

Two Turtledoves

Luke 2:21-38

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
12/22/2013*

Two Turtledoves

Luke 2:21-38

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. ²² Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “*Every male who 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 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just 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 So he came by 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 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.” ³³ And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” ³⁶ Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings

and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-38).

Preface: Events Surrounding Christmas

There is very little recorded in the Bible about Jesus, the child. During Christmas we read of the events that surrounded His birth. The events that usually come to the forefront are the stories of:

- the Magi,
- the evils of Herod,
- the proclamation of the angels,
- Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist),
- The virgin birth, Joseph's response,
- the Song of Mary,
- the manger scene
- and the flight to Egypt.

This morning I would like to focus on an aspect of the story of the baby Jesus that you don't generally see displayed on Christmas scenes but is very large part of the Christmas story.

The Presentation of Jesus

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who 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” (Luke 2:22-24).

Two Turtledoves

Shortly after the manger scene we see Mary and Joseph (according to the Law) bringing the baby Jesus to the temple for to present Jesus to the Lord. According to Leviticus 12 the days of Mary’s purification would be forty days after the birth of the child. And according to Exodus 13 the first-born would be presented to the Lord with a sacrifice.¹

This sacrifice should be a lamb but if you couldn’t bring or afford a lamb it would be sufficient to bring two turtledoves (Leviticus 12:8)². A turtledove was a wild pigeon similar to the modern mourning dove. When we think of two turtledoves it seems that our minds naturally gravitate to the very popular Christmas carol known as the *Twelve Days of Christmas*.

The Twelve Days Of Christmas

Biblical Christianity is the only true and infallible Christianity. I emphasize this because I would like to take a moment and examine something that is external to the Bible yet is traditionally held to be part of historic Christianity.

In the church “Christmas” referred to a twelve day period that started with Christmas day. This is where *The Twelve Days of Christmas* comes from. The world celebrates Christmas for twelve hours but the church celebrated for twelve days because the gift of Christ is with us for twelve months of the year.

The song itself was designed for young people who did not have complete freedom to practice their faith. The song was an allegory. Within the stanzas were theological truths that could be more easily memorized and passed along to others.

¹ These sacrifices, similar to New Covenant sacraments, would be a perpetual sign of the need for deliverance and cleansing from sin. The first born, as the eventual head of the household, would utilize his position to the honor of God.

² Clearly indicating the poor condition of the family in which Jesus was born.

- The “two turtledoves”, of which we just read, represented the Old and New testaments.
- The “three French hens” were faith, hope and love - the three gifts of the Spirit that abide according to 1 Corinthians 13.
- The “four calling birds” were the four gospels which sing the song of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- The “five golden rings” were the first five books of the Bible also called the books of Moses or the Torah.
- The “six geese a-laying” were the six days of creation.
- The “seven swans a swimming” were seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- The “eight maids a milking” were the eight beatitudes.
- The “nine ladies dancing” were nine fruits of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5.
- The “ten lords a-leaping” were the Ten Commandments.
- The “eleven pipers piping” were the eleven faithful disciples.
- And the “twelve drummers drumming” were the twelve points of the Apostles Creed.

How accurate all of this is I do not know for sure. What I do know for sure is that Mary and Joseph presented two turtledoves at the temple when they presented Jesus to the Lord in accordance with the Law of God. I also know that when they arrived to do this they were greeted by two very notable people. One was a man who had some very significant things to say.

The Remnant

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just 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 (Luke 2:25-26).

The Profane Nation

As we read further in the gospels we recognize that virtually the entire nation of Israel had become profane. Yet, as Paul indicated in Romans 11, there would be a faithful remnant. This remnant included Simeon and Anna. These two, full of the Holy Spirit would recognize Jesus as the anointed one of God even from His birth.

The Consolation of Israel

Simeon was just and devout, waiting for the consolation *paraklesin* of Israel. So even though he was surrounded by faithlessness, he didn't allow the hypocrisy which surrounded him to keep him from the temple. He faithfully looked for Israel to be consoled by the redeeming work of Christ. Luke records that the Holy Spirit was upon him which is, of course, why he was full of faith.

He Wouldn't See Death

In a prophetic manner it was revealed to Simeon that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Truly, the promise of God would be fulfilled in this generation.

The Message of Simeon

So he came by 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 Which You have
prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² A
light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, And
the glory of Your people Israel ³³ And Joseph
and His mother marveled at those things
which were spoken of Him. (Luke 2:27-33).**

The Joy of Simeon/How Much More Ours

Simeon took Jesus in his arms and blessed God. God's promise to Simeon had been fulfilled, that he would see God's salvation. Simeon gloried in the face of Jesus, the child, even though he hadn't seen the actual works of Jesus. How much more should we glory having had the full expression of God's salvation. Simeon merely beheld the embryo. We have seen the work completed, death conquered and the light shining upon nation after nation.

The Proclamation of Simeon

Simeon went on with his message.

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵ "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:34,35).

The Preparation of Mary

Simeon is preparing Mary for the mission of her child. The good tidings of great things would be riddled with the hardness of human obstinacy. This perfect and glorious child whose entrance upon the earth was accompanied by

praises of the heavenly host would indeed bring great things.

But the great things He would pour upon the earth found as their vehicle the outrage of human contempt. The world, the church and the very priests of God would strike at the Sun of righteousness. The covenant nation of Israel whom God had protected would find Christ to be a stumbling stone and would conspire with Rome to destroy Him.

The Fall of Many

Simeon declared that Jesus was destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel. For many Jesus would be their fall, their undoing. His very truth would be an affront to their religion. He would come into His own and His own would receive Him not. Jesus is no friend of a Christ-less Christianity. He would become a stumbling stone.

A people devoid of Christ, no matter how religious and sanctimonious, are a people devoid of life. And the closer Christ comes to these people the more evident their fall becomes. It is as true today as it was then. As evidenced by our nation's present dilemmas, if Christ is not embraced there is no moral compass and certainly no salvation. The rejection of Christ sealed their fate and continues to seal the fate of those who rise up against the King of kings.

Jesus would be a sign that would be spoken against. In this Simeon is indicating that the fall of many through Christ would result by their own act of striking against Him. Those who reject the child would find themselves rejected. In the same way the temple was destroyed those who identified merely with the temple (which was the archetype symbol of religion) would fall as well. For the temple was only a sign.

The Rising of Many

But Jesus would also be for the rising of many. Those who had the vision to see the purpose of the temple being Christ would rise and would themselves become living stones being built into a holy temple. As grandiose and

marvelous as the buildings of the temple were, they would soon be trampled. Not one stone would be left upon another.

But upon the humble beginnings of the birth of a baby a greater temple would be built. Its cornerstone would be Christ, its foundation the apostle and the prophets and its mortar would be faith granted by the Holy Spirit. This is an everlasting temple that is being built to this very day and will continue into eternity.

The Preparation of Mary and Us

This entire course of events would pierce the soul of Mary. It would be no easy thing for her to observe. But the words of Simeon would prepare Mary for the means by which God would bless the world. You and I should take heed of these of these words of caution and encouragement as well.

Although it might pierce our souls to see the reaction of the world to the person and work of Jesus, we should not be surprised nor discouraged. We must not for one moment think that God's plan of salvation or that the good tidings of great things can in any way be impinged upon.

Revealing Hearts

It would be through this child that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. In the same way fire burns the rust while the gold remains; the way the winds blows the chaff but the wheat is preserved and how war and confrontations separate the cowards from the courageous; it is the person of Jesus Christ who is the watershed of humanity. It is man's confrontation with Jesus Christ that reveals the thoughts of our hearts. To reject Christ is to reject truth itself. To embrace Him is to embrace life everlasting.

A Partridge In A Pear Tree

And it would be on this day that Mary and Joseph brought two turtledoves for the sacrifice of presenting Jesus to the Lord that Simeon would remind them of the eventual method of Christ's earthly task. This would be the first stanza of the song. He would be "A partridge in a pear tree." This denoted Jesus dying on a tree as a gift from God and rising again to conquer death.

So it is the person and work of Jesus Christ that exposes us for what we are. Simeon and Anna, though a remnant, a tiny minority, were just and devout. They recognized Jesus for who he was and, as we saw with Anna, spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption. Redemption is found in Christ and in Christ alone. He is our redeemer. He is to be sought and trusted. For salvation is found in Him and in no one else.

Questions for Study

1. What are some of the events that surrounded the birth of Jesus? Why do you suppose they are mentioned in Scripture (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why would sacrifices attend the birth of the firstborn (pages 3, 4)?
3. Can you memorize the theological truths presented in *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (pages 4, 5)?
4. What is meant by a remnant (page 5)?
5. Define "the consolation of Israel" (page 5).

6. How was Simeon preparing Mary (page 7)?
7. Discuss how Jesus would affect the fall of many and the rise of many? How does this apply today (pages 8, 9)?
8. What is redemption and where is it found (page 9)?