

## Luke 2:22-40 Sermon

Today Jesus, as a baby, is presented at the temple, in accordance with Jewish law. In this story, we meet two portraits in miniature of faithful Israel, we learn more about who Jesus is and more about his destiny.

Upon arrival at the temple, Jesus's parents met two characters: Simeon and Anna. Both of these characters are presented as picture portraits of what the faithful people in Israel would be like – devout, obedient, spirit-led, constant in prayer, at home in the temple, hoping and longing for the fulfilment of God's promises.

Firstly, we meet Simeon, a righteous and devout man who looked forward to the 'consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him'. There is not much more that could be said to demonstrate his faithfulness to God. He was guided by God's Holy Spirit that morning and came into the temple at just the right time, and, perhaps because he was so in tune with God's spirit, he recognised the child immediately and praised God for him. Simeon as a Godly man looked for God's coming as he served God in God's world. Who knows how long he had waited, how he was so certain that he would see the Messiah, or how many times he had entered the temple before and been disappointed – not today, Simeon, not today. But instead of doubting, questioning or losing faith, he diligently came to pray again and again.

Then we meet Anna. She is described with her Jewish lineage and as a faithful wife, and then a devout widow. The lineage leaves you wondering why it was so important to name her so accurately – was it so people could go and check (though at her age, that can't have been a long-term issue) or was it more about her credentials as a prophetess, or something else. In any case, she never left the temple; never leaving the place where God was. And she fasted and prayed all the time. She immediately also recognized that this child was the one that all Israel had been looking for – waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So we have two picture portraits of what faithful Israelites would look like. They were people who waited in expectation for God and people in tune with God; looking for God in all of life and following him faithfully. These are pictures of what the people of God should be like. They are also pictures of what we should be like if we are to truly follow God in our daily lives – people who patiently hope and long for the fulfilment of God's promises to the world. Would we be close enough to God to naturally see his works in our lives when we meet them? If not, why not? Do we fail to prize God enough to be this determined in our faith?

We could just stop there and we'd have been challenged enough perhaps on our spiritual life with God already. But that would be to leave before the headline act hits the stage.

Jesus was brought to the temple to fulfil the law of Moses. Two things had to happen that day. One was the purification of Mary after birth. And this is referred to in verse 24 when it talks about a pair of doves. This sacrifice was required for Mary's purification, and was carried out according to the law. Jesus's family was a faithful Jewish family carrying out all that was required.

The second thing that had to happen that day was the redemption of the firstborn. According to Jewish law all firstborn children or animals belonged to God. They were God's property or else they had to be redeemed, meaning bought back, from God. This would have cost Mary and Joseph five shekels of silver. Interestingly, this is referred to in verse 23 – every firstborn Males shall be designated as holy to the Lord – but there is no record of the redemption price being paid. Whether

it was or not is a matter for history, but here we have the writer, Luke, deliberately omitting further reference to it; suggesting that Jesus remained holy to the Lord - set apart for God and his purposes.

So we see that already Jesus is clearly recognisable to those who are close enough to God to see his purposes unfold. And also we find that the gospel writer intends us, even at this early stage, to see Jesus has been set apart for God's purposes and plans. The platform is set for the rest of Jesus' work and ministry, and also his death.

Finally we are told a little about the effect that Jesus would bring. Simeon prophesies that Jesus is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, revealing the inner thoughts of many. Here we see in embryonic form, the polarizing effect of Jesus and his ministry that we will continue to see throughout the gospel story, and culminating in Jesus's crucifixion. Wherever a light is switched on, shadow will be created. The Light of the World's coming shines brightly and makes the shadow naturally appear darker in contrast. We don't know how Mary reacted to this; perhaps this is deliberate to let us ponder for ourselves, perhaps feeling the cold shudder that must have gone down her spine even as she fawned over her beautiful baby boy.

However Mary felt, Simeon prophesies that Jesus will bring polarization because of his holiness and light. This will be uncomfortable for all of us who find that in comparison we aren't quite as squeaky clean as we thought we were. The question then becomes for the rest of the Gospel and for us: Will they, and will we react by following Jesus and living in his light, or will we react by rejecting him and trying to hide from that light? We either choose to move closer to Jesus or move further away.

In this choice, may the lives of Simeon and Anna be our inspiration. People who may not be exceptional by the world's standards were exceptional in their faithfulness to God. People who exemplify the spirituality of the whole of God's people and model it to others. May we choose to be these people. May we be people who choose to be closer to the light that is Jesus, and to let that light shine through us to others, rather than people who shirk away from Jesus, or neglect him, and thereby drift or hide in the shadows. Let us be people who, like Jesus, live up to God's purposes for us, whatever that may be. Amen.