

Please consider (with me) some of the most significant days of your life so far. ... There is of course... the day of your birth... (if you are a Christian) the day you trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior... your graduation day... the day of your wedding... but let's not include the day of your death (unless it has already happened for you.) ... Interspersed between our first day and our last day... are days of great victory and defeat. There are days we can't remember, there are days we remember with sweetness, and others we would soon rather forget. Each day, however, is a gift from God to glorify Him. ... Moses said in Psalm 90:12, "*So teach us to number our days... that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*"

Today's portion of Scripture directs our attention to two special days in Jesus' life as a baby (His eighth day... and His fortieth day.) These two pictures from Jesus' baby book... are snapshots of two very special days... which provide great lessons for **you** and **me**. ... Luke included only three stories from the childhood of Jesus... and here we find two of them. These seemingly insignificant episodes (that are typically bypassed when telling the story of Jesus) contain some remarkable truths for us.

So I invite you to imagine the setting. ... A week has passed since the Nativity (that first Christmas - when the angels filled the skies over the fields of Bethlehem as they announced Christ's birth to the amazed shepherds... who then ran... leaping the low fences... to see their newborn Savior-King lying in a manger.)

Young Mary had hardly recovered from giving birth... and the mental video tapes of the miraculous events were set on constant replay: the forced journey to Bethlehem... their frantic search for a place to give birth... her

labor under the stars... Joseph anxiously standing beside her in the night air.

This couple would live their entire lives in the unfolding mystery of these events. ... And with the continuing unfolding of memorable occurrences (that are recorded in our passage today) - which is Luke 2:21–38 - Mary and Joseph were given even more to deepen and confirm the significance of Jesus' birth in their minds. ... These same events can help make the dazzling wonder of the Incarnation a year-long experience for us.

As we move on from the Nativity Scene... the shepherds have gone back to their sheep... and Joseph and Mary back to Nazareth. ... We can imagine Joseph putting up with irate customers in the carpenter shop... while Mary was washing diapers. (The glamour is gone and life is back to normal.) We pick up Luke's narrative with Mary and Joseph going through the ritual activities... taking their baby to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice. Mary and Joseph were proceeding with all the usual customs of normal Jewish life.

In the temple they met two Jewish prophets (Simeon and Anna.) ... The Holy Spirit was upon both... and they recognized this baby and His importance for both Israel and the Gentiles. This revelation came to these two faithful believers (who were just and devout and had the Holy Spirit upon them.)

For 400 years the voice of PUBLIC prophecy in Israel had been silent. Now two prophets suddenly emerge. (Apparently prophets still existed – but God was not speaking to the whole nation through them.) ... (Now)... before we meet these two... Luke is going to briefly describe the

circumcision of Jesus in one sentence... and then tell us why Jesus and His parents went to the Temple 38 days later... (where they met these two prophets.)

### **Luke 2:21-24**

Our story begins with the events that took place on the eighth day of the life of Jesus. ... The eighth day in the life of a baby boy was significant. ... So sacred was that ceremony that it could be carried out even on a Sabbath when the law forbade almost every other act which was not absolutely essential.

It was important that Jesus be circumcised... because circumcision was commanded in Genesis 17 for all males who would be a part of Abraham's household. ... Without it Jesus could not have identified with his people. Circumcision made the Jewish boy a member of the Israelite community. If Jesus was not circumcised... He could not be part of the people to whom He was sent.

The circumcision and purification ceremonies were necessary as a reminder that we are all born in sin. Jesus *could* have been excused because He was **not** born in sin. (Yet) we see Him even as a baby... identifying with sinners... as He also later did at His baptism and on the cross. ... He was not so much as eight days in this world till He began to be numbered with the transgressors. Mary's firstborn son was a lamb without blemish and without spot... but before He was a week old... He began to bear the sins of many.

However... the matter of greatest significance at His circumcision was that He was officially named Jesus (which means “Jehovah is salvation.”) ... .. The sense of the moment must have overwhelmed them. “This child shall be called ‘Jehovah is salvation.’ ... This child... (our baby)... is salvation!”

This is essential to understanding Jesus’ birth... though sadly... in this secularized age... the average person on the street has no idea what *Jesus* means. ... But for those of us who know Him... the name is both a claim and a promise. ... Jesus not only means “*Jehovah is salvation*” but suggests deliverance. ... It carries the idea of our being delivered by God’s merciful action.

(You may have already known that a Jewish boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.) But did you know that the eighth day was the **best** day to do the procedure? ... Medical science has learned that on the eighth day of the new born male child... the blood clotting and infection fighting agents in the blood are at their combined best. ... When God gave the command to circumcise... He did not choose the eighth day randomly. It was no accident that God gave instructions for this surgery on this very day.

God had also given instructions for mothers after they give birth. Jesus was brought to the Temple after Mary’s purification period and her childbirth was completed. ... The law of Moses stated that giving birth to a baby boy required the mother to have forty days of purification and cleansing (Leviticus 12:2–4). ... If the mother gave birth to a baby **girl**... eighty days of purification (twice as long)... were required (Leviticus 12:5). ... As to the reason why it was longer for a girl... I don’t know. ... She could go about her household and her daily business... but she could not enter

the Temple... or share in any religious ceremony until her time of purification was complete.

So... when Jesus was brought to the Temple... He was about six weeks old. ... The purpose of this trip to the Temple was to present Jesus to the Lord. ... Ironically... the Lord is being presented to the Lord. Think about that! ... He (Who is our High Priest)... was being presented to the priests.

This practice was changed (later) when the tribe of Levi became the tribe of the priest. ... So instead of bringing the firstborn to be placed into the priesthood... each firstborn was to be presented to the Lord... and a sacrifice made by the parents.

The sacrifice was to be a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering. ... This was a somewhat expensive sacrifice... and so the law laid it down that *if the parents could not afford the lamb...* they could (instead) only bring the much cheaper offering – of pigeons. This technically called *The Offering of the Poor*. ... THIS “poor person’s offering”... is what Joseph and Mary brought. ... Christ was not born into wealth but into poverty. ... But His poverty was for our spiritual wealth.

Joseph and Mary could not afford the lamb... but in truth... they were bringing the Great Lamb of God to the Temple in the person of Jesus Christ who would be the Great Sacrifice for man’s sins. ... His sacrifice would eliminate the need for any more sacrifices.

This child dedication was performed in strict accordance with Jewish customs and included a promise from the parents to train their child in the knowledge of the Lord.

The baby was presented to the priest with a small sum of money... equal to five shekels (which was less than \$10.00 in our money). ... Then the priest asked the question: “*Which would you rather do—give up your first-born son, or redeem him for five shekels?*” ... “*This is my first-born,*” answered the father. “*Take unto thee the five shekels due for his redemption.*” The rabbi repeated two short prayers (one for the law of redemption... one for the gift of the child.) ... Then... placing his hands on the head of the child... he pronounced this blessing:

*The Lord bless you and preserve you;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you  
And give you peace,  
Length of days, years, and peace  
Be gathered to you.  
God keep you from all evil  
And save your soul.*

The fact that Mary and Joseph were presenting Jesus to the Lord brings us to a very important question. Have you presented yourself to the Lord? This is one of the challenges of Scripture.

The word “present” in Luke 2:22 is the same as in Romans 12:1. It is from the word *παρισταμι* **{par-is'-tay-mee}** which means “*to place a person or thing at one’s disposal, to stand by or be at hand, to bring into fellowship or intimacy, to offer.*” ... We are to be available to the Lord and at His disposal... ready to be put to use. ... We are to be in close fellowship with the Son of God and surrendered to His will.

Paul tells us in Romans 12 to present our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice. This word “*present*” is in the aorist infinitive tense which means “*a once-for-all, decisive action.*” ... We are to present our bodies “*once and for*

*all* to the Lord just as a bride and groom are to present themselves once and for all to one another. Our minds are to be made up about living for Christ.

The word "*bodies*" in this verse... indicates our whole being as well as our physical bodies. ... We are to present our bodies as living (not dead sacrifices.) ... Only Christians can present their bodies as a living sacrifice. ... An unbeliever cannot do this because he is spiritually **dead**.

Presenting your body as a living sacrifice... is the key to victory and joy. ... It is the key to fulfilling God's purpose for your life. ... Most people try to get all they can from God... but the key to satisfaction and happiness is to give yourself... and all that you are and have to the Savior. ... God wants **US** most of all.

Our Lord wants 100% commitment from us. There **is** a difference between "involvement" and "commitment." ... When you look at a plate of ham and eggs... you know the chicken was "involved"... but the pig was "committed."

On one of the old Roman coins was the figure of an ox... standing between a plow and an altar... with the inscription, "*Ready for either.*" ... That is the attitude of the sold-out Christian who presents his body as a living sacrifice. He is ready for service **and** sacrifice. ... Are you ready and willing to live your life for the Lord Jesus Christ? ... How dedicated are you to the Lord? Are your prayers MORE along the lines of "**THY** will be done" (?)... or "**MY** will be done" (?)

Approximately 12,000 days after His dedication... Jesus would be presented to the Lord again in Jerusalem as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world as He was crucified on the cross of Calvary. ... No more sacrifices would need to be made for the spiritual purification of men or women.

When a person puts their faith in Christ for their salvation... he or she is declared pure and justified before God. ... The righteousness of Jesus Christ is placed on us... and all of our sin is placed on Him... when we put our faith in Him. ... Without faith in Christ... we are still lost in our sins and condemned to an eternal Hell. ... With Christ in our heart we have genuine peace with God.

### **Luke 2:25-26**

When Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem... they met a wonderful man known as Simeon. ... Simeon was a just and devout man. How fitting (you see) his name means “*Hearing*” or “*listening*.” ... This man was in tune to the Lord in his life. His attentiveness to God made him just and devout.

The word “**just**” is rich in meaning. It is from the Greek word ***dikaios {dik'-ah-yos}*** which means “righteous, obedient to God’s commands, conformed to the will of God in his actions and attitudes, and approved and accepted by God.” Let me stop for a second and ask, “Does this describe you? Does the Lord approve of the way you are living? Are you yielded to the will of God in your life and obeying God’s Word?”

Bertoldo de Giovanni is a name even the most enthusiastic lover of art is unlikely to recognize. ... He was the student of Donatello... the greatest



sculptor of his time... and he was the teacher of Michelangelo... the greatest sculptor of all time. ... Michelangelo was only 14 years old when he came to Bertoldo... but it was already obvious that Michael was enormously gifted. ... Bertoldo was wise enough to realize that gifted people are often tempted to coast rather than to grow... and therefore he kept trying to pressure his young prodigy to work seriously at his art.

One day he came into the studio to find Michelangelo toying with a piece of sculpture far beneath his abilities. ... Bertoldo grabbed a hammer... stomped across the room... and smashed the work into tiny pieces... shouting this unforgettable message: "*Michelangelo, talent is cheap; dedication is costly!*"

(CHURCH!) being dedicated to the Lord is costly. It is not convenient... cheap... or comfortable at times... but it yields wonderful blessings... satisfaction... opportunities... and the fulfillment of God's purpose for your life. Bible characters like Simeon (who are righteous... obedient to God's Word... surrendered to the will of God... are reminders to us of what God expects.) Let's compare ourselves to THEM... instead of the average church-goer today.

The Bible also says that Simeon was "**devout**" which means he was a godly man that had a good testimony among the people. The combination "righteous and devout" may well indicate that Simeon conducted himself in such a manner that his behavior both with respect to men (he was righteous) and God (he was devout.)

The Holy Spirit of God was evident in his life. His relationship with God helped him to have the right kind of relationship with other people. Let me ask, "*Do you have a good Christian testimony?*"

Simeon not only was devout and righteous... he also lived in the hope that God's promise will come to pass: he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. ... Consolation refers to the hope... comfort... and deliverance of Israel.

To be sure... conditions were bad - very bad in Israel at the time of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem ! ... Think of loss of political independence... cruel King Herod... legalistic scribes and Pharisees and their many followers... worldly-minded Sadducees,...the silence of the voice of prophecy, etc. ... But in the midst of all this darkness... degradation... and despair there were men (and women) who were hopefully looking forward to... and earnestly expecting... "*the consolation of Israel.*" Already mentioned were Mary and Elizabeth. In just a moment... Luke is going to add Anna to the list.

This word "consolation" appears in the Greek Old Testament. Isaiah 40:1 reads: "*Comfort, comfort my people,*" and then again in Isaiah 66:13: "*As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.*" This is what Simeon and the others were looking for.

All of their waiting for the coming Messiah is a wonderful picture of what you and I need to be doing right now! We are to be patiently and eagerly awaiting His second coming which will begin with the first phase known as the Rapture. Those who are Christians will be removed from this planet instantly. This event is imminent. Heaven's bugler is practicing and preparing to blow the trumpet that will call all believers dead and alive for a reunion on Heaven's shore.

**Matthew 24:37-42 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

<sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.

<sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Beloved, are you ready for His coming? Don't be caught off guard and be ashamed when He returns. He could come today!

**1 John 2:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

**Luke 2:27**

The Spirit has taken care that at the precise moment when Joseph and Mary were walking into the temple carrying the baby Jesus... Simeon also walked in.

Simeon had received an oracle from God... making it clear that though he was aged... he would not leave this life without seeing the Lord's Messiah. ... How long had he been waiting? Days—months—years? ... We do not

know. ... But we can imagine his settled assurance and joyous anticipation as he daily came to the temple looking... reflecting... and sometimes asking himself: *“Is this the One? There is a likely couple! They look so regal. Maybe that Godly-looking fellow is him!”* ... And then... one grand day... *“Moved by the Spirit”* ... he went into the temple courts.

Ol Simeon saw a young man and a young woman... both of them poor peasants. ... They were Galileans by the sound of their voices... destitute by their looks. ... They carried a Baby. They were coming into the temple to present Him to God. The Holy Spirit urged him: *That’s Him!* ... *What? The baby of this impoverished couple?* ... He stepped forward boldly. ... *“Of course! A Babe!”* ... All doubts were swept aside. This was the One of whom all of the prophets had written! ... He held out his arms.

### **Luke 2:28-29**

What Simeon means is that he is *now* ready to die, since God is releasing him in peace. After Simeon held Jesus and acknowledged who He was... he was ready to die... totally at peace and satisfied. ... His cup was filled with blessing and pleasure. ... The same holds true for us today. When you put your faith in Christ... (when you are ready to meet the Lord)... you can have perfect peace. ... **FIRST**... it is a peace with God... and that leads to being at peace with other people.

### **Luke 2:30**

True peace comes only when we (like Simeon) understand that salvation is Jesus Christ plus nothing — and rest our souls in Him alone.

God had promised Simeon that he would see the salvation of God. What did he see? He saw a little **Baby**. Salvation is a **Person** (and not something that you *do*.) ... Salvation is a Person... and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. You either have Him... or you don't have Him. You either trust Him... or you don't trust Him. ... Do *you* have Him today?

### **Luke 2:30-32**

For the Gentiles salvation is *light*: the true knowledge of God... holiness and love... joy as never before experienced. Of course... it is also light for Israel... but the term is especially appropriate when applied to the Gentiles because their darkness was deepest.

If Jesus is revelation for the Gentiles... He is more than that for Israel. ... He is its glory. For Israel salvation is *glory*. It is glory also for the Gentiles... but no one who knows his/her Bible will fail to understand why this description specifically suits Israel. ... It is with Israel that we associate the Shekinah.

### **Luke 2:33**

Simeon's prophecy must have been a great shock to Mary and Joseph. ... For thousands of years... the Jews had expected a Messiah who would deliver Israel. ... No one expected the Messiah to be for all people. ... Simeon said that this light (this salvation) was not just for the Jews. ... I am sure this must have been a great wonder to them. It is for all.

But then... another shocking thing was told to them. Simeon added that *not* all will be blessed... but many in Israel will fall because of Jesus.

### **Luke 2:34**

There are promise and fulfillment... but not all is good. ... Jesus will force choices and (as a result) some people will fall rather than rise. ... In substance Simeon told Jesus' parents that their child would become the great divider. Furthermore his message was that this great division would not simply turn out that way (as an accident)... but that in God's eternal **plan** it had been so decided. ... Literally what Simeon said was: "*Mark well, this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel...*" In other words a person's relation or attitude toward Jesus would be absolutely decisive of his personal destiny.

By means of their attitude to Jesus... men would be constantly revealing the thoughts or deliberations of their hearts. Jesus' person shows where hearts really are before God. Jesus will expose those who do not believe. He is a litmus test. ... With Jesus... there is no neutral ground. People either joyfully accept Him... or totally reject Him.

That prophecy is completely fulfilled to this day. And so was what Simeon said next.

### **Luke 2:35**

In addressing Mary... Simeon states that a sword would pierce her soul. In fact (as the original language indicates) a large and broad sword (the symbol of intense pain) of frightful and piercing anguish.

In her *Magnificat* she sang of how the future generations would call her "blessed." But here she learns that the future will also bring great sorrow. That future would include the family's flight to Egypt, her Son's being misunderstood and rejected, the terrible events of Passion Week, and watching her Son die on the cross.

A great sword would go right through this mother's soul! The most honored woman of all would know great pain. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Another wonderful person was at the Temple. Her name was Anna.

### **Luke 2:36-38**

Anna knew great sorrow early in life, but this sorrow did not drive Anna away from God but rather it drove her to the Lord. She did not forsake God in sorrow but sought Him in sorrow... (She did not depart from the Temple but continued to worship) ... with fastings and prayers.” This marks her as a woman who was concerned about God's kingdom and Israel's hope.

Anna did not remarry... but devoted the rest of her life to God's service. Anna's activity pictures a person totally focused on serving God. ... She was either 84 years old or had been a widow for 84 years. ... We are not sure... but we do know she was up in years and was faithful to the Lord. She did not retire from serving God in spite of her age. The aged woman was a prophetess that served the Lord with a devoted prayer life. (What an inspiration!) No matter what your age... don't fall into spiritual slumber. Stay busy for Christ until you cross the finish line and He calls you home to glory! There is work to do even for those who are far along in years. Anna spent her time in prayer, praise, and proclamation. What a blessed way to spend one's "declining" (?) years.

Anna and Simeon probably knew one another and worshiped with a group of people who eagerly sought the One who would redeem Jerusalem. After Simeon had made his pronouncement... she arrived and gave further prophetic confirmation that the baby was the long-awaited Redeemer...

and she excitedly began to announce his arrival to all who had hoped for the Messiah.

Anna was “coming up at that very hour” (or “moment”). We may picture her as being in one of the courts of the temple, perhaps “the court of women”... when she sees Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus. She carefully observes Simeon as he takes the baby into his arms. She distinctly hears every word for she has now “come up” and joined the little family. She is convinced that this child is indeed the Messiah.

Filled with gratitude she immediately returns thanks to God. Her prayer finished... she begins to speak to (who?) To everyone? No. She went to all who were like she and Simeon (“all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” - all like-minded people.) She would speak to all (who being one in spirit with she and Simeon) were similarly looking forward to “Israel’s consolation.”

Perhaps Luke included this brief snippet from Mary’s baby book to let us know that the arrival of the Messiah was neither quiet nor unexpected. His birth had been announced to the people most likely to care... and they spread the news like wildfire. ... Many people anticipated His coming... although none of them occupied positions of power... wealth... or religious influence. ... So... without much fanfare... the Christ entered the temple to satisfy the requirement of the Law and to take His place alongside His kindred Jews. ... Only a small remnant understood the importance of what occurred that day.

(And) this is exactly the way things are today – with Christ’s **SECOND COMING** being so close! So **MANY** (otherwise) good evangelical churches



are refusing to teach on Christ's second coming – because they view it as too controversial. What a shame to miss out on so much.

Anna and Simeon (along with a small remnant of their day) were co-celebrants of the consolation of Israel. They *believed* when few others truly believed in Christ's FIRST coming. They never gave up but kept trusting and looking. What an example they are even for us today!

**1 John 3:2-3 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

**Titus 2:12-13 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

We can be like Simeon and Anna... who purified themselves by waiting and watching for Christ's coming. The same will happen to us. ... They longed for the righteousness and consolation that would come only through the Messiah. They came to God's house hungry... and they received as few others have in the history of the world.

Lives like these are rare. Such longing is not in vogue today. ... But (now... more than ever before)... we need to long for the righteous consolation of Jesus' return. His coming back is so imminent! Will you receive such blessings by trusting and eagerly looking for His return? Now... more than ever... don't be placid. Stay excited and excite others.