

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Luke 2:22-35 “What Child Is This?” (The story of Simeon)

Intro. The events surrounding the birth of Jesus were both simple and sublime. The Gospel of Luke tells us about the angelic announcement to Mary that her child would be great, the Son of God and the promised Messianic King (1:32-33). Then, about 9 months later, while in Bethlehem to be registered for taxation, she gave birth to Jesus in a simple place where animals were kept, for there was no room in the inn. Then, another sublime event occurred. At that time Mary learned of the announcement that the angel had made to the shepherds about her special child. They confirmed to Mary that her child was the long-awaited Messiah. Surely, they also reported to her that an entire host of angels appeared to them, proclaiming the praises of the Lord.

Luke tells us that Mary “pondered all these things in her heart” (2:19). As Mary held the baby Jesus, she could have kept wondering, “What child is this?” She must have kept wondering what her child would grow up to be like. She knew that ultimately He would be a Savior and King. But she did not know much about what He would be like from His birth until He fulfilled His Messianic role. Would He be tall, dark and handsome? Would He become a great military leader like His ancestor King David? Would He become a great preacher and teacher? Would He be loved and accepted by all the people?

Well today we turn our attention to the time when Jesus was about 6 weeks old. I say that based on v.22 and because in Lev. 12:1-4 we read that the purification process for Mary took 40 days. Mary could go to the temple only after she was ceremonially clean. Then, she was ready to fulfill another requirement of the Law. As v.23 indicates, the first-born belonged to the Lord. This goes back to the plague that led to the death of the first-born in Egypt. All first-born children of Israel were saved by the sacrifice provided by the Lord. And since the Lord saved them, they belonged to the Lord (Ex. 3:2; 13:15). In recognition of that, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord, as One dedicated to His service.<sup>1</sup> Have *you* dedicated your children to the Lord?<sup>2</sup> They also came to offer sacrifices unto the Lord. The poverty of Mary and Joseph is seen in the offering that they presented for her purification. Normally she was to present a lamb and a turtledove. But Lev. 12:8 says, “If she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt-offering and the other for a sin-offering.”<sup>3</sup> Mary and Joseph were too poor to buy a lamb for the sacrifice. So if you’re struggling financially this Christmas, remember that Jesus took His place among the poor of Israel (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9).

Now picture the scene. Mary and Joseph came to the temple to dedicate their child to the Lord. And there at the temple Mary and Joseph were about to meet a man who would tell them new and amazing things about her child. In v.25 Luke calls upon us to “behold” Simeon, emphasizing His significance. Today, as we hear from him, we will learn more about the destiny of the baby

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<sup>1</sup> However, in place of giving up your first-born, parents could pay 5 shekels of silver instead (Num. 18:16).

<sup>2</sup> We can get a lesson from this: all children are to be regarded as a gift of the Lord and they belong to the Lord. It is the solemn duty and blessed privilege of parents to dedicate their children to the Lord (Lev.12:6-8).

<sup>3</sup> By the way, since she had to present a sin-offering, the Catholic teaching of the sinlessness of Mary is denied. Furthermore, the Magi must not have arrived yet, because once they gave those expensive gifts, they would not have been poor!

Jesus. According to v.33 these words would cause Joseph and Mary to marvel. We will see that the prophecy of Simeon came true in every detail, and may *we* today also marvel at his prophecy.

So what would become of this baby? Simeon tells us four things about the baby Jesus. First of all, He would be:

## I. THE ANOINTED ONE

The word “Messiah” or “Christ” means “the anointed one.” We are going to see that Simeon recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, who was anointed by the Holy Spirit to serve as Prophet, Priest, and King. So as a background to this, let’s consider together:

A. The Anticipation of the Messiah – Notice in v.25 that Simeon was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel...” “Waiting” carries the idea of waiting with expectancy and eager anticipation. Simeon was a part of the faithful Jewish remnant that eagerly looked for their Messiah (Mal. 3:16). He could have known that the time was drawing near based on the prophecy of Daniel 9:25.

We have some children here today who are waiting with eager anticipation for Christmas. Well, your wait is just about over! Well Simeon was longing for the arrival of the Messiah with eager anticipation.

Now we see here in this verse why many Jews were longing for the Messiah with hopeful expectancy. Again, v.25 says that Simeon was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel...” The word “Consolation” (*paraklesis*) here means “comfort” and clearly refers to a Messianic prophecy in Isa. 40, where it says that God promised to comfort His people Israel.<sup>4</sup> They had gone through so much suffering. And according to v.2 of that prophecy, this comfort would include the forgiveness of sin and the end of war. Simeon was looking for the fulfillment of that promise for Israel. To be sure, conditions were bad, very bad, in Israel at the time of Jesus’ birth. The nation had lost its political independence; they suffered under the cruelty of King Herod and the Caesars; their religion had become ritualized and external; many of their own leaders, such as the Sadducees, were very worldly minded; and no longer was there the voice of a prophet. They needed comfort. Were it not for the hope of the coming Messiah, they would have no hope for the future.

What are you waiting for with eager anticipation? Today, we are not hoping for the *first* coming of the Messiah, but the *Second* Coming of Christ! He said, “I will come again” (Jn. 14:3). This world needs a Savior. We face the constant threat of war and violence. This world needs the promised Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) who will end all war. There is so much corruption in the seats of government, but the righteous King is coming! Are you living in hopeful expectation of His return? If not, that may indicate that you are not a Christian.

Now, in this text of Scripture, we are given good news, for we not only read about the anticipation of the Messiah, but also:

B. The Advent [or Coming] of the Messiah - Notice in v.25 that “the Holy Spirit was upon him,” that is, Simeon. And then, as a prophet of God, we see in v.26 that he received wonderful news. There we read that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ [Messiah].” So he was given a promise that he would see the Messiah before he died! So on the very day that Jesus was brought to the temple, the Holy Spirit led Simeon to go to the temple also. Then, as Mary and Joseph came through the gates of the

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<sup>4</sup> The same Greek word in the verb form is used in the LXX, παρακαλεϊτε παρακαλεϊτε τον λαον μου λεγει ο θεος.

temple, the Holy Spirit spoke to Simeon, “There He is!” Simeon approached the couple, took Jesus into his arms and testified saying in v.30, “For my eyes have seen Your salvation” (cf. Isa 49:6). Simeon gave testimony that Jesus is the Messiah! So we have yet another confirmation that Jesus the Messiah has come, the Savior God had promised. After all, we have a prophecy that the Messiah would come during the lifetime of Simeon. Who else but Jesus could have fulfilled that prophecy!

Have you come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior that God promised long ago? As we continue with our message, we will see more reasons to believe in Jesus.

Simeon indicated that Jesus would not only be the Anointed One, but He would also be:

## II. THE REVEALING ONE

In v.32 Simeon says that Jesus would be “A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles....” He is probably referring to Isaiah’s prophecy in Isa. 42:6, where Isaiah said the Lord’s Servant would be given “As a light to the Gentiles.” Likewise, in v.9 of that prophecy, God says, “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” What is light symbolic of? It is symbolic of knowledge that would lead to salvation.<sup>5</sup> Simeon says that Jesus would reveal knowledge to those who had been living in darkness and ignorance of divine truth (1:79; Mt. 4:16). Indeed, Jesus said in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” What would He reveal? First:

A. He Would Reveal God to Us – The fact that this child would bring light to the Gentiles indicates that He would bring the knowledge of the one true God to other nations. He would show people what God is really like. In fact, Jn. 1:18 says that Christ came to reveal the unseen God to us. If Jesus had not come, we would not have known God like we know Him. If you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus. He said in John 14:9, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father....” In Jesus we see the love of God. In Jesus we see the mercy and grace of God. In Jesus we see the righteousness of God as He purged the temple. In Jesus we see the wisdom of God as He taught and answered difficult questions. In Jesus we see the omnipotent power of God as He did amazing miracles.<sup>6</sup>

This prophecy has come true. Since the coming of Jesus, many among the nations no longer believe in the pagan gods of their ancestors, but they believe in the One true God who can meet all the needs of your life. The Almighty God can give you strength. The merciful God can forgive your sin. The all-wise God can solve the dilemmas of life.

There is another kind of knowledge that Jesus would reveal:

B. He Would Expose Sin – In the last of v.35 says that Christ was given “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Christ’s words and ministry indeed revealed the deepest reasoning<sup>7</sup> of the hearts of many. There were even times when the gospels state that Jesus knew people’s thoughts (Mt. 12:25; Luke 6:8; Jn. 2:25) and exposed what people were thinking. And how a person responds to Christ’s words reveals their true nature. If you have a sinful heart, you

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<sup>5</sup> Note the Hebrew poetic parallelism of that prophecy.

<sup>6</sup> In the prophecy of Isa. 9:6 it is stated that the Messiah would “be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God....”

<sup>7</sup> The word translated “thoughts” (*dialogismos*) is always used in a negative way in Scripture, so these are thoughts of sin and unbelief.

will not want to hear about Jesus (Jn. 3:19-20). Thus, your sinful heart is exposed and condemned. But God's people love to hear His Word. The problem is not with Jesus, but with the heart of man.<sup>8</sup>

You see, the same light of the Son either melts ice, or hardens clay. How you respond to Jesus says a whole lot about the condition of *your* heart.<sup>9</sup>

This work of Christ was important. You see, before you can be saved, you must first understand that you are a sinner. Only then will you understand your need for a Savior. Do you accept the fact that you have sinned against a holy and righteous God? If you have any doubts about how far you fall short of God's standard of righteousness, just compare yourself with Jesus.

Furthermore, Simeon predicted that the baby Jesus was be:

### III. THE SUFFERING ONE

Simeon had spoken some wonderful words about Jesus. But people were bound to react negatively to Jesus exposing their sin, including hypocrisy (Mt. 23). So for the first time a note of sorrow is added to the ministry of the Savior. Simeon warned Mary that her child would suffer. She had such high hopes for her child, and now she is struck with concern for her child.

There are two indications that Jesus would grow up to suffer. First, Simeon says:

A. He Would Be Spoken Against – Again, in the last of v.34 Simeon says that this child will be “for a sign which will be spoken against.” Simeon is saying, “You have heard that this baby will be a Savior and King. But not everyone will love Him. In fact, He will be spoken against,” and indeed He was! He was slandered many times. For example, He was accused of having a demon (John 7:20; 8:48, 52). He was accused of blasphemy (Mt. 26:65; John 10:33). He was murmured against (John 6:41<sup>10</sup>-43; 7:32). His teachings were denied and rejected.<sup>11</sup> They even reviled Him when He was suffering on the cross! (Mark 15:29-32; 1 Pet. 2:23). Oh yes, no one denies that Jesus was spoken against, just as Simeon had predicted. And not only Simeon predicted this, but the prophets did as well. Isa. 53:3 says of Lord's Servant, “He is despised and rejected by men.” Ps. 118:22 says that the Messiah would be “the stone which the builders rejected...” Christ was spoken against because He exposed their sin which they tried to hide by the veil of outward religion. They also spoke against Him because of jealousy.

Jesus is still being “spoken against” (the verb is actually a present participle). His claims are denied. His name is taken in vain. His manger scene is being removed from the public square in countless communities. So dear Christian, don't become discouraged when your Savior is spoken against. God predicted through His prophets long ago that this would happen.

Another prophecy of the suffering of Jesus is that fact that Simeon said:

B. A “Sword” Would Pierce Mary's Heart – In v.35 Simeon interjects into his prophecy a word for Mary, “yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also.” “Sword” (*rhomphaia*) refers to a large battle sword.<sup>12</sup> But a different type of sword would pierce Mary's heart. The heart of a

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Luke 12:51-52, “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.”

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Parable of the Sower. The same seed (God's Word) is sown, but the response depends on the kind of soil.

<sup>10</sup> “The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’”

<sup>11</sup> John 6:52 says, “The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us His flesh to eat?’” John 8:13 says, “The Pharisees therefore said unto Him, ‘You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.’” See also 8:31-59.

<sup>12</sup> It occurs in the Septuagint of Goliath's sword. This is in contrast to the smaller dagger-like sword.

parent, especially a mother, is deeply touched by the suffering of their own children. Because Jesus would suffer, Mary would suffer.<sup>13</sup> The sorrow of Mary was brought to a head when she saw her son on the cross (John 19:25-27). She was unable to help her son in His dying hour. Imagine how she must have felt! Some here today have lost a child in death. You know how terrible that is. Can you imagine what it was like to see a mob take your son and crucify Him right before your eyes? Think of her sorrow as she saw or at least heard them drive the spikes in his hands and feet. But is it not possible that the very memory of Simeon's prophecy strengthened Mary in the moments of her deepest agony?

So Simeon said that Jesus would be the Anointed One, the Revealing One, and the Suffering One. Yes, Jesus Christ was willing to suffer for you! And so because Jesus was to be the suffering One, Simeon reveals that He would be:

#### IV. THE SAVING ONE

The angels had already said (2:11) that Jesus would be a Savior. After all, that's what the name "Jesus" means, "Jehovah saves." Now Simeon also confirms that Jesus would be a Savior, for he said in v.30, "my eyes have seen Your salvation." So let us consider first of all:

A. The Provision of Salvation - As Simeon looked into the face of the baby Jesus, he said in v.30, "For my eyes have seen Your salvation." He understood that salvation would come through Jesus. God's salvation is in a Person. We also see here that salvation is the work and provision of God, for he says, "Your salvation." Furthermore, he goes on to say in v.31 that this salvation is something the Lord "prepared" (*hetoimazo*). It is not a work of man; it would be accomplished by God through His Son Jesus.

What would Jesus do to save us? This text implies that He would save us through His sacrifice. The law of Old Testament sacrifices pointed to this. Right here in the context, we see in v.24 that Mary was to "offer a sacrifice" for her purification. An innocent pair of birds died for her cleansing. Even so, we are cleansed from our sin only through the suffering and death of a sinless substitute. Who is that sinless substitute? It is Jesus! When He grew up, He died for our sins on a cross. That's how He brought salvation to us.

At the close of a religious service, a gentleman approached Dr. D. M. Stearns with a criticism. "I don't like your way of preaching," he said. "I do not care for all this talk about Christ dying for the lost. Instead of preaching the death of Christ on the cross, it's better to be up-to-date. Preach Jesus, the teacher and example." Then Dr. Stearns asked, "Would you then be willing to follow Him if I preach Christ as the great example?" "I would," said the gentleman. "I will follow in His steps." "Then," said Dr. Stearns, "let us take the first step. Peter said of Christ, "Who did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). Can you take *this* step?" The critic seemed confused. "No," he said, "I do sin. I must admit." "Well, then," said Dr. Stearns, "your first need of Christ is not as an example but as a Savior."<sup>14</sup>

So we see that God provided salvation from sin through the sacrifice of His Son, the Messiah. But did God provide salvation for all, or just for the Jews? Did He provide salvation for you? Well, I have good news. We not only see the provision of salvation but we also see in our text:

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<sup>13</sup> This explains the relationship of the interjection of "And a sword ...also."

<sup>14</sup> Clarence Jones in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #5404* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

B. The Extent of Salvation – Simeon loudly proclaims the significance of Jesus not only for Israel but also for the Gentiles. He said in v.31 that God’s salvation through Jesus had been “prepared before the face of all peoples.” The plural in v.31 includes other peoples and nations as well.<sup>15</sup> And then in v.32 he specifically mentions the Gentiles. Christ would be “a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...” in accordance with the Messianic prophecy of Isa. 49:6.<sup>16</sup> This is the clearest indication so far of the universal dimension of Jesus’ redemptive work. This ought to make us Gentiles rejoice this Christmas season. Jesus did not come just to be the Savior of the Jews, but also as Savior for the nations.<sup>17</sup> John 3:16 certainly indicates that salvation is for all people. That beloved verse says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Are you glad that God sent a Savior for all people? Indeed, none are excluded.<sup>18</sup>

This is why we should give to the Lottie Moon Mission Offering. Christ came to save souls from *every* nation. They need to hear about our Savior. Let us give that they may know!

Now, what must we do to receive this salvation? Well, the answer is implied in our text. So let see next of all:

### C. The Requirements of Salvation

1. Repent of Your Sin – The last of v.34 *may* refer to the fall and rise of the same people.<sup>19</sup> You see, when Christ convicts us of sin, He causes men to fall first, and then if we respond with repentance, He forgives and raises us up. We must die to sin and self, and then He gives us new life.<sup>20</sup> Whether that meaning is intended here, it is certainly true from other Scriptures that you must first be convicted of your sin, and then repent of your sin. There must come a time in your life that you confess that you fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 6:23), confess that you have sinned, and turn from your sin. Then, you are ready to take the next step of salvation:

2. Trust in Christ as Savior – I believe Simeon experienced eternal life when he died. That’s because when he saw Jesus, he saw in Him the salvation God promised to provide. Then he prayed in v.29, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart [*apoluo*] in peace...” Simeon was ready to die, for his eyes had seen God’s salvation. Simeon also had faith in God’s Word. Note in v.29 the words, “according to Your Word.” The assurance of salvation comes by faith in the promise of God. He promises that if you repent of your sins and believe in His Son Jesus, you can have eternal life.

So like Simeon, we should place our faith in Jesus to be forgiven of sin, and have eternal life. We should not trust in our own goodness, or in the rituals of the church. We are to place our

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<sup>15</sup> The plural “all peoples” should be contrasted with the singular in 2:10, “to all the people” (the Gk. has the definite article), referring to the Jewish people.

<sup>16</sup> Isa 49:6, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>17</sup> Isa. 52:9-10 says, “... For the LORD has comforted His people, ... And all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

<sup>18</sup> This Gentile salvation was of special interest to Luke, who was probably a Gentile. But Christ would also be the glory of Israel (v.32b). To have the salvation of the world coming from Israel was indeed an honor and glory for Israel.

<sup>19</sup> That combination of the words “fall” and “rising again” is only found here in the New Testament.

<sup>20</sup> The word “fall” (*ptosis*) in v.34 is related to *ptoma*, which metaphorically refers to a failure, defeat, calamity, but in Scripture always refers to a person or animal who has fallen in death. So Simeon could be referring to the ultimate fall, which is death, especially since it is followed by the word “rise” (*anastasis*), a word that is primarily used of the resurrection.

faith in Jesus, who is the only Savior God has provided. Furthermore, like Simeon, the believer can rest in the promises of eternal life. Notice how easy it is for a believer to face death. You are ready to “see” death only after you have “seen” Christ by faith.

Conclusion: Suppose on your way home today you have a terrible accident or a heart attack and you die suddenly. Are you ready to face death? Are you ready to depart this world in peace, knowing that you have eternal life. If not, I call upon you to believe in Jesus. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah that God promised. He has revealed God to us. He reveals that we are sinners in need of a Savior. He suffered and died for you. He will save you if you repent of your sin and place your faith in Him. Don’t reject Jesus as so many others have done. My friend, there is only One Savior that God has provided. His name is Jesus. Trust in Him today!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); Stephen Felker, *Devotional and Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgths, VA: Published by Author), 2023; Virtus E. Gideon, *Luke: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures, Vol. 14* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary: Luke* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992); Warren W. Wiersbe, *“Be” Series: New Testament Volumes 1 and 2, Luke* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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