

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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 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. 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. And he came in 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, 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 peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” 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. 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. And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-40

Well, the Christmas Season is closing in on us as we are just five days away from the day when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This time of year tends to be busy for all of us, with schedules filled with to do lists, shopping lists, invitations to parties and gatherings, as well as church and school Christmas presentations. The church calendar entering into and also going through this season was especially busy in that we had a number of new events added to our schedule like Arrowsmith’s 50th anniversary, World Vision’s Couple’s Night Out, Gehardt’s Du Toit’s Prayer Summit and Tim Neufeld and the Glory’s Boys Joy Ride concert. A number of us in the church were involved in all of these events, as well as our regularly scheduled ones - and it did feel good to have a quieter week this past week, which for some of us ultimately ended up being busy trying to get caught up so we could put together the Christmas Eve service for this coming week.

What is ironic about all of this is that the season we celebrate – the season of the birth of Christ – was not a busy season at all when it happened. Instead it was more of a season of *waiting* – a *waiting* on God who had in a multitude of centuries before promised to send a Savior in the world to defeat death and forgive sin and redeem souls and restore a selfish, prideful, rebellious fallen people back into the relationship our most holy and glorious God created us for. Now since we know that God had made that promise immediately after Adam and Eve sinfully rebelled against God – that would then mean fallen humanity had been waiting for God, according to many biblical scholars, for about 4000 years (time between the fall and Jesus’ birth). For those of us, which is all of us, who have been acculturated with a self-driven, impatient, microwave sense of time; we most likely wouldn’t wait even 10 minutes for something or anything that we believe we desperately need. Or if we did have to wait, we would surely chew of a piece of the one we feel is responsible for making us wait. *Wait* for 4,000 years? No way! Well, as we squint through the shadows that sin has cast across the history of fallen humanity, we see that that was their reaction. Not only did we feel entitled to take the fruit forbidden by God in the Garden of Eden, we also feel entitled to a quick resolution to our sin problem. And if God seems to procrastinate in doing so we will take matters into our own hands.

Years ago in Scotland, the Clark family had a dream. Father Clark and his wife worked and saved, making plans for their nine children and themselves to travel to America. It had taken years, but they finally saved enough money and obtained passports and reservations for the entire family on a new ocean liner to the United States. The entire family was filled with anticipation and excitement about their new life. However, seven days before their scheduled departure the youngest son was bitten by a dog. The doctor sewed up the boy and then hung a yellow sheet on the Clark's front door. Because of the possibility of rabies, they were being quarantined for 14 days. The family's dreams were dashed. They would not be able to make the trip to America as they had planned. The father, filled with disappointment and anger, stomped to the dock to watch the ship leave - without the Clark family. Shedding tears of disappointment and the father cursed his son and God for their misfortune. Five days later, the tragic news spread throughout Scotland that the mighty Titanic had sunk. The unsinkable ship had sunk, taking hundreds of lives with it. The Clark family was to have been on that ship - but because a dog had bitten their son, they were left behind in Scotland.

Waiting can oftentimes turn out to be a blessing; in God's economy of blessing *oftentimes* is almost *all of the time*. In the waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior into the world - 4000 years was the perfect time, the "*fullness of time*" - when God's purpose and God's plan intersected over 2000 years ago, in the lives of two people who lived in a small backwaters village called Nazareth. In Galatians 4:4-7 we read that, "*when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*"

We enter our text this morning in the context that God has fulfilled His promise to send a Savior. In the first chapter of Luke the gospel writer tells us the angel Gabriel came to a young woman named Mary and declared to her that she was chosen by God to bear a child that would become the Savior of the world - and that this would come to pass by the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of you who know this story also know that Matthew tells us in his gospel the Mary's fiancée Joseph was not too happy about marrying a woman who was carrying someone else's child - but Joseph was persuaded to still do so when an angel came to him and told him the child would be God's child. The second chapter of Luke opens with Jesus' birth, where we read that a host of angels appear to some shepherds in field announcing the fulfillment of God's promise and then proclaiming: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14). The shepherds are so affected by this that they go to Bethlehem to see the baby born to be Savior and in the second chapter of Matthew we read that wise men from the east did the same. The immediate context of today's text (vs. 21) tells us, "*at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*" After God's promise, right after fallen humanity began to sin, the 4000 long year wait had finally ended. The Messiah had finally come.

In our text for today we read that, "*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.*" These are actually two separate ceremonies: 1) the "*purification*" of Mary, and 2) Jesus being dedicated or "*presented to the Lord.*" The "*purification*" of women by "*the Law of Moses*" was to occur after the birth of a child - as the Old Testament Law stated that a woman was ceremonially unclean after the birth of her baby. For a boy child the woman is unclean for seven days and unable to enter the temple for 33 days; for a girl child the time doubled. This means that Jesus would have been about six weeks old at the time of his "*presentation*" (dedication). The sacrifice of the two turtledoves indicates that Mary and Joseph were poor people, as this was a provision for the poor. And it's at this point that Luke begins to introduce us to two people: Simeon and Anna. And it's in Simeon and Anna that we will see the blessing of what it means to "*wait*" for God to fulfill His promises. For just as we saw in Nehemiah in the message we heard two weeks ago, Simeon and Anna were blessed as they "*waited*" in prayer.

As Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple to “*present*” him “*to the Lord*” (dedicate) they encounter a man whose name is Simeon - whose name means "one who hears and obeys." That would be fitting of his character, as Simeon is described as a “*righteous and devout*” man. In our vernacular Simeon would have been someone who was faithfully obedient in his relationship with God - and not because he had to but because he deeply loved God. Clearly Simeon was a man whose life literally reflected the presence of God; our text even says that the “*Holy Spirit was upon him . . . and he came in the Spirit into the temple.*” This was a man who without a doubt fully believed God’s promises and readily obeyed God’s commands because of his deep, intimate relationship with God.

Implied but not stated here is that Simeon, in being described as a man who was “*righteous and devout*”, would have been a man who passionately prayed to God - *because* prayer is not so much about communicating with God as it is about developing a deep, intimate relationship with God. What is important to note here is that the only things we are told about Simeon are the things that matter most to God—his deep, intimate relationship with God, his faith in God, and his devotion to God. We read that Simeon was man of faith in that he was “*waiting for the consolation of Israel*” – which is the ancient expression which summarizes the faith of those in the Old Testament who put their faith in God’s promise to send the Messiah, the Son of God, Immanuel, the Savior of God’s people - who would come to redeem God’s people from their sins and restore the nation of Israel to its proper place as God’s chosen people who would retake possession of the promised land.

Luke tells us in verse 26 that the Holy Spirit “*revealed*” to Simeon that before he died he would see the Messiah. But I suspect that Simeon wasn’t some old guy wandering around the temple hoping to bump into the Savior just because he had heard the Holy Spirit speak to him. Now exactly how Simeon recognized this little baby named Jesus was the Messiah, we are not told. But what we are told here is highly significant: Simeon recognized that this baby was the Messiah sent by because he was “*righteous and devout*” - led by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. After a lifetime of waiting for the Messiah, Simeon joyfully took Jesus in his arms and blessed God.

“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 peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

This is a prayer of praise for salvation – the fulfillment of God’s promises to send a redeemer to rescue His people from their sins and restore them back into the relationship with God they were created for. Simeon’s life purpose was to see the promised Messiah. For years he had walked with God and served God wholeheartedly and obediently. God had told him that that he would not die before seeing the promised Savior of God’s people. Led by the Spirit of God through the Word of God he went with an expectant heart to see the promise of God – then he saw Jesus! “*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word!*” What Simeon is saying here is: “Now my life is complete and fulfilled; now I am ready to die.” Simeon’s heart and life were finally at peace because he had finally seen the salvation of the Lord, a salvation was not just something Jesus would do – *it was also who Jesus was.* “Jesus” (Yeshua) literally means, “Jehovah (God) is Salvation.” Simeon’s life purpose was fulfilled; he had seen the Messiah – he praised God in prayer.

Simeon’s prayer of praise for salvation through Jesus Christ is strangely rare among most within the community of faith because we have so many other things in our lives that we value more than Jesus. Jesus spoke of this in what is now known as The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value in Matthew 13:45-46: “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*” This “*merchant*” finds a pearl which is so stunning, so amazing, so incredible, so utterly magnificent that he realizes nothing else really matters as long as he has the pearl and so he sells absolutely *everything* he has to obtain it.

What is hard for us to understand is that in selling everything, he got a real bargain. He may have paid a million dollars for it, but even at that it was greatly undervalued because the pearl was literally priceless. And now that the merchant has it, he has no desire for *anything* else. When Simeon saw Jesus – he knew he had seen a pearl that had a value that was priceless. Nothing else really matters when you know Jesus as Lord and Savior. There used to be a beer commercial, which said, "When you've said Budweiser, you've said it all." Apparently there are many in this world we live in who believe that drinking beer is the ultimate experience in life. For the rest of us, it may not be beer – but we all have our own beer-like ideas about the ultimate experience in life. But, Simeon would say: "When you've said Jesus, you've said it all." Knowing Jesus as your Lord and Savior is the ultimate experience in all of this life and of the life to come.

What do you want to see before you die? Simeon would say: "I just want to see Jesus before I die." Would you agree with him? Some might say: "Simeon's situation was different; this is about the birth of Jesus. Jesus came and died and rose from the dead. We don't need to see him now; he lives within us." And I would say: "I still want to see Jesus before I die; I don't want to wait." I can say that, and you can say that, and we can say that - because while Simeon was a devout Jew, he did not view the Messiah's coming as only for the benefit of the chosen people of Israel - but he also knew Jesus would also come as Savior to be a "*light of revelation to the Gentiles.*" We can say Jesus is our greatest treasure, just as Simeon could say Jesus was his greatest treasure because the Messiah, the Savior would come to bring the salvation of rescue and redemption and restoration to all of mankind. This is a truth that was taught in the Old Testament, and Simeon's words here reveal his knowledge of the Old Testament promise of a salvation for Gentiles as well as for Israel. *This is again a prayer of praise for salvation* – the fulfillment of God's promise to send a redeemer to rescue His people of the nation of Israel, and His people from all nations of the world from their sins and restore them back into the relationship with God they were created for through Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 42:6-8: "*I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*" Isaiah 60:1-3: "*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*"

Luke tells us that Jesus' "*father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.*" Here we read of the impact Simeon's prayer of praise had on them. The original Greek word "*marvel*" is also translated "amaze and wonder." Jesus always causes amazement and wonder in people's hearts. But that would change for Mary after Simeon "*blessed them*" and then said to her: "*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.*" Up to this point everything Simeon had proclaimed to them about Jesus had been overwhelmingly positive - divinely so, in bringing peace and salvation to fallen humanity. But now Simeon speaks of the other side of the story, which is also of the Old Testament promises of God – the rejection, the suffering, the crucifixion, and the death of the promised Messiah who would come to give his life for many.

In predicting that Jesus would be a controversial, divisive figure Simeon revealed that Jesus would have a probing, exposing effect on those encounter him. People will have to make a decision about Jesus, and as they do so they will reveal their hearts. Some will oppose Jesus. Some will vehemently oppose him because Jesus will always challenge attitudes that value power and privilege. Many will not want a Messiah like Jesus, because it will cost them to follow him, which will reveal that their hearts are not really devoted to God and to His causes, but rather to themselves and their agenda.

But Jesus' probing, exposing effect on others, people like Mary and Joseph and Anna and Simeon, and on people like us, will come with open hearts to who God is and what God is doing, and their hearts and lives will sing out with prayers of praise for him. Simeon is saying that Jesus will not be someone people can remain neutral about. Jesus will always force us to make a decision.

Simeon also has a personal word for Mary: *"A sword will pierce through your own soul also."* There are different Greek words for sword, and the one used here is the word for the larger, wider, two-edged sword, the most deadly of swords. Simeon is saying, "This Son of yours will pierce that sword right through your heart." The life that Jesus would live, the choices that he would make, the mission he would obediently fulfill for His Father, would bring incredible heartache to his mother. Obviously this foreshadows when she would watch him die on a cross for the forgiveness of sin.

This is also a prayer of praise for salvation – for what is known as the substitutionary atonement of Christ; Jesus, the Lamb of God, who sacrificed his life on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins; who was beaten and crucified and died and buried; and who then rose from the dead proclaiming victory over sin, evil and death - appearing multiple times before many people, and at least one time before a crowd of more than 500; who then ascended into heaven and who now sits on the right hand of God, ready to return at the appointed time to restore back to God those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by repenting of their sins and surrendering their hearts and lives to him.

As Mary is pondering the "sword" that will "pierce" her "soul" for the cause of the fulfilled promise of God - Luke introduces a second person into our text for today; her name is "Anna." Anna was a woman of at least 84 years of age; she was married for seven years before her husband died, and lived the rest of her life in the temple as a widow: *'She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.'* Now Anna was in the temple for the same reason Simeon was. She was *"worshiping with fasting and in prayer"* while waiting for the Messiah, the Savior to come. And we read that *"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."* Now looking at the meaning of Anna's name reveals the deeper reason of why Anna is in this story at this point. "Anna" means "grace." Just after Simeon told Mary a "sword" will "pierce" her "soul" for the purpose of fulfilling God's promise - God sends Anna ("grace") into Mary's life to thank God for the fulfillment of His promise. Anna ("grace") could do so because Anna had endured the heart-piercing experience of the loss of her own husband by running to God and clinging to Him with a life of devotion, prayer and service. Mary would need the full extent of God's grace in the days, months and years ahead; God's grace would be with her, just as Anna ("grace") had always been in the temple. As with Anna, God's grace is always with us when we fully devote our lives to Him: *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16).

We then read that after Mary and Joseph *"had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom."* Jesus, the Word, the Word of God, the Son of God, the Word who become flesh, the fulfilled promise of God, grew into manhood - *"and the favor of God was upon him."* Two thousand years have passed since Simeon and Anna saw Jesus in the temple on that day. We ultimately know what did happen to Jesus - and also we know what ultimately will happen when he returns. In the meantime we are alive and we are here and these words have deep meaning for all of us today.

Every one of us in this room needs a Savior. Jesus means "God is Savior" because every one who has lived, is living and will live on earth needs a Savior. We may not like to hear that - but the truth is you and I and everyone else were all born in spiritual darkness; we are natural born sinners, condemned to die. The Bible tells us that we were born into *"iniquity"* (Psalm 51:5) and we *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 2:23) and that *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23).

Now while we might not like hearing that, we all know that by looking at the world around us - and if we were to be truly humble and brutally honest with ourselves, we would acknowledge that we do see and feel and know that remaining sin is still alive and well and at work in our lives. Without God's divine intervention to save us from our sins and rescue us from ourselves, we are in bondage to our sin and condemned to die and spend an eternity in the unimaginable pain of darkness. Yet while God's Word does tell us in Romans 6:23 that "*the wages of sin is death*" - the rest of the verse then says "*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Jesus is Savior! And Jesus is the only who can grant us salvation. Acts 4:12 tells us: "*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" Jesus said: "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26). My friends, do you believe that? Just like Simeon, may we yearn to see the Savior today; and just like Simeon may we devote our hearts and our lives to seeing Jesus and knowing Jesus beyond just being saved by Jesus.

Knowing Jesus as your Lord and Savior is more important than anything else in all of life. Those of who claim Christ should cry out "Amen!" to that - because it is both hypocritical and an affront to God to call yourself a Christian, but find true fulfillment and joy in someone or something else. Brothers and sisters, there are just way too many of us who claim Jesus as our greatest treasure but who are instead finding a greater treasures in money, possessions, power, positions, security, sex, recreation, family, retirement, sports, - whatever, you name it. But that can't be true for a born-again follower of Jesus Christ. We need to realize and acknowledge and embrace the reality that nothing in life is more important or more fulfilling or can bring us greater joy *than a deep, intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ.* Now, that doesn't mean other things in life don't matter. God has given us responsibilities at home, work, and school, and He wants us to take care of those things. God wants us to be involved in the lives of our family and our church and our community. Yet, we need to realize that if all we had was Jesus - that would be more than enough.

The truth is God never intended that Jesus would be a comfortable, easy choice. Simeon spoke of the fall and rising again of many, and that there would opposition, and "*that thoughts from many hearts*" would be "*revealed.*" Jesus himself said: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*" (Luke 9:23). Following Jesus means sacrificing the lesser treasures and contentedness of this world for the greatest treasures and contentedness of knowing Jesus and living our lives for Jesus. Jesus brings the sword; he is the great divider of hearts and attitudes. In Matthew 10:34 he said: "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" Jesus brings a sword to cut away those things that keep us from him. Jesus divides nations, he divides communities, he divides churches, he divides families, he divides relationships, and he divides hearts - he divides good from evil, heaven from hell, and life from death. Jesus divides that which doesn't matter to God from that which does matter to God.

With Jesus, our lives are complete. Without Jesus, our lives are nothing more than never-ending, empty activity. Eugene Peterson once said: "Busyness is an illness of spirit." While that might not sit well with some of us, know that Eugene Peterson also told us how to cure the spiritual illness of busyness when he said: "Prayer gets us in on what God is doing." Two weeks ago we saw that as Nehemiah waited in prayer for God to fulfill His promise for *restoration*, and after Nehemiah put himself under the burden that God had for those he was praying for, God answered his prayer by sending Nehemiah himself to help restore God's people. Today we see that as Simeon and Anna waited in prayer for God to fulfill His promise for *salvation*, that they put themselves under the burden that God had for those who they were praying, and God answered their prayers by sending His only begotten Son Jesus (whose name means "God is salvation") to die on a cross to defeat death and forgive sin and redeem souls and restore a selfish, prideful, rebellious fallen people back to the relationship with the most holy and glorious God who had created them.

This is what happens when we pray out of a deep intimate relationship with God. Simeon and Anna were fully devoted to God and they passionately prayed for salvation and they lived out their lives with expectancy in an age when few others truly believed a Savior would ever come after 4000 years. But a little over 2000 years ago God fulfilled His promise when Jesus was born into the season that we are celebrating in these days. We are to be a people who are devoted to God; God's Word calls us to passionately pray for the salvation of those we share the gospel with; and we are to live out our lives with expectancy in an age when we believe Jesus will return to take us home to God. This is the call we read of in Titus 2:11-14: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, WAITING for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."*

The only thing that really matters in life - is Jesus. He is answer and the response to the prayer of praise for salvation, the fulfillment of God's promises to send a redeemer to rescue His people of the nation of Israel - and His people from all nations of the world - from their sins and restore them back into the relationship with God they were created for through Jesus Christ. One day, like Simeon, we too will stand and behold Jesus as the Son of God, but it will not be in the old temple in Jerusalem, and he will not be a little baby held in his mother's arms. When you and I stand and behold Jesus we will behold Him in all His glory as Savior and Redeemer and the King of kings and Lord of lords. We will stand before him and see him as the Righteous One who purchased our salvation. Until that time may we commit your hearts and lives to seeing Jesus and to treasuring Jesus – knowing that God's grace will be with us, until the day we fully see him in all his glory!

O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!

2015-12-20

Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church