

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message Confirmation of Jesus as Messiah**

#### **Scripture Luke 2:21-40, 41-52**

Today's message is the second in what will be a long-running series from the Gospel of Luke. I will have to be selective about the passages we focus on. Last week we thought about the short introduction to the Gospel, verses in which Luke explained his purpose in writing.

Most of chapters 1 and 2 of the Gospel describe the events associated with the birth of John, who would later be known as the Baptizer, and the birth of Jesus. The description of these events requires a total of 95 verses. These events are important in the record of Jesus' life, and we think about them during the Christmas season. Today we will think about two other important incidents in the early life of Jesus. The events we will cover today took place in the temple in Jerusalem.

#### **Read Luke 2:21-40**

In these verses Luke emphasizes the fidelity of Mary and Joseph to the Jewish Law. Following the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were very careful to comply with the requirements of the Law in regard to circumcision and purification. According to verse 23, they presented Jesus "as it is written in the law of the Lord." In verse 24, they offered a sacrifice "according to what is said in the law of the Lord." In verse 27, "they brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required." And in verse 39, Mary and Joseph returned to their home in Nazareth only after they "had done everything required by the law of the Lord."

Jesus was born into a deeply devout Jewish household. His parents were excellent models. They were sensitive and obedient to the requirements of the Mosaic law. Thirty years later Jesus announced that He had not come to oppose and abolish the Law but to fulfill it (*Matt 5:17*). Both Jesus and His human parents had that desire.

Let me give some background to the ceremonies which are mentioned in verses 21 through 24. The first ceremony, referred to in verse 21, was that of circumcision. God introduced the practice of circumcision during a dialogue with Abraham when Abraham was 99 years old (*Genesis 17:9-14*). It was on this occasion when God announced that He was ready to fulfill His promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, but first Abraham had to be circumcised because circumcision was to be the sign of the covenant relationship between God and His chosen people. After that time, all the male descendents of Abraham were required to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. That was also the occasion when the name of the child was publicly announced.

Verse 22 mentions the time of purification. According to the Jewish Law, a mother became ceremonially unclean with the birth of a child. She could not enter the sanctuary or interact with people outside her own family until at least forty days had passed. Then the mother was required to offer a sacrifice at the temple. A lamb was the appropriate sacrifice, but poor people could substitute two doves or pigeons (*see Leviticus 12:1-8*).

The third ceremony was the presentation at the temple of the first-born son. The purification of the mother and the presentation of the child could be done on the same visit to the temple. The Old Testament Scripture required that "Every firstborn male be consecrated to the Lord" (*Exodus 13:1-2; Numbers 18:15-17*). This requirement originated when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. You will remember that God spared the firstborn sons of the Israelite families if they had applied the blood of a lamb to the door posts and lintels of their dwellings. When the angel of death passed over the land, all the first-born offspring of Egypt were slain, of both man and beast.

After that event, God declared that all the first-born males of the Israelites, whether man or beast, belonged to Him, and that a redemption price had to be paid before they would be allowed to live. The redemption price for a first-born son was set by the Law at five shekels. Through this consecration ceremony, Israelite parents acknowledged that their child belonged to God.

Jesus would have been approximately six weeks old at the time of his presentation. It is during this presentation of Jesus at the temple that Simeon and Anna spoke words of divine inspiration, identifying the Christ-child as God's Messiah.

The only thing we are told about Simeon is information which pertained to his faith and his character. We are told that Simeon was “righteous” and “devout.” He was also a man of faith and hope, for he “looked for the consolation of Israel.” This was an expression which summarized the faith of the Old Testament saints in the promises of God concerning the restoration of Israel through the coming Messiah.

Finally, we read that “the Holy Spirit was upon him.” It was the Holy Spirit who had revealed to Simeon “that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” It was the Holy Spirit who steered Simeon to the temple courts on the same day that Jesus’ parents brought Him to be presented to the Lord. It was the Spirit of God who revealed to Simeon that this child was indeed the Messiah.

The precise means by which Simeon was enabled to recognize this six-week old child as distinct from others is not told us, but Simeon eagerly took the child in his arms and began to praise God. It is difficult for us to imagine this episode. Simeon had been waiting to see the Messiah for many years. What he had pictured in his mind and what he actually saw must have been difficult to reconcile. He had an understanding of the great things that the Messiah would accomplish, and yet the tiny baby in his arms was without any power at all, and dependent on the care of others. Simeon did not let his eyes deceive his mind. He knew that the ordinary looking baby in his arms was the salvation of God because God had revealed this truth to him. The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in connection with Simeon.

Simeon praised God for the privilege he had to look on and hold God’s Son. The sight of the baby made his life complete, and so he could say, “Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, now let me die; for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

Simeon knew from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Lord’s salvation would be seen by all people, Gentiles as well as Jews. Simeon did not view the Messiah’s coming as only for the benefit of Israel. The Messiah would, of course, “sit on the throne of His father David.” This would be Israel’s glory. But the Messiah would also be a “light of revelation to the Gentiles.” There are several references in the Old Testament to the fact that “All the ends of the earth (*and all people*) will see the salvation of our God” (*for example, Psalm 98:2-3; Isaiah 52:10*).

Joseph and Mary “marveled at what was said about” their baby, on top of information they already knew. The angel had announced who Jesus would be and what He would do, Mary had experience the supernatural conception, and the shepherds reported what the chorus of angels had said. Joseph and Mary knew that their Child was the promised Messiah, but Simeon’s words added to their amazement. Perhaps their amazement sprang from Simeon’s words about the universal significance and application of the redemption to be accomplished by their son. Their previous information received from the angel had only connected Jesus with the fortunes of Israel. Simeon spoke about the salvation of all mankind.

Simeon blessed them, and then directed a very specific prophecy to Mary. He announced that Jesus would be like a stumbling block over which some people would trip and fall and perish, but He would also be the means by which others could be lifted up and be saved. Furthermore, the Child would be a sign which would reveal the hearts of people, and divide them, and that hostile attitudes would be directed to Him.

This is the first hint in this Gospel of the coming struggle and suffering which would culminate in the Messiah’s rejection and crucifixion. Up to this point, all of the inspired utterances pertaining to Jesus had been only positive, speaking with reference to His ruling on David’s throne, setting right the things which were wrong, and bringing peace and salvation to men. Simeon accurately portrayed what would happen in the future. He could probably point to several Old Testament passages, such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, which revealed the sufferings and death of the Messiah. Simeon was also accurate when he announced that Mary must be prepared for the grief she would experience because of what would happen to her son.

There was another prophet at the temple that day, Anna, a very old widow. Anna was exceptionally faithful in her worshipping, fasting, and praying at the temple. Anna, like Simeon, was divinely guided to Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, and Simeon. She also began to give thanks to God. More than that, she began to publicize the good news concerning Jesus to everyone who, like herself and Simeon, were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. The fact that she was already known as a prophetess probably meant that her testimony had great impact.

As I said earlier, the occasion for the appearance at the temple of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus was to fulfill the requirements of the Law but, interestingly, Luke wrote nothing about this ceremony. We have no record of the ritual, nor are we given the names of any of the priests who might have been involved in the ceremony. Obviously, Luke was placing the emphasis on the proclamations of Simeon and Anna. The purpose of the passage was to make known the inspired testimonies of two godly people. The witness of Simeon and Anna confirmed the identity of the child as God's Messiah. Luke wanted his readers, both Theophilus and us, to have confidence about the person of Jesus.

Verses 39-40 mention again that Mary and Joseph were faithful to the Jewish Law. We also learn that the Child Jesus grew normally in both physical and intellectual ways. The Bible has very little information about the first 30 years of Jesus' life. Matthew, but not Luke, described the arrival of the Magi and the family's journey to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, the King. These events occurred during the second year of Jesus' life. The only other information we have about the childhood years of Jesus' life is in verses 41-52.

### **Read Luke 2:41 – 52**

Adult males were required by the Law to attend the three major festivals held annually in Jerusalem (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). If distance prevented a man from attending all three, he was expected to make a special effort to be at the Passover festival. Families would often accompany the men.

Verse 42 informs us, for the fifth time, that Jesus' parents consistently observed the Law. When Jesus was twelve years old, He accompanied them on their journey to Jerusalem for Passover. At age twelve, Jewish boys began preparing to take their places in the religious community. At age thirteen they could become full members of the synagogue. This custom continues today in the Jewish bar-mitzvah ceremony.

At the conclusion of the festival, which lasted seven days, Jesus remained in Jerusalem while the parents began the journey back to Nazareth, a distance of about 70 miles which required several days of walking. Pilgrims to the festival usually traveled in large groups, and often the women and younger children would be separated from the men. Everyone would be engrossed in conversation and the children would run back and forth and play as they walked along the roadways.

When it was discovered that Jesus was not in the company of travelers, Mary and Joseph anxiously returned to Jerusalem to look for their son. After an intense search, they found Jesus “in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions,” which was exactly what a twelve year old Jewish boy was expected to do in preparation for his religious “coming-out” ceremony. Asking and answering questions was the customary way of religious education.

Everyone was astounded by Jesus’ ability to interact with the temple teachers. Even His parents were astonished, but then it seems that Mary’s motherly concerns were expressed in words of scolding: “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

Jesus response to Mary was a question of amazement: “Why were you searching for me?” To Him it was logical and reasonable that He would be in the temple. He referred to it as His “Father’s House.” Jesus’ use of the words “my Father” are in contrast to Mary’s use of the words “your father,” which referred to Joseph. The two sentences spoken by Jesus clearly call attention to His divine Sonship. Jesus referred to God as His Father because God, and not Joseph, was His real Father. Jesus was surprised that Mary did not realize or remember this. Verse 50 states that Jesus’ parents did not understand what He was saying to them. They did not understand that Jesus, in His coming of age, religiously speaking, was setting His divine calling ahead of His earthly relationships.

Luke notes that Jesus was obedient to His human parents. He was, after all, the perfect human as well as the Son of God. He accompanied them back to their home. This was another in a long line of experiences that Mary could reflect on and “treasure in her heart.”

Verse 40 is a summary statement of the development of Jesus until age twelve. Verse 52 is a summary statement of the next years before He began His public ministry. We have no details about the personal life of Jesus between age twelve and thirty. We know that Joseph was a carpenter and that Jesus helped him in that work. We know that Jesus grew up in a fairly large family; there are verses in the New Testament which indicate that Mary and Joseph had sons and daughters (*see Mark 6:3*). Joseph is not mentioned in Scripture after Luke chapter 2, so Jesus most likely became the provider for His mother and younger siblings.

What is important is that Jesus “grew in favor with both God and men.” He grew and developed in such a manner that His life and circumstances were at all times pleasing to God and to His neighbors.

The purpose of this Gospel is to give us confidence about the truths about Jesus. Simeon and Anna were witnesses to the truth about Jesus. We will add new evidence about this each week. I want each person to grow in their understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done.

With increased knowledge, there will be increased responsibility to do what Jesus wants us to do. With increased confidence, there will be the obligation to obey what Jesus said.

### **Some Thoughts for Reflection**

Simeon and Anna had each been obedient and faithful to God for a long time.

Mary and Joseph were obedient to all the requirements of the Law.

Jesus, in His humanity, was obedient to His parents.

Like Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph, we must respond to God with obedience.