

Simeon's Prophecy

Luke 2: 22-40

1st Sunday after Christmas Day

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Simeon's prophecy reveals how Jesus is God's agent to do the work of revelation and salvation-bringing, and he also predicts the sacrifice that this will require, as well as the pain of sacrifice that even Mary, Jesus' mother will feel. Anna validates Simeon's recognition of Jesus as God's Sent One. God chose to be embodied in humanity in order to bring salvation to us. In this dedication of Jesus both his divinity and his humanity are revealed as he goes through the same ritual of dedication that any other Jewish male child would have done.

The story of Jesus presentation and his mother Mary's purification in the Temple was very important to Luke because it highlights that Jesus was a Jewish male, and that his family followed the laws and traditions that had been set down in the Torah. Let us listen to the word of God in **Luke 2:22-40**

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have

seen your salvation, ³¹ which 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 the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary,

“This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

This is the word of the Lord.

In this story we see Jesus recognized in the Temple – the Holy place for the Jewish people in Jerusalem. But what is really fascinating and gives the readers a glimpse of what this child Jesus will do – turn everything UPSIDE DOWN, is the recognition of Jesus as the son of God, by two ordinary people, Simeon and Anna, two regular people. We don’t hear the rabbis or the holy men announce his coming or recognize his divinity, its these two old people, like the multitude of sinners, saints, prisoners, and just ordinary people who will recognize and claim Jesus as Savior.

The first two chapters of Luke are filled with prophecy and song. An angel brings the prophesy of John the Baptist to Zechariah, his father, and to Mary about Jesus birth. These prophesy are answered with song, Mary’s magnificat and Zechariah’s answer to John’s birth. They are two of the three

canticles in these first three chapters. The last is the text we just read, Simeon's response to witnessing God's redemptive presence in the temple. None of these three were musicians, they were ordinary people, two old men and a young woman, whose only response to the experience of God's action in their lives was to break out in song.

Singing here may seem strange, but it is a very important part of our heritage as God's people. These songs were the vehicle through which the story was passed from generation to generation, long before it was written down. We shouldn't be too surprised after all the Psalms are hymns as well. We remember songs, the exact words in songs. We usually don't remember the exact words to a story, or we struggle to find the words, but we jump right into a song we know.

I will admit I remember very little of the Hebrew I learned in seminary, but I can sing part of the Shema, an important Jewish prayer, because we sang it every day. And I have sung it in the hospital for Jewish patients, because it has such deep meaning for them. I only remember it because I learned it as a song. And today our final hymn is an African American spiritual, Go Tell it on the Mountain, that was sung long before it was written down. This is a reminder of the importance of claiming our history through song, just as the songs of Mary, Zechariah and Simeon. Using song to pass on our story of the faithfulness of God is a tool that helps us remember, just as it was for them.

Many of the songs we sing during this season are sung a few times and put away until next year, but we remember them. So we have the privilege of singing the songs that have been passed on to us today, we ordinary people, as we claim the music that reminds us of God's faithfulness, of God with us. Amen.

And since music is not my gift, Tom Tropp, whose it is, will lead us in our hymn sing.