

That's Our Boy!

First Sunday in Christmas—December 27, 2020
St. Luke's United Church of Christ, Lititz, Pennsylvania
Pastor James Haun

(Worship Aids follow the text of the sermon, starting on page 5.)

Luke 2:21-40

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

When we think of the Holy Family at the Temple, presenting Jesus their newborn son, we visualize a poor and humble couple, overwhelmed by all that was going on around them. This is probably an accurate assessment, as anyone would have felt bowled over by all the amazing events which occurred at that time. But this was not the whole story. Doubtless there were other emotions and reactions from that day, and realizations which came in the days and years which followed as they looked back on that amazing visit. These were days of pride and joy, for Mary, for Joseph, and for all of us, and this is a pride and joy which we should be seizing and celebrating in these days of Christmas.

Joseph and Mary truly were a humble and obedient couple. Their poverty and lack of social influence was clearly demonstrated by their homeless state at the birth of Jesus. Weeks later when they would put forth an offering for Jesus at the Temple when he was presented, we are told that they offered two birds. The law in Leviticus 12:8 commanded that a year-old lamb be given as the offering for such a presentation, and the offering of two small birds was an allowance given for those who could not afford a lamb. They were a poor family, but they were observant Jews! One cannot help but be moved by this gracious and godly couple.

First let us consider a quieter event just before that day in the Temple. *After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* Little is said of this ceremony and it may have been conducted at a nearby synagogue. The emphasis is upon the naming of the boy: Jesus! Naming a child is such a proud event! For each of my children I can gladly tell you the meaning of their name – middle name included! There are names from former generations in our family. There are biblical names given in hopes that the faith and grace of these heroes will be carried on in our children. Most recently we have a granddaughter named after my mother, and I could not be happier. Some see things a little differently and are careful to avoid passing on family names. Each of their children are given names which are unique within their family, with the expectation that this life will be lived like no other life before them, and that this child will be a different and better kind of blessing. Whatever one's thoughts on the selection of a name, all can agree that a naming is a proud event! I often joke that we Germans are very careful to keep our pride in our children a deep secret. We may not boast, but the pride is there!

Like his cousin John, born just months earlier, this child was given a name which was not from the family, but was a name given by God and communicated to their parents by an angel. He was named Jesus in obedience to the angelic announcement. Jesus was actually a very common name in those days and a careful study of the New Testament turns up a number of others similarly named. Jesus means "the Lord saves."

How joyful a moment. This is our boy! This is our son! This is a child of Abraham, a Jew, and one of God's chosen people. This is a special child and is God's saving gift

to our troubled nation. In this season of Christmas, we are invited to join Mary and Joseph in their celebration. *To us a child is born! To us a son is given!*

Days later came the visit to the Temple for the presentation of their son to the Lord. Mary and Joseph's joy and amazement was about to be multiplied. It is there in the Temple courts that they met Simeon. This saint is mysterious as nothing is known of him except for these few verses in the Scripture, but it appears that he was a godly man of note in his time. He is introduced as *righteous, devout, and the Holy Spirit rested on him*. Not only that, but he had been told by the Holy Spirit that though he was old, he would see the promised Savior of Israel before his death. This is a man of some spiritual stature! Luke tells us that Simeon was guided by the Spirit to the Holy Family, and upon finding them he took Jesus in his arms and praised God. Mary and Joseph must have been taken aback to find this elderly man suddenly appearing and seizing their child! The words he spoke are celebrated to this day and have been a part of Christian liturgy over the millennia. They have come to be known as the *Nunc Dimittis* and I well remember singing this glad prophecy in the Lutheran Church. *Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, and now he is here! Simeon's pronouncement was glorious and stunning, and Luke tells us, *the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him*. This pronouncement had special meaning for Mary and Joseph as they now heard a prominent man of God affirm the message they had received from angels. Any doubts and thoughts that perhaps these angelic messengers were just part of a crazy dream were now erased. "God is doing something wonderful," they must have thought, "and it all revolves around our boy!"

With Simeon's celebration came a grim side note addressed to Mary. It appears that he wanted her to brace herself for glorious, yet hard times ahead. *Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed -- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."* Jesus would change the world, but this would mean great conflict and many would be injured, including Mary. Mary in particular is singled out for this prophecy. In the not-too-distant future Joseph would disappear from the scene, apparently dying, and worse yet, Mary would know the kinds of sorrows which every mother dreads—the suffering and death of her child. I think of the contemporary song "Mary, Did You Know," which tells of the glories which she would experience, and the greatness of this Royal Son, but with these wonderful promises comes the ominous word that *your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb*—a lamb of sacrifice!

Mary has been remembered as the sorrowful mother, and while one would never dare challenge this title, I cannot help but believe that there is more to this story. Particularly in the Roman Catholic tradition we find an often-maudlin fascination

with her heartbreak which becomes so prominent that it seems to drown out all other aspects of her life and spirit. In time Mary would doubtless have a broken heart, but all through her life I believe that she also had a fighting spirit! Simeon's words must have frightened the young girl, but I can't help but think that it also aroused in her a real toughness. "This is my boy, and I will fight for him, with all I have, for all my days." And she did! Mary was a tireless and fearless disciple of Jesus all through his earthly life in the days following the Resurrection. Simeon had uttered fighting words, and Mary was going to give her all to that conflict.

Their time in the Temple concluded with the entry of another prophet of God, more accurately a prophetess, Anna. Her life story was a sad one. She was briefly married and then widowed, apparently with no children, and proceeded to spend her life around the Temple, praying for the rescue of Israel. Now in her old age, she may have been viewed as just an old eccentric, or Jerusalem's equivalent of the "Crazy Cat Lady." But this day would prove her faith to have been well placed. The Messiah she had awaited was now present, and affirming the prophecies of Simeon she circulated through the Temple courts telling everyone, and I am sure in a loud manner, that the Savior had arrived!

Anna's witness was foreshadowed by Hannah the mother of Samuel. You may remember that beautiful Old Testament story of this infertile woman who cried to God for a child and was granted a son. She named him Samuel and while he was still a boy dedicated him to service in the Tent of Meeting (a precursor to the Temple). Samuel would go on to become a great savior of that nation. He was the last judge of Israel, a prophet and a priest! Anna rejoiced over Jesus, much as Hannah celebrated the gift of her son Samuel, and Jesus would go on to become an even greater savior to Israel. Jesus, much like Samuel before him, was Israel's son who would set his people free, and Anna delighted to tell the people that their great Son had arrived! And so she invites us to rejoice in the Son, born to us.

In this Christmas season we need to remember and celebrate more than just the tender emotions which surround a birth, and we need to recognize Mary and Joseph as more than just overwhelmed new parents. In those days of Jesus' birth, they would come to rejoice and affirm, gratefully and proudly, "This is our boy!" In being born to this human race, Jesus was *born to us*, bringing us joy, hope and great promise. May we never speak of Christmas as only the time when God's Son came to the earth in a faraway place, but let us, with godly and humble pride, say with Joseph and Mary, with Simeon and Anna—"That's our boy!"

Mary, Did You Know? By Mark Lowry

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and
daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've 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 the storm with his
hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God.

Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know?

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 would one day rule the
nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know?

Worship Aids

Confession of Sin:

As we come before the Almighty on this Lord's Day, let us remember the words of Simeon, spoken of the newborn Christ, and spoken to Mary, and to us:

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Take a moment to consider Christ as our judge. How shall we live so that we shall not fall but be raised up on the last day? What inner thoughts of our minds should we be discussing with Jesus, as He already can read those thoughts?

Words of Assurance:

To all who confess their sins and draw near to God, there is Good News. In Christ the crucified, our sins are nailed to the Cross and we are raised with Him in victory. Simeon realized the wonderful salvation which had come in Christ. Delight with this aged prophet in his words of celebration:

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

An Affirmation of Faith:

Hebrews 1:1-4

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

A Prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, make me worthy to understand the profound mystery of your holy incarnation, which you have worked for our sake and for our salvation. Truly there is nothing so great and wonderful as this, that you, my God, who are the creator of all things, should become a creature, so that we should become like God. You have humbled yourself and made yourself small that we might be made mighty. You have taken the form of a servant, so that you might confer upon us a royal and divine beauty.

You, who are beyond our understanding, have made yourself understandable to us in Jesus Christ. You, who are the uncreated God, have made yourself a creature for us. You, who are the untouchable One, have made yourself touchable to us. You, who are most high, make us capable of understanding your amazing love and what wonderful things you have done for us. Make us able to understand the mystery of your

incarnation, the mystery of your life, example and doctrine, the mystery of your cross and Passion, the mystery of your resurrection and ascension.

Blessed are you, O Lord, for coming to earth as a man. You were born that you might die, and in dying that you might procure our salvation. O marvelous and indescribable love! In you is all sweetness and joy! To contemplate your love is to exalt the soul above the world and to enable it to abide alone in joy and rest and tranquility. —Angela of Foligno, 1248 - 1309

Benediction:

May God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, give us grace, mercy, and peace; may they be ours in truth and love. —2 John 3 (the Good News Bible)