

Hebrews 2:14 – end

Luke 2:22-40

Introduction

There are two things that always strike me about the Christmas story:

1. the people that God chose to reveal Christ's birth to

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| simple people | → | shepherds |
| not powerful | → | The kings were but they were foreigners not Jews |
| not "holy" | → | not church establishment |
| open to him | → | seeking him and ready to hear the message |

2. what he said about the Christ to them

We see this again at the presentation of Christ in the Temple.

Mary and Joseph rejoicing in the birth of their son were not only loving parents but devout Jews and so they did their religious duty to fulfil the requirements of the law which were:

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| Lev 12 | 1. | Circumcision on the 8 th day |
| Num 18:16 | 2. | Every first born child was to be consecrated to God and redeemed by the payment of 5 shekels of silver |
| Ex 13:12 | 3. | This could not be done until Mary had completed her rites of purification. Until then she was unclean and could not take part in public worship. |

So they sacrificed pigeons for the purification and presented the baby Christ to God

This ceremony was especially poignant for Mary who knew that Jesus was truly God's - the promised Saviour.

She was offering Jesus back to God for him to use as he chose.

Reaffirming the consent she had given when the angel had first told her she was going to have a baby.

It's not really surprising that during his dedication in the Temple Christ should have been recognised as the Messiah.

- It was the centre of worship for Israel
- Where people came from all around
- There were many priests, Levites and religious leaders there

So of course he would be recognised.

But he wasn't recognised by the priests who performed the sacrifice or who performed the dedication of Jesus presumably to them he was just another baby

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We are told there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon

How do you think of Simeon? What mental picture do you have of him?

Was he an old man, nearing the end of his life, desperately waiting for God's promised Saviour?

- We are not told he is old. He may have been quite young
- He was noted for his piety and his relationship with God

What we do know about him is:

1) He was righteous:

- In his relationship with other men. He was just in his dealings with others, upright in his behaviour. There is an openness and honesty to righteousness.
- and in his relationship with God. He is described as devout. Worship was important to him. He wanted to be with God and to honour God.

God requires that our relationship with him should be good and that our relationship with other people should be good as well. These two things go together. They complement each other. But one will not make up for the lack in the other. They are both needed.

2) He was waiting for the coming Saviour

That is a lovely description "The consolation of Israel". It comes from Isaiah 40 where God, through the prophet, talks of bringing comfort to his people. "Comfort, comfort my people". The consolation of Israel was a rabbinic term. Presumably most Jews of that time were waiting for a Saviour - but they had their own ideas of what that Saviour might be like. Simeon was really expecting God's promise to be fulfilled and for the saviour to appear. So his attitude was a mixture of expectation and anticipation which needed patience and trust in God to sustain.

3) The Holy Spirit was on him

not only a Spirit of holiness but also a Spirit of prophecy.

God had rewarded Simeon's trust and expectation by promising that he would see the Saviour. That he would not die before the promised Messiah came.

God gave him the faith	to believe
	to expect
	to wait

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God rewarded him for that by promising that he would see that promise fulfilled.

He was very privileged and among a select few who trusted God's promise. Abraham and Moses both trusted but had neither of them seen the promise come to fulfilment. God's Spirit had told Simeon that he was going to see the fulfilment of all the prophecies.

That might have made him arrogant and proud. But when we read of Simeon there is a real sense of humility about him. We read that he was obedient to the promptings of the Spirit and also of his humble joy on seeing the Christ.

4. The Holy Spirit told him to go to the temple

We don't know if he was told that he'd find the baby there. We do know he was told to go

Simeon obeyed and when he saw the baby he recognised the promised Saviour.

The Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see that this was no ordinary baby, but "The Christ" "The Messiah"

5. Simeon took the child in his arms

This was a mark of God's goodness. He had promised Simeon that he would see the saviour - but he was also able to touch, to hold and embrace him. We read of his wonder and joy at the event.

His response was to say the words we now know as the Nunc Dimittis "Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace according to thy word for my eyes have seen thy salvation"

The song was:

- An acknowledgement that God had been as good as his word. He had promised - here was the fulfilment.
- A Thanksgiving. He blessed God. So often when we see the answer to God's promise we forget to thank him. Simeon was deeply grateful
- An acknowledgement that the climax of his life has arrived. And he is now ready to die. We usually think of this as an old man's comment.

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But he could easily have been a younger man. - Life can hold no better than meeting and embracing the Saviour. For Simeon this was the most important moment in his life. There was nothing greater to look forward to so he was ready to die.

What would Mary be thinking/Feeling?

God had told her through the angel that this was no ordinary baby.

- His birth had confirmed that.
- The arrival of the wise men prepared her in part for what was to come – she would have understood the symbolism of the gifts and noticed their attitude to the baby when they bowed down and worshipped him – not usual in visits to new babies!

Now Simeon's words unfold more of the future

- words of great hope
- words of great sadness

Hope: -

this baby is God's salvation

which he has prepared in the sight of all people

A light to lighten the Gentiles.

This message of hope is for all people not just God's chosen people but the whole world. This carries echoes of Isaiah 9. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. The nations of the world are in darkness but the Christ will bring them light and salvation

the baby is also described as **"the glory of the people of Israel"**

The glory that they were expecting was a great King, another David, a leader. But God's idea of glory and what is glorious is so different to ours. To many Jews God's promised Messiah, the Christ was a disappointment and failure - so much so that they wouldn't accept that he **was** the Christ - and are still waiting today for him to appear. The Saviour who was the "glory of God's people Israel" was rejected and denied by them.

Simeon also spoke ~ words of sadness

"he will cause the falling and rising of many". Not falling of some and rising of others. They would have to fall before rising to the promised glory. Even the disciples had to be humbled by failure. It was only because Christ chose to share their humiliation by dying on the cross that they were able to rise at all.

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The message, even here at the beginning, is that the Messiah, because he comes to lead Israel to her glory must tread with her, with her people, the path of suffering.

He will be a sign that will be spoken against

This child, the promised Saviour is a sign of God's love and compassion towards mankind - yet he would be ignored and mocked by many he had come to save.

The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed

The way that we respond to Christ shows what is in our hearts.

- eager thankful acceptance of love and forgiveness or
- anger and rejection - more than that, hate.

Finally: all of this would cause them great sadness

The pain and rejection that Christ would suffer would pierce the hearts of Mary and Joseph with pain as well

Silence

Read Nunc Dimitis

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'