

Dec. 27, 2020 Lk. 2: 22-40. Gen 15:1-6; 21:1-3
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ENTERING THE SCENE:

This time we reflect on the feast of the Holy Family. We see them in the temple following the laws and customs of their faith tradition and we will find them doing so throughout the gospels. Jesus was born into a family that longed to be the ones to welcome the messiah. Everything in this account alerts us to the fact that this is exactly what has happened. Mary and Joseph get a brief glimpse of what might be going on, but slip back into relative obscurity for another thirty years before Jesus' emerges into the limelight of ministry. Tradition has it that Joseph is long dead by the time Jesus emerges into our view again, so Mary is left alone to ponder the words of Simeon and Anna ;by herself. Do you ever wonder if she ever talked to Jesus about that day in the temple?

Luke 2: 22-40

22 When the time of their **purification** according to the **Law of Moses** had been completed, **Joseph** and **Mary** took him to **Jerusalem** to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the **Law of the Lord**, "Every **firstborn male** is to be **consecrated** to the Lord", 24 and to offer a **sacrifice** in keeping with what is said in the **Law of the Lord**: "a **pair of doves** or **two young pigeons**." 25 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.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: We are told that Jesus grew, became strong, and was filled with the wisdom and grace of God. What do you think it was like watching Jesus grow up?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, all parents look into the eyes of their newborns and wonder what they will be like when grown. Did your mom and dad ever talk to you about that day in the temple with Simeon and Anna? If so, did you ever feel that they had too exaggerated expectations of you? In all those years at the side of Joseph, did you ever have that father/son talk about what a man is? Were you aware of the grace of the Father as you studied and probed life's questions? Thank you for sharing my humanity, so that I might share in your love. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION;

PURIFICATION: Purification meant leaving behind the things of the earth's cycle and to into the eternal cycle of God's love. So for 40 days Mary touched no consecrated thing and can now enter the temple again.

How are Mary and Joseph now entering God's cycle by going through this ritual?

LAW OF MOSES / LAW OF THE LORD / CREATION OF THE LAW: 40 days usually signified enough time for a significant change to occur. In Nu. 8, Ex. 13 and Lev. 12 we find mentioned the 40 day interval after the birth of a first born son to be presented to the Lord.

How does a preparation time for a major life event help you to find God's purpose in your life?

JOSEPH / MARY / FATHER / MOTHER: We find the holy family together in the temple worshiping and fulfilling the requirements of their custom. Luke has both women and men as partners in God's plan.

What example for today's families do you find in this text?

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish faith life. People often saved carefully to make the trip there.

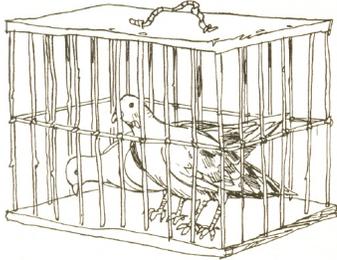
Have you ever felt the call to travel to a holy place? If so, did you go?

CONSECRATED: To consecrate someone or something is to set it or them aside for holy use.

Have you ever set someone or something aside for holy use? If so who/what?

SACRIFICE / REDEMPTION: To redeem something or someone we have to offer something in return.

What are we doing when we sacrifice to obtain something or get something back?



PAIR OF DOVES / TWO YOUNG PIGEONS: The required offering to redeem a first born son of the poor was a pair of doves/pigeons.

How does knowing this help you to understand what is going on in this reading?

SIMEON / ANNA / PHANUEL / ASHER: Simeon means YHWH has heard. Anna means YHWH is gracious. Phanuel means face of God and Asher means good luck.

What is Luke telling us by naming all these people?

WAITING: We get the impression that waiting on God's initiative is a crucial element in Luke's gospel

How does waiting for God's imitative ready you for growth in your faith life?

CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL / PROMISED / SALVATION: All these words indicate that something was desperately wrong or missing in the people's lives.

Is there anything wrong or missing in your faith life today that needs help or consolation?

HOLY SPIRIT: God's Holy Spirit is introduced early in Luke's gospel.

How does this alert you to what might be going on in this story?

REVEALED / LIGHT FOR REVELATION: Now it is coming clear what God will do in and through this birth.

How does waiting and praying help you to see what God is doing in your life as it does for Simeon and Anna?

THE LORD'S CHRIST: The Lord's Christ is the longed hoped for messiah promised who would save the people.

Do you have a lively sense of God's presence in Jesus?

TEMPLE COURTS / TEMPLE: The temple and its courts were tangible expressions of the faith life of the people.

Does your church have this same power for you?

PRAISED GOD / GAVE THANKS TO GOD: All in this story recognize God's hand in what was happening.

When was the last time you felt God's presence in such a way that you praised God?

GENTILES / ISRAEL: The inclusiveness of Luke's gospel is represented by both the Gentiles and Israel.

What are the ways we acknowledge God's inclusiveness today in our worship?

MARVELED: When we recognize the deep significance of something we marvel.

When was the last time you said "would you look at that?" when recognizing what God is doing in your life?

DESTINED / SIGN: A sign takes on significance when it points to a destination.

Where are you pointed to this feast of the Holy Family?

SWORD: In Ezek 14:17 we hear about a sword that would pass through the land. Luke is calling to mind the memory of a time of separation.

How does Simeon's prophecy alert us to what is to come?

VERY OLD: To be told that Simeon and Anna were very old implies that a life time of waiting has gone into this moment.

Do you suspect that you also might have to wait a long time to see clearly God's plan in your life?

WORSHIPED / FASTING / PRAYING: These words indicate a way of life while waiting.

What do they indicate for you today as you enter into another year of growth in faith?

GALILEE / NAZARETH: The holy family now goes back home to live into their calling.

How do you imagine those early years of Jesus' life?

GREW / STRONG / WISDOM: Jesus as a human like us in all things but sin goes through the maturation process that we all go through.

Do you think anyone might have noticed something unique about this family during those "hidden" years? What do you think it would have been like to be their neighbor?

GRACE OF GOD: The grace of God is operating in everyone's lives. Some are more aware of it than others.

How aware are you of the grace of God in your life?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 2: 22 // Lk. 12: 2-6 ; Lk. 2: 23 // Ex: 13:2, Lev. 12: 8; Lk. 2:30 // Is. 46:13, 49:6, 52:10; Jn. 8:12; Lk. 2:34 // Lk. 12:51ff; Lk. 2:35 // Jn. 9:39, 19:25ff, Rom. 9:33, 1 Pt. 2:7; Lk. 2:39 // Mt. 2:23;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Sir. 3: 2-7, 12-14; Ps. 128: 1-5; Col. 3:12-21; Lk. 2:22-30

Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 61: 10-63:3, Ps. 148; Gal. 4: 4-7; Lk. 2:22-40

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

In today's gospel we meet a prophetess, Anna. She had been married and was widowed at a very young age. That evidently got her to take the inward path. She no longer left the Temple, it says. It's always distress that gets us to set off on the inward path. And when this distress turns into torment, there often comes a deep experience, an experience that can have enormous importance for our life and perhaps for the lives of others as well. We suddenly recognize our own essence, our true form. A vision such as the one Anna had is an act of knowledge that culminates in the conviction that despite everything, life makes profound sense.

Only a few people have such realizations while taking a course on contemplative prayer. I don't want to label them visions right off, although they can certainly approach that. Here, too, the depth can vary tremendously. Practically everyone has the experience, at least once, of suddenly getting absolute clarity about some issue he or she had been wrestling with for ages. This clarity often appears in some sort of image. The realization blends with a symbolic structure or figure: "She spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." She recognizes in the child salvation for herself and for her people. Such realizations are often simply the return of split-off portions of our consciousness. That doesn't lessen the value of the experience, but it does show us that the Divine isn't far from us, that it reveals itself in such signs and images coming from our deepest essence. We can say yes to ourselves and go on living.

Thus visions and realizations that suddenly occur to us can be a strong motivating force for our lives. But we shouldn't cling to them; rather, we should simply acknowledge their message. For Anna the vision was a profound religious experience. And with her experience she gave others courage. Pgs. 269-70.

Jager, Willigis. [Search For the Meaning of Life](#). Liguori, Missouri. Liguori /Triumph. 1995.

Doves: The dove in scripture has a long history. Most memorable is the dove that was sent out from the Ark after the flood. It is a symbol of guilelessness that could flee to the cliffs and knows the times of migration. In the NT it becomes a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It is also known as the symbol of love.

In the Christian tradition, as reflected in the Gospel stories, we see Jesus as a person of a deep spirituality grounded in and going beyond the Jewish spiritual tradition. Perhaps we can get a better understanding of the deeper consciousness of Jesus and his growth in the spirit by using the more modern language of heteronomy, autonomy, and theonomy as described earlier in this chapter. Heteronomy, remember, is that dimension of life in which someone primarily lives up to the expectations of others, such as family and friends, social and religious traditions. The parents of Jesus are presented in the Gospels as observant Jews who followed the law of Moses. They brought the child Jesus to the temple for circumcision, and later they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Lk: 2:21-2) When Jesus was twelve years old he was taken to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and he worried his parents by staying behind sitting in the midst of the teachers listening to them and asking questions. Jesus and his parents lived up to the expectations of the law, and they participated in the life of the community as Jesus advanced in wisdom, age, and favor before God and the people (Lk. 2:53). Pg. 107.

Wessels, Cletus. [The Holy Web](#). Maryknoll NY. Orbis Books. 2000.

Yet the story of Mary's purification in the temple confuses a number of distinct Jewish rituals.²⁴ For example, the best Greek texts begin the story with a reference to "their purification" (Lk. 2:22), where the only natural meaning in the context is "the purification of Mary and Joseph," since the immediately following verb states that "they [Joseph and Mary] brought" the child to Jerusalem.²⁵ Yet in the 1st century A.D. the Jewish husband did not undergo any purification along with his wife; it was the physical birth that rendered the mother, and only the mother, ritually unclean. Furthermore, Luke conflates two distinct rituals, as the two halves of 2:22 show: the purification of the mother (which, according to Lev. 12:1-8 and later rabbinic statements did require a visit to the tent/temple) and the redemption of the firstborn male child (which required the payment of five shekels to the temple, but not a temple visit). Luke is thus inaccurate when he describes the bringing in of the child to the temple as "according to" the Mosaic Law (2:23-27). He is likewise incorrect when he connects the redemption or "presentation" of Jesus with the sacrifice of doves or pigeons (actually a part of the purification ritual), while he says nothing about the payment of the shekels, a necessary part of the redemption ritual. To be blunt: either Mary was not the source of this story of her purification or else she had a remarkably poor memory about important events involving Jesus and herself. Pg. 210. Meier, John P. [A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus](#). NY: Doubleday. 1991.

Both birth tradition narratives (Matthew and Luke) seem to be largely products of early Christian reflection on the salvific meaning of Jesus Christ in the light of OT prophecies. Pg. 213.

Meier, John P. [A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus](#). NY: Doubleday. 1991.

Simeon had been waiting all his life, and then at last the Christ Child was given to him: he held the Life of the world in his arms. He stood for the whole world in its expectation and longing, and the words he used to express' his thanksgiving have become our own. He could recognize the Lord because he had expected Him; he took Him into his arms because it is natural to take someone you love into your arms; and then his life of waiting was fulfilled. He had beheld the One he had longed for. He had completed his purpose in life, and he was ready to die. But death to him was no catastrophe. It was only a natural expression of the fulfillment of his waiting. He was not closing his eyes to the light he had at last seen; his death was only the beginning of a more inward vision of that light. Pgs. 62-3.

Schmemmann, Alexander. [For the Life of the World](#). NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1998.

Patience dispels clock time and reveals a new time, the time of salvation. It is not the time measured by the abstract, objective units of the clock, the watch, or the calendar, but rather the time lived from within and experienced as full time. It is this full time about which Scripture speaks. All the great events of the Gospels occur in the fullness of time. Pg. 99.

Nouwen, Henri, et al. [Compassion](#). NY: Image Books. 1983.

"You must realize that it is the ordinary way of God's dealings with us that our ideas do not work out speedily and efficiently as we would like them to. The reason for this is not only the loving wisdom of God, but also the fact that our acts have to fit into a great complex pattern that we cannot possibly understand. I have learned over the years that Providence is always a whole lot wiser than any of us, and that there are always not only good reasons but the very *best* reasons for the delays and blocks that often seem to us so frustrating and absurd."

"The Hidden Ground of Love", Letters by Thomas Merton. Edited by William Shannon Ferrar, Straus, Giroux Publishers, New York 1985: Page 591

SUGGESTED READING:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Finis: Many associate the words of the aged Simeon with death. / Grand words of consolation at funerals of the faithful. / Promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, / Simeon might well have dreaded to hold the infant. / But he rejoiced and felt a great peace come over him. / The years of search and waiting were over. / It will never be given to me to do the same, but my days are filled with tensions. / I confront the night with nameless apprehension. / Still you have promised us the same salvation that Simeon saw and held so gladly. / Lord, fill me with the same peace that overtook him. / Let me close my eyes in peace. Freeman, Sean. [Parables, Psalms, Prayers](#). Chicago: Thomas More Press. 1985. Pg. 140.