

Luke 2:22-40            “The Song of Simeon”

In one sense, we are taking a break from our series through Chronicles.

In another sense, we are merely *illustrating* our series in Chronicles.

Last week we heard Solomon’s prayer,  
where he asked that when God’s people pray in the temple,  
that the LORD would hear from heaven, and forgive, and heal.

And so tonight we come to the fulfillment of Solomon’s prayer.

Luke’s gospel is filled with people praying in the temple.

And we see tonight some good examples of what *our* prayer should look like!

Zechariah had been offering incense in the temple,  
while the whole multitude of the people were praying outside  
at the hour of incense.

People often assume that Zechariah had been praying for a child –  
after all, the angel says,

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard,  
and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,  
and you shall call his name John.” (1:13)

But there is nothing in the text that *says* that Zechariah had been praying for a child.  
After all, “they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren,  
and both were advanced in years.” (1:7)

If Zechariah is doing what Solomon had said to do –

if, for that matter, the whole multitude was doing what Solomon had said to do –  
then they were praying for God to hear, to forgive, and to heal their land.

And, what is more, *that* is what the angel says God will do!

*Your prayer has been heard.*

And the Lord will redeem his people.

The text does not say (or hint) that Zechariah has been praying for a child.

His prayers were not self-centered!

He has praying – as the whole multitude has been praying –  
that God’s kingdom would come!

Had they prayed for a child?

I’m sure they did.

Any barren couple would!

Solomon had spoken of the individual afflictions of God’s people –  
as well as their corporate afflictions.

I’m not saying that Zechariah never prayed for a child.

I *am* saying that if Zechariah was praying for a child that day,  
his prayer must be seen in his larger vision of longing for the kingdom of God to come!

And Gabriel declares that the child to be born  
will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb,  
and will "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,  
and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,  
to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (1:16-17)

We have people in our own congregation who long for a child.  
It is not a bad thing to long for a child!  
But make sure that your longing  
remains rooted in your longing for the coming of God's kingdom!  
How do you do that?  
Be a person like Zechariah and Elizabeth – "righteous before God,  
walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord" (1:6)

We see several examples of this in our text for tonight:

**1. The Redemption of the Firstborn (2:22-24)**

<sup>22</sup> *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*<sup>23</sup> *(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")*<sup>24</sup> *and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

According to the Law,  
when a baby boy was born,  
the mother was unclean for 40 days.

And 40 days after she gave birth to a son,  
the mother was required to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering  
in order to become clean.

When we think of the offerings and sacrifices in the temple,  
we usually think of sacrifices for sin.  
In the Old Testament,  
when you sinned, you needed to bring a sacrifice to atone for your sin.

But there was more to the OT sacrificial system than just the sin offerings.  
In our passage today we are interested in the cleansing of the mother (from Leviticus 12:21-27)  
and in the redemption of the firstborn (from Exodus 13:2, 12).

In Exodus 13, Israel was still in Egypt.  
God had just sent the angel of death to kill all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.  
God had told Pharaoh,

Israel is my firstborn son, let my son go, that he may worship me,  
or I will kill your firstborn!  
And in the battle of Yahweh vs. Pharaoh,  
Yahweh won—over the dead body of Pharaoh’s firstborn son.

(That’s a demonstration of the fact that if you fight against God, you are going to lose)

And so in Exodus 13:2 God says,  
“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.”

Exodus 13 comes in the context of the Passover feast,  
where God passed over the firstborn of Israel,  
and did not kill them, because of the blood of the lamb.

And in this context,

God commands Israel to “set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb” (13:12)  
Moses explains this in 13:13-15

*Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb,  
or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck.*

[again underscoring the principle, if you resist God, you lose!]

*Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.  
And when in time to come your son asks you, “What does this mean?”  
you shall say to him,  
“By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt,  
from the house of slavery.  
For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go,  
the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt,  
both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals.  
Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb,  
but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.*

We don’t always have such a clear explanation of biblical practices,  
but this one is quite clear!

The redemption of the firstborn is a sacrament.

It is a visible sign that represents God’s saving benefits to his people.

And so as a firstborn son in Israel,  
Jesus must be redeemed!

This is not saying that Jesus had sinned, or that he was tainted by original sin.  
Rather, it is saying that he was truly man.  
He became a full part of the human race—

and not just the human race,  
but Israel in particular.

There are three parts of this in Luke 2.

The circumcision of Jesus in 2:21,

where Jesus received the sacrament of covenant initiation.

In his circumcision, Jesus was marked as a Jew.

The redemption of Jesus in 2:22-23,

where his parents presented him to the Lord, redeeming him as the firstborn.

And the purification of Mary in 2:24,

where she offered the sacrifice required in the law,

two birds for a burnt offering and a sin offering,

in order to make atonement for her before the Lord (Lev 12:6).

The details of this sacrament are explained in Leviticus 12.

Mary had become unclean in childbirth.

And when someone became unclean,

the only way to be cleansed was to offer the sacrifices required in the law.

(Later, when Jesus heals lepers,

he will command them to offer the required sacrifices in the temple,

so there is nothing surprising about Joseph and Mary doing this after his birth)

But in the circumcision and redemption of Jesus,

and in the purification of Mary,

Jesus is revealed as an ordinary Israelite.

He will become more than an ordinary Israelite

(indeed, he was already more than an ordinary Israelite!)

but the only way for Jesus to redeem his people,

is if he himself fully identifies with his people.

In the Exodus God had revealed that his purposes revolved around his firstborn son.

And now the Virgin Mary has brought forth her firstborn son—

a firstborn son who will be called the Son of God.

He will become all that Israel has failed to be.

He will become all that David's sons failed to be.

For he will deliver his people from their sin.

I want you to think about this.

Luke goes to great lengths to *connect* Mary and Jesus not just to “ordinary” humanity,  
but to *Jewish* humanity.

The virgin birth signals the uniqueness of this child –

but the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day shows that he is a *Jew*;

the redemption of Jesus on the 40<sup>th</sup> day shows that he is a *firstborn Jew*;

and the purification of Mary on the 40<sup>th</sup> day shows that *she* is a Jewish mother,

needing purification from childbirth just like any other Jewish mother.

## 2. Simeon and the Consolation of Israel (2:25-35)

But when Jesus—this little baby—is brought to the temple,  
then all heaven breaks loose!

*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. (2:25)*

When we think of the Judaism of Jesus' day,  
we usually think of the Pharisees—  
and we think of Judaism as hypocritical—Pharisaical (which have become synonyms!)  
But we should not forget Simeon, Anna, Zechariah, and a host of unnamed people,  
who were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

“The consolation of Israel.”

That is an interesting phrase.

It is rooted in Isaiah 40—

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended.”

Simeon is waiting for that comfort.

He is longing to hear the message that God has triumphed—

over Israel's foes, yes,

but also over Israel!

And that day is today!

We are told that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon.

Prior to Pentecost,

the Holy Spirit was not “upon” every believer.

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon those who played a special role in redemptive history.

Prophets and kings were the ones who most commonly received the Holy Spirit,

but not every prophet and king received the Spirit.

*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.*

God had told him that he would see the Messiah before he died.

*And he came in the Spirit to the temple (in other words, the Spirit led him)*

*and 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 and said,*

*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,*

*according to your word;*

*for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all the peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel (2:26-32)*

Simeon's song—or blessing—is loaded with Isaiah.  
He was waiting for the comfort of Israel—from Isaiah 40—  
and he now saw the fulfillment of that from Isaiah 52:9-10

“Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.  
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.”

Simeon saw himself as the “waste places of Jerusalem”—  
a lonely remnant, awaiting that comfort.  
And now as Mary and Joseph come to redeem Jesus,  
Simeon sees the redemption of Jesus, the firstborn of Mary,  
as the firstfruits of the redemption of Jerusalem.  
Simeon sees in this little baby the “salvation that you have prepared  
in the presence of all the peoples.”  
By faith he beholds the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

What must it have been like,  
for this old man to walk up to these total strangers,  
see the baby in their arms,  
and take this six week old child,  
and say *this is the one!*  
For 500 years we have waited.  
And now this baby is the one who will bring comfort!

And then Simeon looks at Joseph and Mary—  
this young couple, just beginning life together—  
and they marvel at what he has just said.

And he looked at Mary, and with spiritual vision he saw what lay ahead of her,  
and he blessed them, and said to Mary:  
*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel,  
and for a sign that is opposed. (2:34)*  
This would not have surprised Mary.  
She had already been told by Gabriel that her son would sit on the throne of David!  
Naturally that would entail the fall and the rise of many—  
and of course, there would be opposition!  
But Simeon now reveals to her that  
*a sword will pierce through your own soul also (2:35)*

This is the first indication in Luke's gospel that the road ahead will be one of suffering.  
Sure, Mary and Joseph could have gotten a glimpse of that  
in the fact that Jesus was born in a stable!  
But all of the announcements had spoken of the glory of this child.

Simeon is the first to see that the road to glory will be paved with suffering.  
—including the suffering of Mary.

We are all called to share in the sufferings of Christ,  
so it should not surprise us that Mary was called to suffer with him as well.

Mary is one with us — in her sharing in the sufferings of Christ —  
and yet Mary is unique —  
for a mother's care for her child gives her a unique experience of sharing in Christ's suffering!

### **3. Anna and the Redemption of Jerusalem (2:36-38)**

*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,*

*and then as a widow until she was eighty-four*

(or possibly, "as a widow for eighty four years).

She was either 84, or possibly closing in on 110.

Either way, truly she is advanced in years!

*She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*

*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*

(2:37-38)

In Simeon's case, the Holy Spirit had directed him to Jesus.

For Anna, there is no mention of any immediate direction from the Holy Spirit.

In the providence of God, she happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Because she was always in the right place—

she was always in the temple.

(If you would be in the right place at the right time,

then do not depart from the temple,

but pray without ceasing!)

Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Anna was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Psalm 130 speaks of this.

"O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,

and with him is plentiful redemption.  
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities!”  
And this old woman, advanced in years,  
spent her days and nights fasting and praying in the temple.

We don't know of any promise that God made to her regarding what she would see.

In this way Anna is more like you and me.

We don't have special promises that God made to us individually about the future.  
She is simply heeding the call to be faithful.  
She devotes herself to the worship of God.

She fasts and prays.  
She eagerly waits upon the Lord,  
and the Lord heard her prayers and gave to her a great gift:

And on this particular day, she happened to see this little baby!

Perhaps she heard the words of Simeon.

Perhaps she knew what God had promised him.

(After all, if he was a faithful old man who lived in Jerusalem,  
he could not have helped but know this aged prophetess  
who had lived in the temple for all of these years!)

And she came up “at that very hour”--  
and in the days before clocks with minute hands that had the same meaning as  
“at that very minute!”

*And she began to give thanks to God  
and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. (2:38)*

It is true that only men were ordained leaders (whether OT priest or NT pastor and elder),  
but with that principle clearly in view,  
women could have a significant speaking role.  
Anna was a prophetess.

The prophet Joel says that in the last days, all of God's people will be prophets!

All of you—men and women—boys and girls—  
are prophets.

You have been called by God to speak of Christ.

You are called to be like Simeon—filled with the Holy Spirit  
and to be like Anna—speaking of Jesus to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When I look around this room,  
I see so much potential.

I see potential Simeon's and Anna's.

Simeon and Anna symbolize what our congregation needs:  
righteous and devout men and women  
who know the scriptures and are filled with the Holy Spirit,  
who give thanks to God and speak of him to others.

I'm not much for New Year's resolutions,  
but my goal for 2012 is to equip you and build you up,  
so that you might become more and more like Simeon and Anna.

And I would like to ask you to help me in this.  
In Ephesians 4, Paul says that when every part is working properly,  
then the body builds itself up and grows.  
I am not able to read minds.  
I need you to tell me when things aren't working properly.  
If there are places where you are out of joint,  
let's talk.

I want us to be able to look back at the year 2012 and say,  
that was the year that Michiana Covenant Presbyterian Church  
became more and more of a place where those who were out of joint found healing.

Because if the coming of a six-week old baby into the temple  
could cause such rejoicing,  
imagine what should happen when that baby grows up,  
and when he comes in glory to his people—as he has done this day—  
that he might fill us with his Spirit,  
and send us forth to speak his truth in love!