

## **Christmas Message**

### **Simeon, Anna and going home, Luke 2 vs 18-39**

I hope you had a lovely Christmas. Maybe you have been away at family or friends and you are travelling home. How do you feel? Has it been such a great Christmas that you will remember the happy times for years to come? Or has it been a Christmas you want to forget as quickly as possible? You feel disappointed because friends and family have let you down! Christmas can be a very lonely time for some. Christmas may bring back memories of a loved one who has died. Life is like a mountain range, full of ups and downs, highs and lows and full of joys and sorrows.

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 18 v 24, “that a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Dear friend I would like to tell you about this friend. He is the best friend you could ever wish for; **His name is Jesus**. Jesus loves you and He proved His love when He gave His life for you on the cross. He paid the penalty of your sins so that with your repentance and faith He can be your friend. He promises to be your friend for ever. In Hebrews 13 v 5, His promise to us is; “I will never to leave you nor forsake you.” If you take the Lord Jesus as your Saviour today you will never regret it, He will give you a new life, a new purpose and a new future. He will walk with you through life’s changing scenes.

We turn now to Luke 2 vs 18-39. Take time at the end of this talk to read these lovely verses. We break into the story as the shepherds are returning from Bethlehem having seen with their own eyes the promised Saviour, Christ the Lord. These shepherds had been chosen by God as witnesses of the truth that His Son had been born. When they met Jesus (even as a baby), their lives were changed forever. Shepherds were generally looked down on; they were seen as having low or little value. No-one gave them the time of day; most were not interested in what they had to say. But this day was different! Everyone wondered at what the shepherds told them. The shepherds could not contain themselves. They were bursting to tell others about Jesus. They praised and glorified God themselves because of what they had seen and heard.

On the other hand, it is said of Mary, the mother of Jesus that she kept her thoughts to herself. In verse 19 it says that she “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Mary kept everything in her heart (as a person would gather costly treasure). In verse 51, we have the same expression. We never read of Mary outwardly opening her heart and expressing her thoughts. It is good for us to meditate on what the Bible teaches, which will help us to have a deeper understanding of God.

Verses 21-24 are remarkable! According to the law of Moses, which was appointed by God, Jewish parents had certain duties to perform at the birth of a son. He had to be circumcised and he had to be named; this was to happen after eight days. Circumcision identified the child as a member of the Jewish nation. Circumcision also signified the separation of a people from the world to God. The Lord’s circumcision was to fulfil the law and it identified Him as a Jew. Mary and Joseph had been told by the angel before He was conceived in the womb that “Jesus” was the name chosen by God.

There were also other duties and ceremonies that had to be carried out. So the family left Bethlehem and travelled to Jerusalem to present the baby to the Lord and to further fulfil the law. The firstborn child had to be redeemed at a price of five shekels (Numbers 18 vs 15-16). Next a sacrifice had to be offered up. Those who could afford it had to bring a lamb, but the poor had to bring a pair of turtle doves or young pigeons. What Mary and Joseph had to offer this sacrifice of the poor indicates the poverty of the home into which the Lord Jesus chose to come. This sacrifice was for Mary because by the law she was ceremonially unclean and in need of cleansing by the shed blood of a substitute.

Everything the law required was carried out faithfully by Mary and Joseph. It is clear in the Bible that Jesus, the author of the law, was born under the law and was subject to it (Galatians 4 v 4). The Lord Jesus fulfilled the law flawlessly during His life on earth (Psalm 40 vs 6-8 gives a prophetic view of this). We see the humility of the man Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus met every claim of the law. The Lord Jesus did not need to be redeemed, He was sinless and holy, He was without sin. The Lord Jesus came to be the redeemer! Philipians 2 v 8: "And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

In verses 25-35 our attention is drawn to a man named Simeon, a godly man who was waiting for the "consolation of Israel." Simeon was one of a small number of Jews in Israel at the time who were waiting for their Messiah to appear. Simeon was upright, he was righteous, and he kept God's word. Simeon's name means "hearing". The Bible says: "So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10 v 17). This suggests that Simeon spent much of his time pouring over the Scriptures. He was devoted to the Lord. Simeon was a man in whom the Holy Spirit was pleased to dwell.

This was not like the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that every believer receives when he or she puts their faith in Christ. This was a special blessing for a man who was marked out by God because of his faithfulness. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would see the anointed one, the Messiah, the Lord's Christ, before he died. I can imagine that every morning Simeon woke he would think, will it be today? Simeon waited and watched for the Lord. Simeon lived his life in the sure hope of meeting the Messiah. And he did! God was faithful to him.

The Holy Spirit led him to go to the temple. He probably had been there previously on numerous occasions, looking for the baby. Most days he returned disappointed, but this day was different! It was divine timing; it was God's time! The parents brought the child Jesus into the temple and Simeon knew immediately who this child was. The Holy Spirit had prompted him. Simeon, gently, tenderly, reverently, took the baby from Mary and cradled Him in his arms. These were arms of love and care unlike the hands of the wicked evil men who would abuse and crucify the Lord thirty-three years later. Simeon's heart was moved, as he blessed God. His waiting was over, and he was now ready to die in peace. This was according to the promise God had given him.

Can you imagine how Simeon felt as he gazed into the baby's face? He had probably held many a baby in his arms, but none like this baby. This was God's son! This was Emmanuel (God with us). The One who had come from heaven to save and to show God's love to mankind. He was also the One who was the "light of the world" (John 8 v 12). He was to be a light for the Gentiles (non-Jews) and to the Jews. Paul a Jew said in Acts 26 v 23: "That the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." Many individuals would come to salvation through the Lord and Israel as a nation will be saved in a future time. The Lord will come to reign, and He will bring glory to Israel. Psalm 98 v 2 tells us: "the LORD has made known His salvation."

Simeon turned and blessed the parents, then spoke directly to Mary. Both Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was said about their son Jesus. It is interesting to note that Simeon never blessed the Lord Jesus, recognising His greatness. He warned that this coming of the Lord Jesus would not be received by everyone. The Jews were always looking for a sign, but they missed Him when He came into their midst and walked among them. Simeon warns Mary that a sword (or a dagger) will pierce her soul. Without doubt this took place at Calvary's cross. The cross revealed the true thoughts of many. Sinful hearts were brought to light by their attitude to the Lord Jesus. He was hated without a cause. He was bruised and spat upon. He was ridiculed and mocked. He was rejected by His own people, the ones He came to save. I am sure all the things that Mary had treasured in her heart came before her as she watched her Son suffer on the cross. John 19 v 25 tells us, "But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." Out of love and pity, Jesus gave her into the keeping of John, who led her away from the scene and took her into his own home.

In verses 36-38 we read about Anna. Anna was a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. Her name means "grace." It is difficult to know exactly what age she was, but she was a very old lady. It seems to me that she could have been married in her teens, lived with her husband for 7 years and then lived as a widow for 84 years. All the time that Anna had been a widow she fully committed her life to God. She never left the temple or the surrounding courts. She served the Lord, worshipping with fasting and praying night and day. What did she pray for? She, I believe was praying and waiting for God to send His Son from heaven. Anna was a widow indeed. 1 Timothy 5 v 5 tells us "she who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day."

She, too, like Simeon came at God's appointed time into the temple. I am sure she knew Simeon well and when she saw him with the Babe in his arms, she put two and two together and realised that this was the promised One. Undoubtedly, she saw the joy in Simeon's face. Her prayers and her fasting were over, and she gave thanks to God. Her heart overflowed in praise and worship. She had patiently waited for this moment for over 80 years. Can you imagine praying for something for over 80 years without an answer to your prayer?

Today we expect to get answers for everything within minutes. If you want an answer about anything you search it on the internet, and you usually find out what you want. We must be careful that we do not get impatient in the things of the Lord. "Wait for the LORD: be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (Psalm 27 v 14). It is good to remember Isaiah 55 vs 8-9;

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Anna did what she always did in the Temple courts: she spoke about Jesus the Saviour to the faithful remnant who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. But she had a different message to bring them! The Messiah has come; He is here amongst us; I have met Him! How often do you speak about Jesus? Do you only speak about Him on a Sunday when you are at church? Mothers and fathers, do you speak to your children about Jesus? Christians, in your daily life I challenge you to speak more about Jesus.

Mary and Joseph had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, so they returned to the region of Galilee and to their hometown of Nazareth. Why specifically Nazareth? Yes, it was where they came from, but God had chosen this place from the beginning. The journey from Jerusalem to Nazareth was between 90 - 120 miles depending on the route taken. They walked about 20 miles per day so it would take approximately 5 days. This was a route that Mary would have taken on many occasions. Living in Nazareth she would have walked to the Temple at

Jerusalem and back at least once a year. Life was tough; it would be hot, dusty, dangerous on the road (or path).

But can you imagine the conversation between Mary and Joseph. Would they be talking about how they would bring up the Child? Which bedroom would He sleep in? I am not sure, but I don't think so. For most parents, a child in the home is life changing, but what about Mary and Joseph? They had the responsibility of bringing up the Son of God. Nothing is really said in the Bible about this so we must leave it there. But remember that Mary had treasured everything she had seen and heard over the last few weeks. We are not told but maybe Mary unburdened her thoughts to Joseph.

In our study of Luke 2 vs 18-39 we have been thinking about the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna. Each one of their lives was changed when they met the Lord Jesus. It is impossible for you to meet the Lord Jesus in person today. But He speaks to you through the Holy Spirit and the Bible. You may be at a crossroad in your life. You don't know which way to turn, there are so many voices advising you. I am reminded of a song we sing with the children.

"I met Jesus at the crossroads, where the two ways meet;  
Satan too was standing there, and he said 'come this way,  
lots and lots of pleasures I can give to you this day.'  
But I said no! there's Jesus here, just see what He offers me:  
down here my sins forgiven, up there a home in heaven;  
praise God that's the way for me."

If you come to the Lord Jesus in faith and repent from your sins and believe that He died for your sins on the cross, you will be saved for eternity and He will never let you down. The effect on your life will be amazing!

In closing I want to challenge every Christian. Are you, am I, living my life in the light of the Lord's return? Simeon lived in Jerusalem, he was a just man, (a righteous man). He was righteous because of his faith in God. He was an upright man, in that he lived daily a life that was according to the commandments of God. He was devoted to the Lord and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ. For many a long year Simeon waited patiently, watching for the Lord. I can imagine that as he opened his eyes every morning, he said to himself; will it be today? The promise from God would never be far from his mind and this affected the way he lived.

What about Christians today? Are you devoted to the Lord? Are you living an upright, righteous life as a Christian? Does the promise of the coming of the Lord for you affect your life? Romans 13 v 11 challenges us; "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from your sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." Each Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit when they were saved. We all have access to God's word, the Bible. We can all read about when the Lord is to come again in 1 Thessalonians 4 vs 13-18. You know that the time is near. Our salvation (not our salvation from our sins), but our final salvation is nearer than when we first believed. So like Simeon, we have been told that Christ will come.

For the Christian today, He will come to take us to be with Himself, removing us from this world to His father's house in heaven! Every morning you wake do you think: will it be today? Are you patiently waiting and watching for the return of the Lord? Or is your life too busy, too interesting and too enjoyable to be thinking about that? Simeon was on red alert, watching every day for the promise of the Messiah. Are you, am I in that same frame of mind? I must say I have been challenged by this and I trust you will be too. I pray that listening to this talk or reading this

transcript will affect your life in the power of the Holy Spirit. I urge you to devote the rest of your journey on earth to the Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you. Amen.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Simeon, Anna and going home. This is the third and last talk of the Christmas message series, talk number 1126.

The English Standard Version of the Bible has been used throughout this talk.

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