

Christmas Message

Title: “Recognizing the Divine Blessing”

Luke 2:21-40 ~ December 25, 2011

OBJECTIVE: *To see how our obedience and trust in God prepares us for God’s blessings.*

Announcements

- Welcome / guests
- January 1 – regular services next Sunday – Children, Youth, and Adult S.S. classes – and coffee!
- Prayer Gathering – January 8th
- Offering envelopes

Opening prayer

One of the most difficult parts of life is to recognize God’s activity – to recognize when He is doing something in your life. There is a sense that we can trace everything back to God since He is sovereign, but we must also realize that even though He allows / permits some things, He is not the direct cause of them (i.e. sin). So, there is a great challenge in our life - how can we recognize when God is doing something in our midst?

In our passage this morning, we read of Joseph and Mary as they have baby Jesus circumcised, and as they later journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem to follow the requirements of Mosaic Law.

When the young family arrives at the temple in Jerusalem, God had providentially prepared two people to meet them - a man named Simeon – and a woman named Anna.

The passage before us today is not written by Luke to simply take up space...it has some specific purposes. A primary purpose is to establish the fact of the faithful home Jesus was raised in. That from infancy He followed the Law. The primary purpose of this passage is to provide credible witnesses who identify the baby as the promised Messiah. I also see a secondary purpose – to help us see what values and practices are important in our life if we want to recognize God’s hand at work in our life.

Read Luke 2:21-24

Build a home that obeys God’s Word. *vs. 21-24*

These verses tell us that Joseph and Mary were faithful to the details of Mosaic Law. Obedience will allow your heart and mind to recognize God’s work in your life.

Vs. 21 plainly tells us that on the eighth day, “...when it was time to circumcise Him...” Lev. 12:1-3 are the basis for the timeline here. “A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days...On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.”

So, in obedience, on Jesus’ eighth day of life, they take Him to be circumcised. This was probably done there in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary were also obedient to the word of the Lord through the angel Gabriel (Matt. 1:21) when they named the baby, Jesus.

Vs. 22 takes place forty days after Jesus’ birth. Once again, Lev. 12 gives us the basis for their actions. “Then the woman must

wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding...When the days of her purification for a son...are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering.” 12:4-6

Not only did they go to the Temple for Mary’s purification, but since Jesus was the firstborn male in the family, they had to consecrate Him to the Lord in keeping with another O.T. law found in Exodus 13:2, “Consecrate to Me every firstborn male.”

Luke writes these details to show us a couple of things. **First**, it shows us the kind of home Jesus was raised in. We see that Joseph and Mary were God-fearing – God obeying people. They lived according to the Word of God – according to His commands. Their adherence to the Mosaic Law regarding the birth of Jesus demonstrates this for us. Jesus was going to be raised in a home that knew and obeyed God’s Word. **Also**, it shows us that Jesus was raised in a poor home. The offering that was prescribed in the Law for Mary’s purification was a lamb and a pigeon or a dove. However, the Law made provision for poor families that didn’t have/or couldn’t afford a lamb. Instead of a lamb, they could bring two pigeons – or two doves – which is detailed for us in Luke 2:24.

The world is full of people who give lip service to God – but the depth of their understanding and commitment goes only as deep as their lips. Joseph and Mary were committed to obeying God – even when it was costly for them – even when it was difficult for them.

What is your home like? Men – do you lead your home in obedience to God’s commands? Do you teach and model grace and truth?

Let’s read vs. 25-26

Trust in the promises of God vs. 25-26

Simeon was a man who is described as “righteous” and “devout”. These two words are a bit unfamiliar in our modern-day vocabulary. **Righteous** speaks of his standing before God. Because of his faith in God and the promises of God, he was “righteous” in the eyes of God. **Devout** means *deeply and faithfully religious*. This has the idea of obedience – of living out his faith. History has always been filled with multitudes of people who claim to be righteous – they claim to be followers of God, but their heart’s attitude and life choices reject God and His Word.

The fact that Simeon is “righteous” and “devout” is crucial to his credibility as a witness. Simeon took the Word of God – the promises of God literally. The nation of Israel looked religious, but their heart was far from God! The Temple was active – but the majority of the people had lost their confidence in God – their hope was only in themselves – not in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But Simeon was not simply going through the motions – he had heartfelt faith in God! It’s amazing what God had revealed to him - that before he died, he would see the “Lord’s Christ” – or the Messiah! In verse 25, Luke calls this “the consolation of Israel”. What is the “consolation of Israel”?

The “consolation of Israel” was a synonymous term for the Messiah – the consoler – the comforter of Israel. The Messiah was the promised deliverer – the anointed one of God that would deliver God’s people – the Jews – from their sin and oppression. The Messiah was the great hope of righteous and devout Jews in the first century. However, after hundreds of years where the Messiah never showed up, many people had begun to doubt God’s promise of sending a Messiah, and as a result many people began to live their lives according to their own guidelines and their own way of living. Does this sound familiar?

This seems to be a mirror image of how most people live today. God seems distant at best – and to some, they doubt if He exists at all. The result is that more and more people are living life according to their own philosophy and their own rules – instead of looking to God’s Word as their guide for life. Simeon was a man who held on tightly to the promises of God. He was probably ridiculed and laughed at by many of his peers. After all, he was holding onto the promises of God – he was taking God’s Word literally.

We also see that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (vs. 25) and the Spirit led him to the Temple that day.

We first saw that if we want to recognize God’s work in our life we need to be obedient (like Joseph and Mary), and Simeon shows us a second key – that we need to trust God and His Word.

Do you trust the promises of God in your life? Are you living your life in such a way that you are able to see the immanent presence of God in your daily steps?

Embrace God's salvation – Jesus. vs. 27-32

Because Simeon was looking for the Lord each day of his life, God allowed him to see the Messiah – the one that would bring salvation to all people. Let's look at Simeon's prayer of praise and thanksgiving – at the key points in it. All of these points are key things that Jesus brings to those who embrace Him. All of these points are the reasons why Christmas is so wonderful – and why its meaning is much more than presents and feasting.

1. Peace (“...now dismiss your servant in peace.”)

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” *Luke 2:14*

“...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.” *Phil. 4:9b*

Jesus brings peace to you and me – because when we have faith in Him – in His sacrifice for our sins – then we can be at peace knowing that our standing before God is righteous. We no longer need to fear His judgment – because our sins have been forgiven – past, present, and future sins! Jesus indeed brings peace for those who trust in Him.

Can you say – like Simeon – ‘*Lord, if you take me now, I'm at peace – I have no fear of Your judgment!*’

2. Salvation (“...have seen your salvation...”)

“...and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” *Matt. 1:21*

“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” *John 1:29*

When you see Jesus – when you hear a sermon about Him – when you sing songs and worship Him – with your mind you are “seeing” the means and object of our salvation! Simeon held Jesus in his arms – I wonder what it was like for Simeon to hold baby Jesus – only forty days old – to hold Him in his arms and know that this infant was the long awaited Messiah! This infant was the promise of universal blessing that God spoke about to Abraham, David, and Jeremiah!

Have you looked upon Jesus for your salvation?

3. Sight (“...in the sight of all people...”)

“...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” *John 14:9*

“Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” *2 Cor. 4:2*

Christianity is not a secret religion – it's not a religion that only accepts certain kinds of people. The claims of Christ are public – they are available to anyone – and they are available to you this

morning! Don't walk away without placing your faith in Jesus this Christmas!

4. Revelation (“...*a light for revelation to the Gentiles...*”)

For a first century Jew, this was a controversial thing to say! Pious Jews didn't like Gentiles – they were hated and to say that God was reaching out to the Gentiles was not a popular thing to say!

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.” *John 14:6*

Jesus came to earth so that all of us could be God's people. God graciously chose Israel to be His ‘chosen people’ so that the nation could then bless all the nations with the truth God gave them – and the example they were supposed to be.

They were to be a light among the nations.

However, they failed to obey this divine task, and in the darkness of the first century, the light of God entered the world in flesh (*John 1:4-5*).

Today, we are two-thousand years removed from the birth of Jesus – and we still have many people who believe there are many ways to God – many paths to God. Jesus revealed to the world that there is one God – and only one way to that God – through Him and His sacrifice for your sins.

5. Glory (“...*for glory to your people Israel.*”)

This relates back to the great covenants God made with Abraham, David, and Jeremiah.

“...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Abraham).” *Gen. 12:3b*

Jesus was a Jew – He came from Israel and revealed God and salvation to all men – to all women – no matter if they’re Jew – or Gentile. It is in this way that the baby would be the glory of Israel.

He was born a Jew – in the Messianic line of David. He was raised as a Jew according to the Law of Moses. He ministered, preached, and healed many Jews and Gentiles during His ministry on earth, and He died for the sins of the world outside the gates of Jerusalem – the city of Zion.

Israel’s greatest glory – Jesus - is our greatest gift this Christmas.

Jesus was born to die *vs. 33-35*

Simeon not only praises God for the salvation he held in his arms, but the Holy Spirit led him to prophecy about the nation’s response to Jesus and the pain Mary would endure.

“...the falling and rising of many in Israel...” – There is no neutral ground when you meet Jesus! You either embrace Him – or reject Him. You cannot remain neutral or passive when the life and message of Jesus is made known to you. Many of the powerful and self-righteous

who rejected Jesus would fall, and those who put their faith in Jesus would rise up from the depths of their sins. Paul wrote in Romans 9:32-33 “...they have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; but he who believes in him will not be put to shame.’”

Simeon also prophesies that Mary will endure great pain – and this was ultimately fulfilled as she could only stand by and watch as her baby – as Jesus was crucified. I can only imagine that as the sound of each hammer blow on the nails – and when the spear was thrust into Jesus’ side – that she heard these words of Simeon replayed in her mind.

Anna preaches about Jesus vs. 36-38

The last credible witness is Anna – a “prophetess” who was fully devoted to the Lord.

In the Bible, important facts are often confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses, and God has chosen Anna to be a witness along with Simeon. Her husband died when she was probably in her twenties – and for the sixty + years following, she dedicated herself to serving the Lord through prayer, fasting, and speaking God’s Word to crowds at the temple. Her life may seem a bit odd to us from our vantage point, but her faithfulness and dedication to the Lord cannot be ignored!

Her response to seeing Jesus tells us that she knew the significance of this baby. Instead of talking about God

the way she had the last sixty years, she began talking about the baby Jesus.

Notice that she talked to those who were “...looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” I wonder how many people that description excluded.

In a nation that had turned their back on God, and had been living for the outward signs of religion, I’m sure that many of her fellow citizens didn’t believe that God existed – or if He did He didn’t care anymore.

But she found those who did believe – those who still anticipated the promises of God to be fulfilled – and this is who she shared the good news of the Messiah with!

Application – Three things that will help us recognize the hand of God in our life.

Be faithful to God’s commands.

Joseph and Mary were obedient and faithful to God’s commands. Obedience to these commands was not easy – in some ways it was a hardship – but that didn’t stop them. Their obedience to God was not out of convenience. They understood that obedience is not always convenient or easy, but it’s always right.

Trust in God’s promises.

Simeon was an ordinary man – with extraordinary faith. Even when many around him stopped trusting in the Lord...he never did, and God blessed him by allowing him to see Jesus – and to understand that

this infant was the long-awaited Messiah. What a blessing that was!

Dedicate your life to God.

Anna suffered a great tragedy in her life when she lost her husband, yet she didn't get angry at God, she devoted her entire life to Him!

Close in prayer