

Luke 2:21-38 – "Anticipation Fulfilled"

Text: Luke 2:21-38 (CSB)

21 When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. **22** And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord) **24** and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons).

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. **27** Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, **28** Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said,

29 Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation. **31** You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples— **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.

33 His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed— **35** and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. **38** At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Key Background:

- **Context of the Passage:** This scene occurs approximately 40 days after Jesus's birth in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph have brought the infant Jesus to the Jerusalem temple to fulfill three Jewish ceremonial requirements: circumcision

(8 days after birth), purification of Mary after childbirth (40 days for a male child), and presentation/dedication of the firstborn son to the Lord. This encounter with Simeon and Anna represents God's confirmation through the most faithful remnant of Israel that this child is indeed the long-awaited Messiah.

- The Three Ceremonies Combined: Luke conflates three Old Testament requirements into this single temple visit: (1) Circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3), when Jesus received His name as commanded by the angel; (2) Purification of Mary after 40 days (Leviticus 12:2-4), requiring a sacrifice; (3) Consecration of the firstborn son to the Lord (Exodus 13:2, 12-15), acknowledging that every firstborn male belongs to God.**
- The Sacrifice of the Poor: Mary and Joseph's offering of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" instead of a lamb reveals their poverty. Leviticus 12:6-8 specified that wealthy families should offer a lamb, but the poor could substitute two birds. The King of Kings was born into humble circumstances, showing God's identification with the lowly and marginalized.**
- Simeon's Name and Character: The name Simeon means "God has heard." He is described as "righteous and devout," terms that indicate faithful obedience to Torah and vibrant expectancy of God's coming kingdom. His righteousness placed him in the same spiritual company as Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Joseph of Arimathea—faithful remnant waiting for God's promises.**
- "The Consolation of Israel": Simeon was "looking forward to the consolation of Israel", a phrase referring to the Messianic hope of comfort and deliverance promised by the prophets (Isaiah 40:1-2, 49:13, 51:3). After centuries of exile, oppression, and prophetic silence, faithful Jews like Simeon longed for God to fulfill His covenant promises and restore His people.**
- The Holy Spirit's Unusual Activity: The Holy Spirit's work in Simeon's life was remarkable. The Spirit (1) rested upon him continuously, (2) revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before death, and (3) guided him to the temple at the exact moment Jesus arrived. This level of Spirit activity was rare during the intertestamental period and signals that God's prophetic voice has returned.**
- The Divine Promise to Simeon: God had specifically revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing "the Lord's Messiah" (v. 26). This personal promise sustained Simeon through years—perhaps decades—of patient waiting. We**

don't know Simeon's age, but the promise implies he had been waiting long enough that death was a realistic possibility without divine intervention.

- **The Nunc Dimittis:** Simeon's song (vv. 29-32) is traditionally called the "Nunc Dimittis" (Latin for "now dismiss"), taken from its opening words. This is one of four great hymns in Luke 1-2 (along with Mary's Magnificat, Zechariah's Benedictus, and the angels' Gloria). The song declares that God's salvation has arrived and will extend beyond Israel to all nations.
- **Light to the Gentiles:** Simeon's prophecy that Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (v. 32) quotes Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. This is the first explicit mention in Luke's Gospel that the Messiah's mission includes non-Jewish peoples. Of the three prophetic speeches in Luke chapters 1-2, the inclusion of the Gentiles is found only in Simeon's words, foreshadowing the universal scope of the Gospel message.
- **The Prophecy of Opposition and Sorrow:** Simeon's blessing to Mary turns sobering when he prophesies that Jesus will cause "the fall and rise of many in Israel" and will be "a sign that will be opposed" (v. 34). Christ's coming would force people to choose—He would either lift them up or reveal their rejection of God. The "sword" that would pierce Mary's soul most directly refers to the agony she would experience watching her son be crucified.
- **Anna's Name and Tribe:** Anna means "grace" or "favor." Luke specifically identifies her as from the tribe of Asher, one of the northern tribes scattered in the Assyrian exile (722 BC). Her presence demonstrates that God preserved a faithful remnant even from the "lost tribes" of Israel. She represents those who never abandoned hope despite centuries of displacement.
- **Anna as Prophetess:** Luke uses the feminine form *prophetis* (prophetess), indicating Anna spoke on behalf of God. She joins other biblical prophetesses like Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). Her prominence in Luke's opening chapters is striking in a patriarchal society and reflects the significant role of women—Elizabeth, Mary, Anna—in God's redemptive plan.
- **Anna's Age and Widowhood:** If the text means Anna was 84 years old (the most common interpretation), and she had been married for 7 years before becoming a widow, she had likely been widowed for approximately 60 years. This means

she had spent the vast majority of her adult life in devoted service to God, waiting for the Messiah while others gave up hope.

- **Temple Devotion:** Anna "did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers". She likely lived in one of the temple's outer court chambers designated for devout worshipers. Her constant presence, prayer, and fasting made her intimately attuned to God's voice and positioned her to recognize the Messiah when He arrived.
- **"The Redemption of Jerusalem":** Anna spoke about Jesus "to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." The Greek word *lytrosis* (redemption) often carries the commercial sense of purchasing freedom, but here focuses on liberation from oppression. Like Simeon's "consolation," this phrase refers to Messianic hope—but Anna understood this wasn't merely political deliverance from Rome but spiritual redemption from sin.
- **The Faithful Remnant:** Both Simeon and Anna represent the faithful remnant of Israel—those who remained spiritually alert and expectant while others had abandoned hope or turned to political solutions. They lived their lives in anticipation of the coming kingdom, and God rewarded their faithfulness by allowing them to see the promised Messiah.

Questions from the Story:

- What three ceremonies did Mary and Joseph perform for Jesus according to verses 21-24? What does their careful observance of the Law reveal about their character?
- What kind of sacrifice did Mary and Joseph offer (v. 24)? What does this tell us about their economic status and Jesus's humble entrance into the world?
- How is Simeon described in verse 25? What do the terms "righteous and devout" reveal about his character and spiritual life?
- What was Simeon "looking forward to" (v. 25)? What does the phrase "Israel's consolation" mean in the context of Messianic hope?
- What unusual promise had the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon (v. 26)? How might this promise have sustained him through years of waiting?

- **What prompted Simeon to go to the temple on this particular day (v. 27)? What does this teach us about the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives?**
- **What did Simeon do when he saw the infant Jesus (v. 28)? What does his immediate action reveal about his faith and recognition?**
- **What does Simeon mean when he says "you can dismiss your servant in peace" (v. 29)? Why was he now ready to die?**
- **What has Simeon's eyes seen (v. 30)? How does he describe God's salvation in verses 31-32?**
- **What is significant about Simeon's declaration that Jesus is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (v. 32)? How does this expand the understanding of the Messiah's mission?**
- **How did Mary and Joseph react to Simeon's words (v. 33)? What does their amazement suggest about their understanding of Jesus's identity at this point?**
- **What sobering prophecy did Simeon give to Mary (vv. 34-35)? What did he mean by saying Jesus would cause "the fall and rise of many in Israel"?**
- **What does the metaphor of a "sword" piercing Mary's soul refer to? When would this prophecy be most dramatically fulfilled?**
- **How is Anna introduced in verse 36? What is significant about her identification as a "prophetess" and her tribal affiliation?**
- **What do we learn about Anna's personal history (vv. 36-37)? How long had she likely been a widow by this time?**
- **How did Anna spend her time (v. 37)? What does her lifestyle of prayer and fasting reveal about her spiritual priorities and dedication?**
- **What did Anna do when she encountered Jesus (v. 38)? To whom did she speak about Him?**
- **Who specifically was Anna addressing with her message about Jesus (v. 38)? What does this reveal about a community of faithful people waiting for the Messiah?**
- **How does Anna's immediate proclamation compare to Simeon's? What different roles do they fulfill in recognizing and announcing the Messiah?**

- **What do Simeon and Anna have in common? How do their lives of faithful waiting demonstrate true discipleship?**
- **Why do you think God chose these two elderly, faithful servants to be the first to publicly recognize and proclaim Jesus as Messiah in the temple?**
- **What does the timing of these encounters—40 days after Jesus's birth—reveal about God's sovereignty and perfect orchestration of events?**
- **How does Simeon's prophecy about Jesus being "a sign that will be opposed" prepare us for the reality that following Christ often brings division rather than universal acceptance?**
- **What does this passage teach us about the cost of the Gospel to both Jesus and His followers, particularly Mary?**
- **How do Simeon and Anna's lives of patient, expectant waiting challenge our culture's demand for immediate gratification and quick results?**
- **What does Anna's dedication to prayer and fasting "night and day" for decades teach us about perseverance in spiritual disciplines?**
- **How does the inclusion of both a man (Simeon) and a woman (Anna) as prophetic witnesses to Jesus reflect God's value of both genders in His redemptive plan?**
- **What does it mean to live in "prayerful expectancy" like Simeon and Anna? How can we cultivate this posture in our own spiritual lives?**
- **How should the promise that Jesus is "a light to the Gentiles" shape our understanding of the Gospel's universal scope and our responsibility to share it?**
- **What does this passage teach us about God's faithfulness to keep His promises, even when we must wait for years or decades to see them fulfilled?**
- **How can we recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our daily lives, as Simeon did when he was led to the temple?**
- **In what ways are we called to be like Simeon and Anna today—recognizing Jesus and proclaiming Him to those who are waiting for redemption?**