah 2:13) becomes, "A king shall go up leading at their head ... and the Memra of the LORD will be their support" (for the Rabbis, the targum's Memra is the Messiah).¹³ And in 1 Enoch 48:4, a passage that is nearly the same as Luke 2:32, this Messiah is eternal.¹⁴

Simeon now looks at Mary and gives her words that must have pierced her heart. "(And a sword will pierce through your own soul also,) so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35). What does he mean "a sword will pierce through your own soul also?" It is probably a reference to how Jesus' coming to earth is going to wreak havoc on a mother's heart. It is a prediction of his suffering and death. Together with the rest of the nation, Pao says, "The path to the cross creates intense personal pain for Jesus'

¹³ Kevin J. Cathcart, Martin McNamara, and Michael Maher, "Editors' Foreword," in *The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of the Minor Prophets*, ed. Kevin J. Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, trans. Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, vol. 14 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), Mic 2:13, n. 38.

¹⁴ "At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, the Before Time [before the beginning of days];³ even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. ⁴ [Luke 2:32] He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the light of the gentiles and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts. ⁵ All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits. ⁶ For this purpose he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity" (1En 48:2-6).

mother, and it is this journey that serves as an instrument through which God's people are judged. The reading would fit well with the Lukan portrayal of Jesus' prophetic journey to Jerusalem in particular."¹⁵ It is an early hint that the gospel costs something very dear. It may bring pain and suffering. But that is simply the fire working through the metal, testing the quality of each man's profession of faith, revealing whether you are full of gold or full of rubbish.

Anna and Jesus

As soon as Simeon's word finish, he leaves the stage, to make way for another counterpart. We've seen several already: John and Jesus, Elizabeth and Mary, Mary and Zechariah, the shepherds and the holy family, now it is an old woman to go with the old man. Her name is Anna. "And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin" (Luke 2:36).

Anna is the same name as Hannah, a woman whose pregnancy is so much like Elizabeth's and song is so much like

¹⁵ David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Luke," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 273.

Mary's. They are the only two people in the Bible to bear this name. It means “Grace.” She is said to be the daughter of Phaniel, meaning “Vision of God” or “Face of God.” She is the only character in the NT who does not belong to Judah, Benjamin, or Levi.¹⁶ Asher is one of the ten northern tribes that went away in the dispersion, and perhaps her family had resettled in Israel, perhaps even in Jerusalem. Something not often commented on is the meaning of Asher. It means “Fortunate” or “Happy.” Together, these three names tell a story. Anna has been shown grace and is deeply happy because she has seen the face of God. How?

It turns out that this woman was very old. This links her to Simeon, who was also old.¹⁷ Luke tells us that she was once married and lived with her husband for seven years from when she was a virgin. The word “virgin” obviously thematically connects her to Mary. But her husband died, and she lived as a widow until she was eighty-four, so perhaps over 60 years.

¹⁶ Richard Bauckham, “Anna of the Tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36-38), *Revue Biblique* 104.2 (Avril 1997): 162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44089843?read-now=1&seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents.

¹⁷ It is possible to translate her age symbolically as 7 (years married) time 12 = 84. If so, Luke could be saying, “There was a prophetess named Anna ... She was an old woman who had lived a perfect married life [seven years], and an even more perfect widowhood [7 times 12 years.” See Alfredo Tepox Varela, “Luke 2.36-37: Is Anna’s Age What is Really in Focus?” *The Bible Translator* 27.4 (1976): 446, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/026009437602700409>.

She is set up as a New Testament **parallel to Hannah**, Samuel's mother in another way. As it says, "She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day" (37). Of Hannah, "... she went up to the house of the LORD ... and prayed and wept bitterly" (1Sam 1:7, 10). Hannah, of course, was not **happy**, but *sad*, for she had no children. But both are praying at the house of God.

Sticking to Anna's story, "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" (Luke 2:38). Now we have **another link to Simeon**. Of Simeon it was said "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Of Anna it is said, "Waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." Both are *waiting*. **Waiting** is something you do when you are anticipating something. Clearly, both Simeon and Anna were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. They *knew* he was coming.

They are linked together in another way. We have seen that Simeon **prophesied** about what the baby would become. Similarly, Anna is said to be a "**prophetess**," and she gives thanks to God and speaks of this child to all the rest who were waiting. Now, there is **one particular passage** of Scripture that seems pregnant with this very story. **Isaiah 52:8** says,

“The voice of your watchmen-- they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.” People get all hung up on her being a prophetess and what all that might have meant. What we can say for certain is that it means *she knew her Scriptures*, that she spoke of the Messiah, and that *she watched* for his coming. For in the Scripture, a primary job of the prophet—in fact this job is primarily their job—to be *watchmen*. We see this all over the place.

“Son of man, I have made you *a watchman* for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me” (**Ezek 3:17**). We are told that God commands these watchmen never to rest, until the *light of morning comes*. “I have posted *watchmen* on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest” (**Isa 62:6**). They watch out for *dangers* (**Hos 9:8**), for *wolves that attack the sheep* (**Acts 20:29**); for *signs of deliverance* (**Mic 7:7**). And they are in *perpetual prayer* for the people, even when nothing but the routine seems to be taking place. “*Watchman, what is left of the night? Watchman, what is left of the night?*’ The *watchman* replies, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would

ask, then ask; and come back yet again’” (Isa 21:11-12). Simeon and Anna are doing the job of watchmen.

The verse before this is well known, and we’ve seen it previously in Luke already. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings *good news*, who publishes peace, who brings good news of *happiness*, who publishes *salvation*, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Isa 52:7). This is what we’ve been seeing going on for two chapters now in all the songs Luke’s infancy narrative. **Happiness** is exactly what **Anna’s** name means. **Salvation** is what **Simeon** saw with his own eyes. Happiness is what your own hearts should be full of because of Christ.

In fact, **vs. 10** will say, “The LORD has bared his holy arm *before the eyes* of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth *shall see the salvation of our God*” (Isa 52:10). These verses are the introduction to the great **Servant Song** of Isaiah that tells us more plainly than any other OT prophecy about the coming work, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But people miss this verse, and they miss it rather badly. Pao, in his stellar commentary on Luke’s NT use of the OT, doesn’t even mention it. When Isaiah says, “**bare the arm,**” he is not thinking of the American Second Amendment. That’s the right to “**bear arms,**” spelled differently.

The Arm of the LORD is a title for the military commander of the king, the one who carries out the duties as the “right hand.” In another Messianic psalm we read, “You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand” (Ps 89:13). In the Exodus God says, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm” (Ex 6:6). Who is this? The LORD himself, the “man of war” (15:3), the Angel of the LORD, the LORD of Hosts (Hos 12:4-5).

Isaiah’s Suffering Servant prophecy begins with this same arm. “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has *the arm of the LORD* been revealed?” (Isa 53:1). This is very obviously *the Messiah*. But how will God reveal him? *By baring his arm*, this is, by revealing him in an unheard of way. To uncover him, to expose him to the world. Can you think of a better way to do that than the Right Arm himself *becoming a human baby*? This is a prophecy of *Christ’s birth*. Augustine said, “For whole Man did the Word take upon Him, and whole Man the Word became ... because the Evangelist thus saith: ‘*The Word was made flesh, and dwelled in us*’ (John 1:14). [And in] another place saith the Scripture, ‘*And all flesh shall see the salvation of God*’ (Isa 53:10)” (Augustine, *Sermon on Psalm 57.5*). And Leo the Great said,

The day, dearly-beloved, on which Christ the Savior of the world first appeared to the nations ... today those joys must be entertained in our hearts which existed in the breasts of the three magi ... For that day has not so passed away that the mighty work, which was then revealed, has passed away with it ... the narrative which is read to us from the Gospel properly records those days ... yet we behold this same thing more clearly and abundantly carried on now in the enlightenment of all those who are called, since the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled when he says, “*the Lord has laid bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the nations upon earth have seen the salvation which is from the Lord our God;*” and again, “*and those to whom it has not been announced about Him shall see, and they who have not heard, shall understand*” (Isa 52:10, 15).

(Leo the Great, Sermon 36: On the Feast of the Epiphany VI.1)¹⁸

Vs. 9 is even more relevant than this discussion on the arm, for Luke does not talk about the arm. But he does talk about the consolation of Jerusalem. Thus Isaiah says, “Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem” (Isa 52:9). And so in these ways, we can see very specifically that Anna and Simeon knew exactly what to look for, because they knew their Scriptures.

¹⁸ Jerome also comments that the arm is about Christ, but does not mention the birth here. (Jerome, *Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* 2.4).

The passage ends with a **return to the Law**. “*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 2:39-40**). This is the ending of the parallel of Jesus and John, for of John Luke said, “*And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel*” (**Luke 1:80**). We will see the wisdom of Jesus as a boy next time as the early life of Jesus comes to a close.

Until then, let's return to **our original question**. It seems to me very much from both Simeon and Anna that there were in fact people who knew quite specifically that Messiah was coming and what he would do. The intersection of so many prophecies in their words and in the rest of the songs also points to the unavoidable conclusion that they knew at least something that he would **not be a mere man**, but would in fact be **God in human flesh**. Sure, it was more mysterious to them than to us, but these two people knew what they saw. Yes, the Spirit helped Simeon to see it, but of Anna, Luke doesn't even say that, though it is implied by her being a prophetess.

The fact that God came to these two old people and that they were given such a privilege just continues Luke's deep desire that all of us understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is **for everyone**, but especially for those who are not or are no longer the best of society. You are **never too old** to see the Lord. God brought his Son to a **common family of meager economic means**. But that family loved him and did what he commanded because they believed in their God to be the God who keeps his promises. He has done this fully in Jesus Christ.

As you think on these things, know that the Gospel **has been made clear** by him both long before, during, and after to any who see themselves in need of salvation. In these difficult days which will get more difficult with each passing one, you need to see yourself in need of salvation. He alone can meet this need; and he will. Call upon him and he will hear your cry. He will answer you in grace. For that is why he sent Jesus. Then, **sing with the rest** of the church since those earliest days of Jesus' life on earth. Sing in the morning. Sing in the evening. Sing in your coming. And sing in your departure. Sing of the great salvation that God had brought into the world, the salvation that all eyes have beheld in the tiny vessel of the baby, Jesus of Nazareth.

Appendix: The Messiah in Luke and His Sources Compared

<p>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 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 ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Lk 2:34-35)</p>	
<p>But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Isa 8:13-14)</p>	<p>Isa 8.13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall <i>call</i> holy, and let him be your fear and let him be your <i>strength</i>. 8.14 And <i>if you do not attend</i>, <i>his Memra</i> will become <i>among you an avenger</i>, and a stone of <i>smiting</i> and a rock of stumbling to the two houses of the princes of Israel, a <i>breaking and stumbling</i>, because those of the <i>house of Israel</i> have been divided against those of the <i>house of Judah</i> that dwell in Jerusalem. (Isaiah Targum)</p>
<p>The LORD their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them. (Num 23:21)</p>	<p><i>The Memra of the Lord</i>, their God, <i>is their support</i>, and the trumpets of the King Messiah sound among them.</p>
<p>It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations. (Ex 12:42)</p>	<p><i>The fourth night: when the world reaches its appointed time to be redeemed: the iron yokes shall be broken and the generations of wickedness shall be blotted out, and Moses will go up from the midst of the desert and the king Messiah from the midst of Rome. One will lead at the head of the flock, and the other will lead at the head of the flock, and <i>his Memra</i> will lead between the two of them, and I and they will proceed together.</i> (Exodus Targum)</p>
<p>He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head. (Mic. 2:13)</p>	<p><i>The refugees shall go up as in the beginning, and a king shall go up leading at their head, and he shall destroy the enemy oppressing them and conquer the mighty citadels; they shall inherit the cities of the nations, and their kings shall lead at their head, and <i>the Memra of the Lord</i> will be their support [King = Messiah/Redeemer GenRab 48:10; LevRab 32:8; QohRab 4:1; see Tg Ex 12:42.]</i></p>
<p>⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. ⁷ Who are you, O great mountain [Pirqe deRabbi Eliezer RE 9: Mountain = Messiah]? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (Zech 4:6-7)</p>	<p>"This is the word of the Lord <i>with Zerubbabel</i>, saying, 'Not by strength, nor by might, but by my Memra', says the Lord of hosts. 7. What are you reckoned, O foolish kingdom? Are you not like a plain before Zerubbabel? And he shall reveal his anointed One [Isa 28:16; Ps 118:22; 1Pe 2:4-8] whose name is told from of old [see Tg Mic 5:2; 1En 48:1-6], and he shall rule over all kingdoms."</p>
<p>² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (Mic. 5:2)</p>	<p>And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, <i>you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah</i>, from you shall come forth <i>before me the anointed One</i>, to exercise dominion over Israel, <i>he whose name was mentioned from of old, from ancient times.</i> (Micah Targum)</p>
	<p>1 En 48 ¹Furthermore, in that place I saw the fountain of righteousness, which does not become depleted and is surrounded completely by numerous fountains of wisdom. All the thirsty ones drink of the water and become filled with wisdom. Then their dwelling places become with the holy, righteous, and elect ones. ² [OdesSol 36:3] At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, the Before Time [before the beginning of days]; ³ even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. ⁴ [Luke 2:32] He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the light of the gentiles and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts. ⁵ All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits. ⁶ For this purpose he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity. ⁷ And he has revealed the wisdom of the Lord of the Spirits to the righteous and the holy ones, for he has preserved the portion of the righteous because they have hated and despised this world of oppression together with all its ways of life and its habits in the name of the Lord of the Spirits; and because they will be saved in his name and it is his good pleasure that they have life.</p>

Appendix: Samuel and Jesus Compared Literarily¹⁹

<i>Samuel</i>		<i>Jesus</i>	
1 Sam.		Luke	
1:22	presentation of child to the Lord	2:22	presentation of child to the Lord
2:1-10	Hannah sings praises of thanksgiving	2:36-38	Anna praises God and gives thanks
2:20	Eli blesses Samuel's parents	2:34	Simeon blesses Jesus' parents
2:26	Refrain A: "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men" (RSV; see also 2:21).	2:40	Refrain A': "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him" (see also Luke 1:80).
3:1-18	ministry in the temple (without parents) and a message to Eli the priest	2:41-51	visit to the temple (without parents) and discussion with religious teachers
3:19	Refrain B: "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground" (RSV).	2:52	Refrain B': "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (RSV).

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