

Luke 2:21–40 (CEB)

²¹ When eight days had passed, Jesus' parents circumcised him and gave him the name Jesus. This was the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived.

²² When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (²³ It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") ²⁴ They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, *A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*

²⁵ A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. ²⁸ Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

²⁹ "Now, master, let your servant go in
peace according to your word,
³⁰ because my eyes have seen your salvation.

³¹ You prepared this salvation in the
presence of all peoples.

³² It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and a glory for your people Israel."

³³ His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. ³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. ³⁷ She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

*There's so much to look at during Christmas. Lights, trees, cookies, smiling children.
But what should we see before we lay our eyes on anything else?*

Simeon was old. He was righteous, devout, and pretty much waiting to die. But he wanted to live long enough to see the salvation of Israel. Simeon knew that things were not right. He needed only to look up at the Roman soldiers standing atop the Antonia Fortress to be reminded, for the fortress sat adjacent to the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Israel had suffered for so long. But now, the Holy Spirit had assured Simeon that he would live to see the realization of his hope.

One day, on what must have felt a bit like an impulse, Simeon went to the temple. There, he saw a young woman, a girl really, with her husband. They were carrying a newborn into the temple to be consecrated. As soon as Simeon laid eyes on the child, he knew that he could die in peace, and exclaimed, "For my eyes have seen your salvation."

Simeon was not speaking of his personal salvation. Salvation for the Jews had nothing to do with “getting to heaven” or any other path to personal redemption. Instead, the salvation for which Simeon had been waiting was the salvation of Israel and, hence, the world. The child, this Messiah-child, would be the fulfillment of God’s promise that Israel would be redeemed from sin and restored to a right relationship with God. In other words, God had made a covenant with Israel and that covenant would be kept by the baby in Mary’s arms. And as had been promised to Abraham two millennia before (Genesis 12), all the world would be blessed through Israel. The baby was to be a light to the Gentiles every bit as much as to the Jews.

Despite the events surrounding Jesus’ birth, Mary and Joseph were astounded by the appearance of this old man and what he had to say. But Simeon went on. The baby would create turmoil not peace. Many would speak against him. Jesus would reveal what is really in people’s hearts which is, of course, often not very pretty. And, in a statement that surely cut to Mary’s heart, Simeon saw suffering ahead, saying to the new mother, “A sword will pierce your own soul as well.” It might be all angels and adoration now, but the coming of God’s kingdom would exact a high price.

Redemption and Purification¹

Jewish Law prescribed certain rituals after childbirth. First, all male infants were circumcised on the eighth day after birth (verse 21).

Second, as a reminder of the Exodus, the first child born to a couple was consecrated to the Lord’s service. Then, the infant would be redeemed (bought back) at a price of five shekels. Luke notes Jesus’ consecration (verse 22 and 23) but makes no mention of Jesus’ redemption ritual. Perhaps Luke didn’t know all the specifics of Jewish Law and custom. Or, perhaps Luke wants to make the point that Jesus remained consecrated to the Lord, that his parents never redeemed him from the Lord’s service.

Purification of the mother was a third ritual. After the birth of a male child, the mother was ceremonially unclean for seven days and then went through a 33 day purification period. This period was twice as long for mothers of female infants. While she was ritually unclean the mother could not enter the temple nor touch any holy object. After the 40 (or 80) days the mother was to offer to the Lord a lamb and either a pigeon or a turtledove. If the mother could not afford a lamb, she could instead offer two turtledoves or pigeons. Mary can offer only the two birds (verse 24).

¹This is drawn from R. Alan Culpepper’s commentary on Luke in the *New Interpreter’s Bible*.

Speaking for God

As Mary and Joseph tried to make sense of what Simeon had said to them, they were approached by an old woman. Anna was eighty-four and had been a widow for about as long as she could remember. Anna had the gift of speaking God’s word to the people of God. She was one of God’s prophets and never left the temple.

Anna too is overcome at the sight of the child. Like Simeon, she understands the meaning of this infant. Anna gives thanks to God and then uses her God-given gift to proclaim this Good News to everyone in the temple who looked forward to the salvation of Israel – which meant everyone who could hear her. In Israel at the time, perhaps the only Jews who did not anxiously await Israel’s redemption were those who had made their bed with the Romans, such as the Sadducees and other people of means who were doing quite well under Roman rule.

Seeing with clear eyes

Despite their age, Anna and Simeon see the child in Mary’s arms with clear eyes. They see the truth and are delighted by it. They see the arrival of Israel’s rescue in this tiny newly born infant. They see . . . and believe.

You and I, and Luke's readers, cannot see the Christ-child as did Simeon and Anna. We are called to believe, to have faith in, that which we cannot see. But there is more to knowing than seeing, or hearing, or tasting, or touching, or smelling. God's cosmos is larger and more mysterious than that. The baby in Mary's arms is larger and more mysterious still, the one in whom "all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible . . ." (Colossians 1:16), the one who would be "wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5), the one whom "every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of the God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

Daily Bible Readings

More from Luke's story of Jesus

Monday, Luke 3:1-22 The proclamation of John the Baptizer

Tuesday, Luke 4:1-15 The temptation of Jesus and beginning of his ministry

Wednesday, Luke 4:16-30 Jesus is rejected in Nazareth.

Thursday, Luke 6:17-49 Jesus' sermon on the plain

Friday, Luke 7:1-17 Jesus heals a centurion's servant and resuscitates a widow's son

Saturday, Luke 11:1-13 Jesus on prayer

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

A study of the book of Revelation

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

A study of Paul's letter to the Romans

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Both classes are now recorded and are available each week in my new podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts. Search by my name, "Scott Engle."

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Beginning next week, Jan 12: *The Real Story of the Crusades*

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy