

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 2:25-40)

What does this Tell us about Jesus?

Last Sunday, we had a baptism during our morning service. Do you know what happened afterwards? They took pictures. Sometimes, I get to hold the baby for the pictures, which makes it more fun for me. Sometimes, they email me a picture to post on the church's Facebook page. But they always take pictures. Why? Because a baptism is a big deal. Not just because it's a traditional thing we do. In baptism, God washes away all the sin a child is born with and all the sin they will ever commit. In baptism, God claims our children as his own and promises them eternal life. For all those reasons, I took pictures after my children's baptisms, too. Joseph and Mary didn't take any pictures, but in our gospel lesson for today we have an important moment in Jesus' life. It was not his circumcision – which is the Old Testament parallel to baptism. According to Old Testament law, when Jesus was forty days old, his parents had to offer a sacrifice to purify Mary and present Jesus to the Lord as the firstborn son. Joseph and Mary were very serious about their faith, so they did all these things for Jesus. Now, I'm sure this was one of many memories of their son's life. And yet God only records a handful of incidents from Jesus' childhood. God isn't interested in sentimental journeys down memory lane. Every event God tells us about is significant. **What does this tell us about Jesus?**

I.

Jesus was about six weeks old when they brought him to the temple. Obviously, they weren't living in a stable anymore. They had family in Bethlehem, so maybe they moved in with relatives. But they went to Jerusalem which was about ten miles away. They had to have an animal for the sacrifice. The law required a lamb, but it allowed poor people to substitute a dove or a pigeon. That's what Joseph and Mary brought – which shows us that at least at this moment, they were poor. In our day, carpenters make decent money and it was always a skilled trade and perhaps later, Joseph did make more money. But remember, they weren't in Nazareth where all his customers were. They had been in Bethlehem for six weeks already, providing for a new

baby, so at least at this point in their lives, things were tight. Jesus didn't get a free pass in life. He came to face the difficulties that exist in a sinful world.

Right at the end of the lesson, Luke says, **“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”** Somewhere, you have pictures of your children when they were newborns. How old are they today? Mine are adults, so when I look at those pictures, it's amazing how much they've changed and learned and how much more they can do now. But if your kids are ten or even five, that's still true. If you have a baby who's six or seven months old, get out those pictures. It will amaze you how much that child has changed. That happened to Jesus.

But there's more here. In the ancient world, close to half of all children died before their first birthday. But Jesus grew and became strong. He was a healthy baby. And he was filled with wisdom. Not surprising for who he was. A sinless child would seem amazingly wise by our standards. And the grace of God was on him. This was a special child. A unique child. Because he was the Son of God. But he was also a very real, human baby. He did everything that we have to do. He grew. He learned. He even had to obey the Law of Moses that God gave for his people to observe. In the Old Testament, God sometimes took the form of a human being to talk to people. But this wasn't like that. Jesus was as real a human being as you and I are. We have a body, so Jesus had a body. We have a mind and a heart, so Jesus had a human mind and heart, that had to grow and develop like ours do. We have a soul, so Jesus had a soul, too. Why? Because God's plan was for Jesus to take our place in life and in death and even in hell. So he had to be all that we are – body and soul, mind and heart – in order to rescue us from all that sin does to us. God shows us here how completely human Jesus was. **What does this tell us about Jesus? How real he is as a man.**

II.

When Joseph and Mary went to the temple they met Simeon and Anna. Now we know nothing about these two people except what God says here. Simeon came first. God had promised him that he wouldn't die until he had seen the coming Messiah. So he was probably an old man by this time. The Holy Spirit brought him there with a message for Mary and Joseph. I think it's interesting that Luke does not call him a prophet and we have no record of him giving any other message from God. But God had guided his entire life to this one moment when he held the Christ child in his arms and spoke these words about him.

Simeon said, **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.”** Simeon was ready to die and go home to heaven because God had kept his promise. He had seen the Savior – even though he would not live to see one single miracle or hear one single sermon from Jesus. **“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.”** That baby was the true light that God sent into the world for all of us Gentiles. He was the true glory of Israel. God created and protected and guided that people for fifteen centuries so that Jesus could come from them. In him, all our sins are washed away. In him, we have the light that leads us to heaven.

That hymn is so beautiful we still it in our evening services. If you remember the old hymnal, we sang it after communion. But it's not the only thing Simeon said. He turned to Mary and 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.”**

What was he talking about? First of all, Jesus' ministry. He would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. All those who heard his words and trusted in him would rise. They would live in heaven with him – which is what they're doing right now. But all those who rejected him would fall all the way to hell. In fact, in their dealings with Jesus, the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. What does that mean? The religious leaders of Israel – the Sanhedrin, their ruling council, the priests and Levites and rabbis, the Pharisees and the Sadducees – that entire religious apparatus that dominated life in Israel, would be revealed for what they really were. They all claimed to be God's representatives. They all acted like God and his word were the things they cared about most. But when they dealt with Jesus, you could see if they truly had faith or not. If they believed, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, they refused to condemn him. But if they rejected him, they spoke against him. They schemed and plotted. They argued with him and slandered him and in the end, perverted their entire justice system to kill him – to their own everlasting shame and condemnation in hell.

In the process, a sword pierced Mary's heart. Joseph apparently died before Jesus' ministry started, so he didn't have to see what his step-son would endure. But Mary was there at the foot of the cross and watched her son die. I don't know if we can imagine what that felt like.

The other person who spoke to them was Anna. Now, Luke does call her a prophetess. She spoke about Jesus to everyone who was waiting for the Savior to come. Why did God send these two people to Joseph and Mary? To remind them who this was and what he had come to do. Now, God had given them that message before Jesus was born. But even so, he found it necessary to underline that point for them. Why? Because they were so close to the child that it would've been easy to lose sight of the big picture. They were getting up in the middle of the night to feed him. They were changing his diapers and carrying him around. Soon, they would be watching him crawl and picking him up with he fell and teaching him new words. While he had no sin, he was a real, human baby. It would've been easy to forget how much more he was. So God told them again.

God recorded this for us, too, because we live in a world that wants to forget who this child was. Not so long ago, most people were willing to accept that a man named Jesus probably did live in Israel. He must have been a great teacher because he had such an impact on so many people. But even then, they rejected the idea that he was God and Savior of the world as total nonsense. Sadly, today it's worse. Today, the scholarly community has pretty much concluded that there is no real evidence that Jesus ever lived. Sadly, many people consider him just one more example of religion polluting the minds and hearts of people who would be better off without it.

It shouldn't surprise us that we live in a world like that. Jesus lived in a society that totally revolved around God's Old Testament word. Yet, the vast majority of their leaders were unbelievers. The vast majority of his people rejected him when he came. If that happened in a world where God's word was part of every aspect of life, what could we possibly expect today? The gospels make clear that even in that society, there were thieves and prostitutes and murderers. What can we expect in our world? We live in a society that cares nothing for the true word of God, and that shows in the way Christians are portrayed on TV. It shows in the morals that are accepted in our society and in the demand that we accept sinful choices, too. All that puts pressure on us. It's hard to stand up for two parent families when a third to half of all children in our society come from single parent or blended families. It's hard to insist that Jesus alone saves when people accuse you of hate speech if you say some other religion is wrong. It's hard to hang on to the truth when you constantly hear that something else is true. I can't count the number of times that I've heard members of churches I served tell me something that completely contradicts what Christianity teaches. And they didn't even realize that was the case.

It wasn't just Mary and Joseph that had to be reminded of what was true. We need it, too. And do you know why? Because we're all born sinners. The natural instinct of the human heart to turn away from God. We think we're good people. We think God should reward us when we do good. We think that we should get to decide for ourselves what we're going to believe and what is good or bad for us. In fact, our sinful human hearts think that God should get on board with our choices. Now, as believers, the new man inside us fights against that sin with all his might. But he doesn't always win. He has to be renewed by the gospel message. If he isn't, we will forget what we have been taught. We'll start to believe that we get to heaven because we're good people. It's like your faith has a half-life – it decays a little bit every day. For as long as we live here, we have to keep renewing our faith, or it will die.

So God sent Anna and Simeon to remind Mary and Joseph and Luke and us that this child is God and man, that this child is the Savior of the world, that this child would die and rise and pay for all our sins – even our tendency to forget what he has taught us. God forgives us for all the sin and weakness in our hearts and for all the times we forgot what was true and for all the times what he said was hard and we wrestled with it. In that message, God reaches inside us and renews our faith. God builds up the new man to fight the good fight against our sinful nature. He carries us through this life to the life to come.

So what do all this teach us about Jesus? How much more he is than just a man. Jesus is our Savior. He will continue to remind us of that truth until he brings us home to heaven. Hear that truth to renew your own faith. Share that truth, to encourage your brothers and sisters in faith and to bring others to faith. God will work through the truth in your heart and in theirs. Amen.