

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:22-40)

How Do We Know this Child is the Savior?

How do you know something is true? That might seem like a fairly obvious question. If I can see it with my own eyes, it’s true. If I can examine the evidence, I can know what is true. But is it really that simple? Can you always trust your own eyes? There’s a huge body of evidence that suggests that eyewitness testimony is extremely unreliable, even when the witness is convinced they’re telling the truth. What do you do when two apparently honest eyewitnesses disagree? On an even deeper level, how often do we examine the things that we know and ask ourselves, “Is this true or is it simply something that I believe?” – especially when it comes to our attitudes about life and the people around us? Sometimes, it’s good to ask ourselves, “How do you know?”

When it comes to our faith, how do we know? I can say without a hint of irony today that I know Jesus is my Savior. St. Paul said the same thing just before he died – “I know whom I have believed in.” But he went on to define what we mean by knowing when it comes to faith. He said, “And I am convinced that he is able to guard what he has entrusted to me.” Paul knew in the sense that his trust in what God was saying was so strong that he was certain of it, even though he also knew perfectly well that he could never prove the Christian faith in a court of law or in a scientific experiment. The only evidence that he could point to was what God had entrusted to him: the word of God and his faith. That’s true for us, too. I make no claims to be able to scientifically prove that Jesus even lived, let alone that he died and rose again. But I believe those things – I am certain of them. I know them because that’s what God tells us. Today, we have before us a moment very early in the life of Christ. Through this incident we want to examine the way God makes us know the truth. We’ll focus on the most basic truth of the Christian faith. **How do we know this child is the Savior?**

I.

The answer is one of eye-witness testimony. God called men like Luke and John to tell us the story of Jesus' life and men like Peter and Paul to explain what that story means. But not all those guys were eye-witnesses. Luke was not present at the incident he records for us today. But Luke does give us the testimony of someone who was there: God. The Holy Spirit gave him these words. In his gospel, Luke does not tell us everything that ever happened to Jesus. God carefully chose which incidents to record for us so that we could see who Jesus really is. This incident today resonates with Jewish ceremonial laws, most of which are very foreign to us. But they all are part of God's testimony. **How do we know this child is the Savior? He fulfilled God's law for us.**

Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem after "the time of their purification." Under Old Testament law, when a woman had a baby she was ceremonially unclean. Her purification required a sacrifice forty days after the baby was born. It was supposed to be a lamb, but the law allowed for two doves if the family was too poor to be able to afford a lamb. That's what they offered for Mary. But they also presented Jesus to the Lord. That was something different. God claimed every Jewish firstborn son as his own because of the Passover, when the angel of death killed the firstborn child of the Egyptians but spared those of Israel. Jesus was presented to the Lord as his own.

Understand, all those Old Testament laws taught the people something. Being ceremonially unclean was really a way of underlining sin. When you were unclean you couldn't come into the temple, into the physical place that represented God's presence among his people. You couldn't come into God's presence. Childbirth made a woman unclean to remind us that we're all conceived and born in sin. God was telling his people that from birth we need his forgiveness and then the blood of the sacrifice washed the sin away. That represented Christ. And the presentation was based on God's great act of deliverance in Egypt. The angel of death broke Pharaoh's hold on Israel and that horrible judgment set God's people free. That was a symbol of Christ setting us free from slavery to sin and death, but at a terrible cost: his own death on the cross where he endured the judgment we deserve.

All those Old Testament rituals were symbols of what Jesus would do. But God did command them for his people. When his Son took on human flesh, he became a Jewish human being. He was born under the law, just like every one of us is born under God's law. God did that on purpose because he sent Jesus not just to die in our place, but first to live in our place. God's law demands that we be perfect, every day of our lives, perfect in what we think and feel, perfect in all that we do and say. And quite frankly, that's impossible. So we try to soften the blow. We redefine perfect as doing the best you can. In our lives that works. We tell our kids to do their best. If at school their absolute best is a B or a C, we praise their effort. If their best on the basketball court is scoring only one basket all year, we build them up because they did their best. But even in life, their best isn't always good enough. When universities offer competitive academic scholarships, a B average isn't going to make the cut. When our grade schoolers move up to high school and want to play basketball at that level, one basket in the course of the year might not be enough even to make the team. There is a standard for many things in this life. And there is a standard to reach heaven: we have to be perfect or we don't get in.

So obviously, not one of us is going to make it, right? We are not perfect. We sin every day. But God in his love wanted to spare us. So he sent Jesus to be perfect in our place. Every day of Jesus' life, in his words and in his actions, in his thoughts and in his feelings, he obeyed God's law totally and completely and joyfully. He obeyed the moral law – the things like don't hurt or kill your neighbor, don't steal, don't curse and swear. But he even obeyed the ceremonial law – those Jewish sacrifices and rituals, because he was Jewish and for him, all those laws applied. So when we see him today obeying laws that God does not require of us gentiles, we see how perfect our Savior was. God has given to us that righteousness of Christ. When God looks at you and me, he sees Jesus. So he sees everything that we've ever done or said or thought or felt as perfect, as if Jesus had done it right. And so he says that we are free to enter heaven.

II.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, they encountered two people that God sent to tell the world who this baby really was. Of course, that needed to happen. Every day Jewish babies and their mothers came to the temple to fulfill God's Old Testament laws. What made this child any different? He was the Son of God. But that was hidden deep inside the body and soul of a six week old baby boy. So God gave

witnesses to make it clear. And God had Luke record this incident so that we could hear their testimony, too.

How do we know this child is the Savior? God's prophets testify about him.

Both of these people were prophets. Luke tells us that God had promised Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Christ with his own eyes. He had been waiting, maybe for years, for that promise to be kept. Luke tells us that he came into the temple on this day "moved by the Spirit" and he said those beautiful words that we used to sing every communion Sunday: **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."**

Simeon saw that child and he knew what that child was, what was hidden beneath his flesh. He is the light for us gentiles, for us strangers and foreigners, that shows us the way to heaven. He is the true glory of Israel, because he is the reason God chose that people. Simeon was an eyewitness, not of what everyone else in the temple that day could see, but of what they could not see: the Son of God was come in human flesh.

He said, **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** It would hurt Mary to watch her son die. But Jesus came to fulfill all that God had been doing in Israel since the time of Abraham. He caused the falling and rising of many in Israel. What does that mean? Not every person who shows up for church is truly faithful. Not every leader in the church has God's mission foremost in their mind. Jesus came to cause the falling of many leaders in the Jewish religion. Almost all of them rejected Jesus. Their unbelief led to a final fall and destruction in hell. But what about the rising of many? That's all those sinners who came to faith in Christ and were saved: prostitutes and tax collectors who repented of their sinful ways and clung to Jesus for forgiveness and life.

And which are we? To most of us, being a church member, being a church leader, is something we respect. That's a good thing. But the Jews didn't have a monopoly on being Pharisees. It's so easy for us to fall into thinking that God loves us because we're so good, so involved, so generous with our church. That's just pride and sin. But Jesus came to save sinners. He came to save us who are full of pride. He came to save us and the people around us who have led sinful lives and now don't know what to do. Jesus died and he paid for us all. He washed all our sin away. He came for the falling of all those who trust in their goodness and for the rising of all those who trust in him. Trust in your Savior.

That message was reinforced by the other prophet who was there that day, Anna. Now, Luke does not record her words for us. He tells us only that she was a very elderly woman who practically lived in the temple, worshipping God. She came in and God showed her who Jesus was, too. And she told all those who were waiting for the Messiah that God had kept his promise. God had Luke write all this down for us. God sent these prophets so that you and I can know what no one can ever learn or discover on their own: this is Jesus our Savior.

The only way for us to be certain of that truth is to get God's testimony. The Bible is the only source for faith because that is where God records the gospel. The gospel is the power of God that makes us believers. You and I don't believe because somebody sat us down and made a good argument for Jesus. We don't believe because we can prove it scientifically or archaeologically or because our society sees faith in Christ as obviously wise. Just the opposite is true. More and more, our society denies the truth and ridicules faith in Christ. You cannot make the gospel make logical sense. Many, many famous people have rejected it because they just can't buy the lack of logic they see in God becoming man, in Christ taking the place of all people, in God demanding payment for sins. I won't try to argue you into heaven and neither does God.

Instead, God gives us Jesus and he tells us who he is and what he did. Jesus lived in our place and God calls us holy. Jesus died in our place and God says that payment counts for us. Jesus rose from the dead and God says that is our proof that we are forgiven, that we are loved, and that we, too, will rise with him. God speaks through these prophets and through the gospel we proclaim today and he reaches into your heart and he gives and strengthens faith. And as you grow in your faith, as it becomes stronger and more mature, you grow in your certainty. You can honestly say that you know that Jesus is your Savior, even though you can't set up a scientific experiment that would prove it. You know it because the power of God convinces you. That power works through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hear that gospel and be certain. Amen.