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LUKE 2:21-38

Today, we leave the *Gospel of John* and go to the *Gospel of Luke*. Today our focus is on the Christmas story...the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've all been out shopping for Christmas presents for our family and friends. We've all seen crowds of people with their arms full of packages. We've all heard clerks in the stores wishing their customers "Happy Holidays."

Many people substitute "Happy Holidays" for "Merry Christmas," don't they? In fact, the policy of many stores is that their clerks are forbidden to wish their customers "Merry Christmas."

Everyone wants to be politically correct. Everyone wants to be all-inclusive. No one wants to offend anyone!

And Christmas is observed by almost everybody. It doesn't matter if they know Jesus or not, they put up a tree and hang lights outside and buy Christmas presents and cook big dinners and have big parties!

That's really an amazing thing when you stop and think about it.

I mean, how often have you celebrated the birth of someone you don't know or believe in?

We might observe the birthday of Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, but we do that, not because we knew them, but because we believed in their existence and because we know and respect what they did.

But, folks all over the world will celebrate Christmas and yet they've never known Jesus and they certainly don't respect or revere what He did.

Christmas has become **big business**. It has become a time when retail businesses gauge the financial success or failure of the entire year.

It has become a reason to shop and to party and to drink and to travel and to cook and to eat and to decorate and to spend lots and lots of money.

I wish I knew what percentage of people even in our own country will truly celebrate the real meaning of Christmas this coming Wednesday.

I believe the *Luke 2* gives us the true meaning of Christmas...from a man we hardly ever think about.

The *second chapter of Luke* tells that a decree from Caesar Augustus had gone out that all the world should be taxed and that a census should be taken.

Now, when we have census here in our country, we can fill out a form and send it in. But, that's not what was done back then. In those days each person had to go to "his own city" to be registered for the census.

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And Luke goes on to tell us that Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem to register for the census. We all know that Mary was far along in her pregnancy with the Lord Jesus Christ and while she and Joseph were in Bethlehem the Lord was born. And He was born in Bethlehem because it had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

Verses 6-7...

This chapter goes on to tell the story of the angel of the Lord coming to the shepherds and announcing the birth of the Lord Jesus.

It tells of the shepherd's leaving immediately and going in haste to find this baby the angel of the Lord had told them about.

It tells of their making this known to others and how they glorified and praised God for all that they had heard and seen.

It tell us that Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

But, our lesson today takes us **from** Bethlehem **to** Jerusalem. Because you see, there were certain things Jewish people did after the birth of a child.

Verses 21-24...

First, we see that Mary and Joseph followed the Law of Moses by having Him circumcised.

This was the sign and seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham, and it was required of every Jewish male who wanted to practice their faith.

Then, **verses 22-24** tell us of Joseph and Mary's taking Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord.

According to the Law of Moses, after a child was born and a certain number of days had past, a sacrifice was to be brought in recognition of the Lord's blessing upon their lives.

This sacrifice might be a lamb or a kid out of their flocks or if they weren't able to bring a lamb or kid they might bring two turtledoves.

And when Mary and Joseph came to offer this sacrifice, we read that they brought a pair of turtledoves.

WHY? Because they could not afford to bring a lamb or a kid.

Jesus, who created all things came into this world and took His place in a family so poor that they weren't able to bring a lamb out of the flock. They brought, instead, the offering of the very poor...two turtledoves.

Verses 25-26...

Very little is known about Simeon. Only Luke mentions Simeon. The name, Simeon, means **"God has heard."** The longing of Simeon's heart was for God to send a comforter and a deliverer.

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And at the end of his life we see that indeed God **had** heard
and we see Simeon at long last meeting the One he had waited
so long to see.

Luke tells us a little bit about Simeon's character... Luke tells us Simeon was a righteous and devout man.

The word for "devout" in **verse 25** is often translated "cautious." And indeed Simeon was very careful how he treated what had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.

He lived a careful, cautious, responsible life...one that was exemplary...one that honored God and brought glory to His name.

Luke also tells us something of Simeon's theology:

Simeon was "**waiting for the Consolation of Israel.**" The word rendered "Consolation" is a direct reference to the Messiah.

Simeon had a hope that he would live to see the Messiah come

How did Simeon have this hope? What or who gave him this hope?

Well, first of all we need to be reminded that the people before the Cross were saved in the same way as the people after the Cross.

Before the Cross, folks looked forward to it...and they knew the sacrificial system God had instituted through Moses pointed to the time when the Lamb of God would be sacrificed.

They may not have understood all there was to know...but they knew enough to know that without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sins...

And they knew enough to know that blood must be shed year after year after year for their sins and they longed for the One who would take away their sins permanently.

Verse 25 tells us the Holy Spirit was **upon** him. And **verse 26** tells us this had been **revealed** to him by the Holy Spirit.

Now, does this mean the Holy Spirit spoke audibly to Simeon? I don't know. Maybe He did.

Maybe Simeon was a student of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and in the stillness of his study of these Scriptures, the Holy Spirit spoke to him and told him, "Simeon, you will live to see this!!"

More than likely Simeon had been told this early in his life and he had lived his entire life in the light of this knowledge.

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Imagine the incredible feeling of having precise insight into exactly what needed to occur before you could die.

I believe this knowledge prompted Simeon to examine his heart and life on a regular basis. I believe this revelation made Simeon want to be ready...always clean before the Lord...because he never knew at what moment he would meet the Messiah.

And don't you wonder how all this took place?

Verses 27-32...

God, in His sovereign wisdom appointed a time and a place for Simeon and Christ to meet. And the meeting took place even though Joseph and Mary knew nothing of Simeon, and he knew nothing of them or how to identify the Child.

But, the Lord overcame those barriers and brought the four people together. Perhaps Simeon approached the parents and initiated a conversation with them.

Maybe Simeon said, "God has directed me to this place today.
God has also promised me I would live to see the
Messiah. Do you know where I can find Him?"

And maybe Mary and Joseph said, "Why, we have Him right here."

And can you imagine how Simeon must have felt when he took this little baby in his arms and pressed Him to his chest, and perhaps leaned his head down to kiss Him?

Can you imagine the joy that must have flooded this old man's heart as he realized God truly **did fulfill His promises?**

And Simeon sang a song...and the song he sang was **a worship hymn**.
He blessed the Lord for keeping His promise in sending the Messiah.

Now Simeon was ready to die!
The word "depart" (v. 29) means
"to release a prisoner, to untie a ship and set sail, to take down a tent and to unyoke a beast of burden..."

Simeon was not afraid of death because it would only free him from the burdens of this life and lead him into the blessings of the next life.

The song Simeon sang was also a **salvation hymn**...
Simeon sang, **"For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."**

Simeon was a man who was led by the Spirit of God, taught by the Word of God, and obedient to the will of God; and therefore he was privileged to see the salvation of God!

But Simeon's song was also a **missionary hymn**...
For a devout Jew standing in the Temple, this was an unusual song. Simeon sang of salvation coming to the Gentiles!

This was unusual because most Jews believed that one day their Messiah would come and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel, and would rule over the heathen Gentile world.

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The Jews hated the Gentiles. The Jews considered Jehovah **their** God and **their** God alone. And the mere thought of salvation being offered to the Gentiles by the Messiah they had been longing for was absolutely foreign to them.

But, here Simeon was...singing a missionary hymn...telling by song that the Messiah has come and that His salvation is for all peoples...without distinction.

It's very probable that the **shepherds** hadn't understood this. When they heard the angels proclaim, "**For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord**", they assumed the "**to you**" meant them and other Jews.

It's also very probable that **Mary and Joseph** hadn't understood this. When Mary and Joseph heard they were to name their son

"Jesus"... "**Yahweh saves**"...because He would save **His people** from their sins, they probably understood "**His people**" to mean only Israel.

But, the Old Testament prophecies are filled with statements that tell us that this salvation would be offered to the Gentiles. The **Book of Isaiah** tells us God had called Israel **and** the Lord Jesus to be a light to the nations.

In light of all the Old Testament prophecies, no one should have been shocked at Simeon's words. He could have had any one of these references in mind.

God loved the **world**...and He sent His Son to die for the sins of the **world** and old Simeon knew this!!! *And when the Jews really realized this, it made their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah even stronger.*

Verses 33-35...

How much, at this point, did Mary and Joseph understand about what would happen to Jesus? How much did they understand about what would be done to Him **on the way to** and **at Calvary**? We don't know.

But we know that when Simeon said these words, especially telling Mary that a sword would pierce her own soul...this must have been disturbing.

Mary was an ordinary woman, called to an extraordinary honor that carried with it an extraordinary burden.

We've all heard the song, "Mary Did You Know?" Last year, Pam Adamson gave me a beautiful little book by the same title written by Mark Lowry. I just want to read to you the words of this song...

***"Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered will soon deliver you?"***

***Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with His hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?"***

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When you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God

***The blind will see
The deaf will hear
The dead will live again***

***The lame will leap
The dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb***

***Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is The Great I Am."***

One day, Mary would give up her only Son.

One day Mary would watch Him die a cruel death.

One day Mary would realize that many of the very ones Jesus came to save would reject Him...that indeed many would rise but many more would fall in Israel and that many would oppose the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and Messiah!

One day Mary would truly feel this sword that would pierce her very soul!!

Verses 36-38...

These verses tell us there was someone else at the Temple that day. An old prophetess named Anna "just happened" to be there. God's timing is always perfect, isn't it? Anna came up just as Simeon was praising and singing.

And she began praising God and speaking to everyone who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Both Simeon and Anna were watching and waiting for Jesus. Both lived their lives in expectancy. They didn't just sit and wait, they lived their lives in service.

My prayer is that we live such lives today! Since we know of His first coming, may we be like Simeon and Anna and tell others. And may we look every day for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

That's our Christmas lesson for today.

I wondered if maybe you'd like to share something with the class this morning. Maybe one or two of you would like to tell us briefly of the time you realized that the Lord Jesus Christ had come to save you from your sins...when like Simeon, your eyes saw your salvation!

Let's just bow our heads this morning and thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's just praise Him for the Lord Jesus Christ who was willing to be born and to suffer and to die and to be raised again that we might live an abundant life right now and an eternal life in His presence.