

Are You Ready for Christmas?

Luke 2:25-35

Are you ready for Christmas? The clerk at the grocery store asked me that question as I was checking out at the register.

I suppose you have heard that question many times already. What people really mean by that is Did you finish your shopping? Did you mail out all your cards? Did you make out your calendar of where you are going and when? We call this the Christmas rush, it becomes a very hectic time, that we forget what Christmas is really all about.

It seems that many of the people who lived at the time when Jesus was born were not really ready for Christmas. When the angel Gabriel told Zacharias that he would have a son that would prepare the way for the Lord, he didn't believe it (Luke 1:20). When Mary heard the announcement that she would bear the Son of God she asked, **"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"** (Luke 1:34) and heard the answer, **"For with God nothing will be impossible,"** (Luke 1:37).

When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant he decided to put her away quietly and had to be convinced by an angel that **"that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit,"** (Matt 1:20). When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7). When Herod heard from the wise men that the King of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem he had all the baby boys there murdered. Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt to keep Jesus from being killed. Even though the scribes in Jerusalem knew where the Messiah was to be born the Bible doesn't record any of the powerful Jewish leaders going the short distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see the child.

By the standards of the world, his birth was only a slight blip on the radar of history, a peasant child born to peasant parents. In Rome they paid no attention; in Athens and Alexandria no one took note. In China and India no one knew a thing.

For the most part Phillips Brooks had it right: "How silently, How silently, the wondrous gift is given." He came silently, quietly (as quietly as a newborn baby boy ever arrives), without fuss or ruckus, without making a stir or announcing his presence. He came in the same way all babies come, and most of the world paid no attention. The Apostle John put it this way: **"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.."** (John 1:10-11) His own what? His own world, his own people, his own nation. The very people who should have been happiest to see him, instead paid no attention at all.

But let me ask you today: Are we any more prepared for the coming of Christ than they were in Bethlehem? That really is the crucial question.

Today we will meet a man who was ready for Christmas. Luke tells the story a man named Simeon. He had been waiting for years to see the Messiah, and when he meets the baby Jesus, he knows his long wait is finally over.

Setting the Scene: The Days Of Purification

The setting for our story is found in Luke 2:21-24,

21 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."

Three different aspects of the Old Testament Law are intertwined in these verses:

1. The Law required that all male children be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. That's verse 21.

2. The Law also required that women wait 40 days after the birth of a son before presenting themselves in the temple for their purification in fulfillment of Leviticus 12. That's verse 22.

3. The Law also required that a mother and father present their firstborn son before the Lord to be "redeemed" by the offering of a sacrifice in fulfillment of Exodus 13. That's verse 23.

All three things are happening in these verses. Verse 21 takes place 8 days after Christmas, and verses 22-23 take place about 33 days later. The circumcision may have taken place in Bethlehem, but the presentation and redemption happened in Jerusalem.

These verses, although somewhat incidental for our purposes, show clearly that Jesus was born into a god-fearing, law-abiding home. They illustrate the truth of Galatians 4:4 that **"when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."** They also illustrate our Lord's own words in Matthew 5:17, **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."** Jesus was no law-breaker, as some of his opponents would later accuse Him. He was born under the Law and lived His whole life in obedience to the Law.

Verse 23 also tells us something about the financial situation of Mary and Joseph. You might read right over the mention of **"A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons"** without thinking a thing about it. But Leviticus 12 tells us that when a woman came for her purification she was to bring a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a dove as a sin offering (Lev. 12:6). If, however, she could not afford a lamb, she could bring two doves or two pigeons instead (Lev. 12:8). That made it possible for even poor women to obey the law of purification. Lambs were not really considered a luxury item, but Joseph and Mary could not afford one. Jesus was not born into an upper-class home. He was born into a loving, godly home but Jesus knew poverty and hardship from the very beginning.

So forty days have passed since the birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph come into the Temple courts, ready to "redeem" their firstborn son. There was nothing outwardly to distinguish them, no marks or signs that indicated they were anything other than another poor young couple coming with their newborn son.

At this point Simeon enters the story. Aside from what we are told in Luke 2, we know nothing about him. We don't know his background, his hometown, his education, or even his occupation. We assume he was an old man—but even that is not a certain fact. He simply appears on the stage of history as a bit player in the drama surrounding the birth of Christ. After his part is over, he fades from the scene, never to be heard from again.

A divinely-planned encounter is about to take place. Luke tells the story this way:

Luke 2:25-26

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.

These verses tell us just a little bit about Simeon. First, he was a righteous man. Second, he was a devout man. Third, he was “**waiting for the Consolation of Israel.**” Fourth, he was a Spirit-filled man. Fifth, and most importantly, he was eagerly awaiting the imminent appearance of the Lord's Christ. The Holy Spirit had told him, “*You will not die before you see the Messiah.*”

That promise must have consumed his whole life. If Simeon is now an old man (as seems likely from verse 29), then perhaps he's been waiting in the Temple for many years. I imagine him praying day by day for the Lord's Christ to finally appear. As he grew older, his anticipation grew stronger because he knew he couldn't live forever. The Lord's Christ must be coming at any moment.

Can you imagine Simeon going to the Temple, watching and waiting for the Messiah to come. How would he know him? What should he look for? Did he know to look for a baby? Or was he looking for a teenager or a strong young man?

Luke 2:27-28

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:

And while he is waiting Mary comes holding the baby in her arms with Joseph by her side. Jesus is only about six weeks old. What an unlikely couple to be carrying the King of Israel. Joseph is a poor carpenter from Nazareth, Mary is a peasant girl. They are obviously from the country. They obviously don't have much money. Not educated by the famous rabbis. Not from the upper-crust. When Simeon sees them, perhaps he prays for the 10,000th time, “*Is this the one?*” And the Holy Spirit says, “Yes.”

Suddenly Simeon's heart leaps within him. The long days of waiting are finally over. The Lord's Christ is before him. Here is the One for whom the nation has been waiting. He approaches the young parents, introduces himself, and asks if he could hold the child. As Mary gives the infant Jesus to Simeon, the thought hits him, “*I am holding the salvation of the world in my arms.*”

At that point Simeon breaks out into a song of praise. The Christian church has called the song the Nunc Dimittis, the title being taken from the first two words of the Latin translation of Simeon's words.

The song goes like this:

Luke 2:29-32

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."

Simeon's first thought is that he is now ready to die. The word "**depart**" or "dismiss" is a military word, used to describe a sentinel who has stood watch during the long hours of the night. Now at last as the sun comes up over the eastern horizon, he knows his work is done, and he goes to his commanding officer to be dismissed. That's the way Simeon feels. The long wait is over, the years of anticipation have been fulfilled, his sentry duty is finished, for he has seen and personally held "**the Lord's Christ.**"

What Child Is This?

Notice what he says about Jesus. In the words that follow Simeon tells us three important things about who Jesus is.

1. He is the Glory of Israel

In verse 32 Simeon calls him "**the glory of Your people Israel.**" In this baby, Simeon sees the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people across the centuries. The word "**glory**" is a special word to the Jew. In the Old Testament God appeared in His glory to Moses on the mount. He showed His glory in the sky through the pillar of cloud and fire. He showed His glory when He inhabited the tabernacle. He showed His glory at dedication of the temple. The glory of God was God's presence. His glory is the radiating light of God's saving, leading, guiding, protecting power.

To call Jesus "the glory of Israel" was to say that He is the very presence of the Lord God. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by [His] Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of [His] glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb 1:1-3 NKJV)

Jesus, the Son of God, is the very brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person.

The apostle John writes: (Jhn 1:1, 14 NKJV) **1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the very glory of God. That's what Simeon means when he calls Jesus "the glory of Israel." He fulfills all the promises that God would be with His people, would save His people, protect His people, and lead His people.

2. He is the Savior of the World

Look at verse 30, **“For my eyes have seen Your salvation.”** This child will bring salvation. That is why is named Jesus, as the angel told Joseph, **“you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”** And as Simeon shows, “His people” are not just the Jews. Verse 31 says, **“Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples.”** And in verse 32 Simeon also calls Him **“A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles.”** This baby will not only be the glory of His own people Israel. He will also be the light of revelation for the Gentiles. He’s not just for Israel. He didn’t come just for their benefit. He came to shine a light of the revelation of God into every nation, every tribe and every tongue.

He’s the Savior of the whole world. Rich and poor, young and old, black and white, Jew and Gentile, American and Russian, healthy and handicapped. All people are included in His coming. He didn’t come for a small group. He came for the whole wide world.

That means there is hope for you at Christmastime. If you are lonely this year, Christmas is meant to include you. If your family has rejected you, Christmas is meant to include you. If you feel forgotten, depressed, discouraged, and down on your luck, be of good cheer, Christmas is for you! Whatever sins are holding you back this year, Christmas means that you can be forgiven, because Jesus came for you.

It’s true that our Lord was a Jew. But he didn’t come just for the Jews.

- He met a Samaritan woman at the well, and he forgave her.
- He met a Roman centurion and said, “I have not found such great faith in all of Israel.”
- He met a Syrophenician woman and healed her daughter.
- When he was crucified, it was a Roman centurion who said, “Surely this was the Son of God.”

In all of this, Simeon is telling us something crucial. By sending His Son to the earth, God is not only fulfilling His promises to the nation. He is also bringing to the world a Savior for all people everywhere. This is why we give extra at this time of year to support our missionaries who are taking the gospel to the ends of the earth: because Jesus is the savior of the whole world.

3. He is the Divider of the Human Race

There is yet a third thing that Simeon says. The story continues in verses 33-35:

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."

Here is the third and final thing Simeon says about Jesus. He is the Great Divider of Men. He will cause many to fall. He will cause many to rise. And He will be a sign to be spoken against, and in this way the hidden thoughts of people’s hearts will be revealed.

It is an ominous thing Simeon says to Mary. “Mary, I know you are happy now, but you will weep later. Today your heart is filled with joy. Later it will be filled with sorrow. Rejoice and enjoy this time because dark days are coming.”

Simeon is prophesying about Jesus’ sufferings. It’s like he is saying, “Mary, they are going to touch this child, and you won’t be able to do anything about it. They are going to hate him, they are going to lie about him, they’ll spread rumors about you and Joseph, they will smear his name with malicious lies. And you will have to stand by helplessly and watch it happen.”

Down the road it all came true. Eventually they questioned not only Jesus’ parentage, but also His mental ability. They snickered and said, “He thinks He’s the Son of God. But he’s just filled with demons.” In the end hatred took full control and they arrested Jesus and put Him on trial as a seditious blasphemer. They beat Him within an inch of his life. They condemned Him to die. In the end, Mary stood by the cross and watched Her son die an agonizing, brutal, bloody death. Mary saw the spear thrust into His side and felt a sword pierce her heart as well.

Above the cradle stands the cross. This little baby was born to die.

Did you notice how Simeon put it? Because of Jesus, the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Underline that in your mind. With Jesus there is no neutrality. No one can ever come face to face with Jesus Christ and remain the same. Every time you see Jesus, you will either be drawn closer to Him or you will move farther away. That’s what Simeon means when he says that Jesus will cause the rising of many and the falling of many.

People rise or fall according to their personal response to Jesus. In this world there are only two classes of people: Those who believe in Jesus Christ and those who don’t. And there is no middle ground. There is no fence to sit upon.

It’s popular in America, to simply call Jesus a good teacher, a good person, a great moral example, and so on. Simeon is saying you can’t do that. You have to make up your mind about Jesus. Either He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, or he’s not.

At Christmastime you only have two options regarding Jesus Christ. Either you join Herod in trying to kill him or you join the Wise Men in bowing down and worshipping him. And there is nothing in between!

Remember, if you are indifferent, you’ve really joined the side that wants to kill him. Jesus would later say, “(Mat 12:30 NKJV) 30 **“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.”**

That’s what Simeon is saying. This little baby who is the glory of Israel, who is the light of the world, is also the great divider of the human race. You’re either on one side or on the other regarding Jesus. No one stays forever in the middle.

The way you respond to Jesus reveals what is in your heart. Think about that. The way you respond to Jesus tells us who you are and what you are and what is in your heart.

When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he said, “*Lord, I’m ready to go home now. I can die in peace.*” But no one is ready to die until they have seen Jesus Christ with the eyes of faith. You’re not ready to die until you have seen Him and known Him and trusted Him as your Savior.

If you come to the end, and you've never seen Jesus, never trusted in Him to save you from your sins, you've wasted your years on this earth. At the end the only thing that matters is to know Jesus Christ.

It's Christmastime. Do you know him?

He's the Messiah of Israel. Do you know him?

He's the Savior of the World. Do you know him?

He's the Great Divider of Mankind. Do you know him?

It's Christmastime. He came for you. Do you know him?