

VI. Advent in Biblical Perspective
Life Portraits from the Nativity
“Anna and Simeon After the Nativity”
Luke 2:21–38
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December 29, 2019 • Morning Sermon

We will be looking at the Gospel of Luke 2. This is our last study in the series of the live portraits from the nativity. Luke 2:21–38 says [21] *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.*

[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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have had a great time doing these advent series of live portraits and putting them in couplets. We have looked at Zachariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, wise men and shepherds, and the two that are missed by many which are the Spirit of God and the Word of God that is constantly present in all of the nativity account. In this study we'll look at Anna and Simeon.

Luke is not only a doctor he is a historian. We know that Luke is writing this Gospel having done research for we know in the opening verses he had talked to eye witnesses and done

interviews. It really shows up when he says three different times ‘Mary pondered these things in her heart.’ How would you know if somebody pondered something unless you had talked to them? We kind of know when this happened. When Paul had been put in prison in Jerusalem, then transferred by Caesarea by the Sea which took place over a two year period, it’s likely that his companion Luke compiled the things we read from the Gospel of Luke. Later when Paul was in prison in Rome was perhaps the time Luke compiled what we know as the book of Acts.

Luke obviously did his research writing not only as a theologian but he is also writing under the power of the Spirit of God as a historian. His is meticulous in his research and great writers particularly those who do historical writing, always do painstaking research. They have to immerse themselves in the times and events they are writing about. Luke uses phrases like ‘at that time’ or ‘on that day’ which lets us know something about this narrative. Notice that Luke doesn’t say ‘once upon a time’ because this is not a myth or a fable. He is historically documenting things. The phrases Luke uses tells us this nativity has a historical context, a Biblical, theological context and it has a personal context. It is a real historical document, about real people 2,000 years ago making real life decisions in real time in real moments with real evaluations that are taking place.

For instance, we see the timing when Jesus has been born. Upon ‘the eighth day’ from Luke 2:21, would mean the seven days have now passed for Him to be circumcised and now He has been circumcised and named. We have the New Testament version of this every time we read baptism because it replaced circumcision in the Old Testament and this is when the father would name their child and the blessing. So in this verse we see that Jesus by the Old Testament covenant was circumcised, not baptized and then received his name by the angel through Joseph. This is Jesus – God saves, Immanuel – God with us for God is with us to save us from our sins.

Now we are past that eighth day. We have gone another 33 days and have arrived at the 40th day. Now Joseph and Mary have to go to the temple and make that seven mile journey there. Luke says four times in phrases like this in the text ‘according to the law of the Lord’ so that we don’t miss it. Luke makes it abundantly clear that God Word has settled what they do that day, on the 40th day after Jesus’ birth. So now we go from a historical context to a Biblical context taken from Leviticus 12. Not only is He to be circumcised after the seventh day but He, the firstborn male of the family is to be brought into consecration into the temple with an offering of a lamb or if you’re poor you can bring two turtle doves or two pigeons.

Joseph and Mary bring two birds (either turtle doves or pigeons) when they come to the temple to consecrate Jesus to perform the custom of the law. This statement is not to make an economic or political statement here but it is just to let you know Jesus was not rich in the palace but born in the stable to a forgotten line of kings in Mary and Joseph’s line who are both of the line of David, seed of Abraham, and tribe of Judah. So they are poor. Now I’m doing a little speculation here but this also tells us the kings (wise men) have not arrived yet because if the kings had arrived Joseph and Mary would have brought a lamb due to the gifts they brought of gold, frankincense and myrrh. With gold they could have brought a flock of lambs so likely the kings have not arrived to see Jesus yet. Now we have the personal element of this narrative.

When Mary and Joseph come to the temple they meet two more people – Simeon and Anna, who arrive at the same time. Do you see the sovereign hand of God here? We see the sovereign hand working in the lives of those who are being obedient to the Word of God. Don’t miss this. Simeon and Anna are at the end of Luke’s nativity narrative but his narrative began with Zachariah and Elizabeth. Luke has framed the nativity with two older couples narratively. Zachariah and Elizabeth whom the angels visit tells them they will have a son who fulfills the

prophecy of one coming in the spirit of Elijah, paving the way for the Messiah and now this Messiah comes to be consecrated in obedience to the law by Joseph and Mary, concluding this narrative with another elderly couple, who are not married to one another but who both daily serve the Lord in their singleness in the temple, having embraces that calling from the Lord.

I will be sharing about Simeon and Anna and then I will give you the life takeaway. In the life takeaway there will be two things I want you to see. One is that Simeon and Anna become the opportunity for us to reaffirm a Gospel dynamic about a saved life. There are people that are saved in this Biblical narrative who have come to Christ and now serving Christ. There is something that is common to each and every one of them and Simeon and Anna become the explanation point so that we don't miss this reoccurring statement that has woven by the Spirit of God through the accounts of Matthew and Luke, particularly Luke. There is also something in Simeon and Anna that is being affirmed that is directly related to why Jesus has come to save us and you must not miss this one. Before I get there let's look at Simeon and Anna first for it's amazing how much biographical information is packed in these two paragraphs about these two people.

So what can we know about Simeon from this text? Here's what we know. One is that Simeon is a Jew and we can tell that by his name. More than likely because of his name, I would guess he is from the tribe of Judah or Benjamin. Secondly, he is from Jerusalem. Thirdly, the text takes great pains to tell us he is righteous. This does not mean a self-righteousness whereby he is attempting to secure his own salvation through arrogance because the text tells us he is blessed by the Spirit of God and the Spirit doesn't lead you to self-righteousness and works salvation. The Spirit of God leads you to full dependence on Christ and His righteousness. When you get saved your heart's desire is to pursue holiness and righteousness. Fourthly, that means Simeon leads an intentional life thus the word 'devout' which also describes him in the text.

Fifthly, Simeon had a special, Divine calling and that was that God had chosen him to be a prophet with one singular ministry which was to affirm the Messiah when He came to the temple. This is what it meant when it says he was to keep watch for the consolation of Israel. Imagine how many days and years passed as he would come every day thinking 'Is this the day?' He was the one who would announce the Messiah when the glory of the Lord entered the temple and that is Christ.

Sixthly, Simeon had a Divine assurance and that was that he would not die until he had fulfilled that calling. With this calling you can almost hear the echo of Acts 13:36. Here Paul is preaching a sermon and he uses David as an illustration. Acts 13:36 says *[36] For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers.* In other words, David died after he had served God's purpose. Luke 2:26 says *[26] And it had been revealed to him (Simeon) by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.* Simeon was chosen to announce His presence when He came into the temple. The Bible tells us we know not our time to die but Simeon at least knew when it wasn't his time. It wouldn't be his time until he had seen and held Jesus in his arms.

Seventhly, Simeon recognized Jesus and realize Simeon has been coming for years to the temple and this is an aged man. This is the not the first couple who has shown up to consecrate their first born. So why and how does Simeon know this is Jesus? It is the same way you know that He is the Savior of your soul for the Spirit of God gave him eyes to see and ears to hear. The Spirit showed him this was not just any couple or just any baby and that's reaffirmed by an eighth thing we are told in the text which is that he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Bible so wants us to know Simeon was filled with the Spirit by making three comments about it. One it says that the Holy Spirit was upon him (poured out upon him) which is the same language that is used when Jesus is anointed by the Spirit at His baptism when He begins His public ministry 30 years later. Two the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Thirdly, that day the Holy Spirit led him to the temple and to Mary and Joseph. The Spirit of God was the One who enabled him to know that this was the Son of God who has come in the flesh.

A ninth thing we know about Simeon is that he is a teacher. We have no evidence he is a priest. In fact, the evidence would be against him being a priest but he is a teacher because he does the ministry of a teacher. He blesses God. He gives the benediction of praise to God and then he gives a benediction to Mary and Joseph. Let's look a little more closely at his blessing in Luke 2:28–32 which says [28] *he took him (Jesus) 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.”*

Now Simeon can die because God has fulfilled His Word for he has seen the Savior. There are over 6,000 times God is referred to as Lord with two other words. There is only five times He is referred to in the Bible as Lord with the one used in Luke 2:29. This is the word *despotes* and from here we get the word despot which literally means unrivaled master. We can see Simeon's heart overflowing in subservient and surrender to the God of glory.

Then Simeon makes three comments about God's salvation. He declares that the Messiah has come who is the Savior presented for all peoples which means He is the only Savior for any people. There is not another plan or another way or another savior and all peoples need a Savior and this is the One, Jesus Christ the Lord of glory. He has come to save you. He has come to the Jew (wise men, rich, up and inners) and the Gentile (shepherds, poor, (down and outers). The second blessing is that He is a light to the Gentiles so what God has promised Abraham has now come for He is the seed given that will be a blessing to all nations. The third part of his blessing is the declaration of glory to His people Israel.

Do not be distracted with all these notions that what we need to be looking for is a rebuilding of a temple, a reinstating of sacrifices, a going back to Old Testament offerings etc. for that's exactly the lie that Satan has sold – He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. Why did they reject Him? He couldn't be the Savior they wanted yet the One they rejected is said by Simeon to be the glory of His people Israel. He is not One to be ashamed of for this is the One who fulfills all the offerings, prophets, priests, kings, types, shadows, prophecies for we don't look to go back to all that. We want the Gospel to go to the Jew first and to the Gentile so they would hear and no longer be deceived by Satan for Christ is your glory. He is the One who saves His people, Jew and Gentile, from all their sins.

Then the text says in Luke 2:33, [33] *And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.* Can you imagine what Mary and Joseph thought after hearing this sermon from this rabbi that pronounces this blessing? Then Simeon blesses them and grants to them a word of benediction. They have come in obedience to the law and the Spirit of God shows up with Simeon to bless their wondering souls and now they marvel at what was said to them.

Tenthly Simeon is a prophet who is giving a sermon and then makes a prophetic word that this salvation will be costly. Luke 2:34–35 says [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.” This Child is opposed and Satan wants to devour and destroy this Child and the covenant people of God. Mary was told that it would not only cost her Son His life in the holy war against the enemies of God yet He will win the victory with His death and resurrection but the sword will pierce her own soul. Now we have Anna.

In Luke 2:36–38 we see so much about Anna. One she is also a Jew. Secondly, she is the daughter of Phanuel. Thirdly, she was 84 years old. I’m glad the Bible doesn’t practice chronological snobbery. It’s not just about the youth but the aged are honored. Fourthly, when she was preparing for marriage she was Biblically faithful for she was a virgin. Do you think maybe this is one of the reasons God the Spirit has Anna with Mary the virgin who has given birth and with her right now when she is about to go through the rites of purification? Just the right counselor by the Spirit of God has been brought to her.

Fifthly Anna is an attendant to the temple with all its ministries and sixthly she is a prophetess. That is only mentioned six times in the Bible and she is one of the six. Seventhly, the Holy Spirit is upon her for coming up on that very hour and the Spirit is always on time, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all. In other words, Anna gave the great news of the Gospel to all who were there while she was praising God. She was led by God’s Word and filled by His Spirit.

Now we are at the takeaway and Luke has something he is reaffirming and affirming. What is he reaffirming? He is reaffirming this; salvation experiences with God and from God come as we obey the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God by the grace of God. In other words, God’s relentless, unmerited favor in grace as it searches us out brings us to experience salvation in Christ by two means of grace – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Every one we have studied in this nativity came to Jesus because the Word of God brought them to Jesus and they were filled with the Spirit because it’s only by the Spirit of God that one will profit from the Word of God. So with the Word of God guiding them and the Spirit of God guiding them the grace of God brings them to the Son of God.

Notice that everyone who gets to Jesus, when they go away for Jesus are changed. As they depart for Jesus they are all led by the Word of God and the Spirit of God and all are doing the same two things – they are worshipping God (praising Him) and witnessing for God (telling others about Jesus). There are the marks of true spirituality. It is a devotion to worship God in spirit and in truth and to tell the truth about God in the Spirit to the lost. When that guides you all kinds of glorious experiences happen.

Mary and Joseph didn’t get up on that 40th day and think they needed an experience with God to move forward yet I don’t know if it took place that way or not but I can imagine Joseph telling Mary that they would be faithful to God’s Word and do what He says for them to do. They would go to the temple and consecrate their first born. What did God have ready for them in their obedience to God’s Word? He had the blessing of Simeon and Anna for them. They didn’t go looking for those two. They went in obedience to God’s Word by the Spirit of God and the same God that brought them brought Simeon and Anna to bless their souls.

Most professing Christians are looking for experiences from God to determine whether they obey God. It is abundantly clear in these nativity portraits that God has glorious experiences but it’s not the experiences that send us to obedience for it is the grace of God through the means of grace – the Word of God and the Spirit of God – that bring us to Jesus and then comes God’s appointed experiences to bless, save, sanctify, encourage, convict and console us.

This is my heart for you that you will have a hunger for God's Word and that you will be surrendered to God's Spirit and it will show up in you with a desire to praise Him and a relentless commitment to tell others about Him. But I have another great concern for you and that is that you are ready to meet Him.

During these last few weeks in this holiday season with wonderfully supported staff I go through those in our membership who are sick, facing eternity in a fight for their life or those elderly or those younger who feelings are so raw and visit them. I would like to tell you what I get a chance to hear during many of these visits – Pastor, thank you for coming but I want you to know my mother was ready or it might be a brother or sister, aunt or uncle etc. I may ask them how they knew and they would proceed to tell me about their commitment to Christ. Now I know that they were ready. I can't tell you how encouraging it is to hear when someone is ready to meet Jesus. I may hear 'I'm ready' in which they have been liberated by the redeeming hand of Christ from the bondage of sin, its guilt and shame and free from the fear of death. Now I'm ready to depart for by faith I have seen and held my Savior close to my heart with the saving grace that comes by His Spirit and His Word. All that language comes from this text in Luke 2.

Simeon said 'Now I'm ready, for I have seen my Salvation, the glory of Israel, the Light to the nations and He is mine and I am His.' You will never be ready to die and meet Christ until you have died to yourself and received Christ. You are ready to die when Christ has become your life. So Simeon was ready. Man knows not his time. Are you ready? You have an appointment. I wonder how many times you have heard someone say 'Are you ready?' According to Webster's Dictionary *ready* means fully prepared for an appointed event.

Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* Are you ready by having received Christ as your Lord and Savior? Is it well with your soul? My heart goes out for everything your body faces in a sin-cursed world but I want it to be well with your soul. Are you ready? Is Christ yours and are you His? As the hymn *It Is Well With My Soul* says;

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! (Now I'm ready)*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trumpet shall sound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

Are you ready? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Let the Spirit of God speak to your heart. If you're ready to meet Jesus then you're ready in this life to worship Him and bear witness of Him by the grace of God through the means of grace – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Follow Simeon and Anna who were praising God before the people and telling all the people of the Redeemer of His people, Jesus Christ. Today you have heard that this Jesus has come with Good News of great joy to save you from your sins. It's appointed to die and then the judgment – are you ready? He is ready to receive you. You may hold Him in your arms by faith because He will hold you in the arms of righteousness and redemption. Are you ready? If you would like to pray with someone about having a personal

relationship with Jesus please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with you about this. I pray all this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

SIMEON

ANNA

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

Salvation experiences with God and from God come as we obey the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God by the Grace of God.

Everyone who came to Christ was brought by the Word of God and led by the Spirit of God. And as they left to serve Christ, they were directed by the Word of God and filled with the Spirit of God.

Worshipping – Witnessing

READY