

Sunday, December 25, 2022 | Go Tell It on the Mountain

Week 6 | Luke 2:22-40 | "*Prosdéchomai*: Awaiting to Welcome"

Towards the end of November, we started our Luke study two weeks ago by kicking off the series "Go Tell It on the Mountain." And during that message, we unpacked the four things Luke wanted his audience to know. Firstly, Luke was among many who had written about Jesus' life. Secondly, though he was not an eyewitness, he was close friends with those who were. Thirdly, he took all he had heard and placed the facts of Jesus' life in order. And, lastly, he wrote all that he wrote because he wanted to give his reader, Theophilus, certainty about the things he had been taught. And the takeaway for us was that we are to see ourselves as Theophilus. In other words, we are to imagine that Luke is writing to us and that, like Theophilus, we are to share the Gospel with others.

In the second week, we moved to the story of an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. We learned through their life that God will always keep his promises. No matter if we are cynical and slow to believe, like Zechariah, or we're disgraced, like Elizabeth, the Lord will stay true to his word, and for those who believe, he will even redeem his people.

In the third week, we were introduced to the mother of Jesus, Mary. Through her example, we learned that God's grace is unmerited, he blesses those who believe in his promises, and those blessings reverse the believer's fortunes. And the natural outcome for those who are the recipients of God's unmerited favor is worship. In other words, they'll magnify the Lord.

In the fourth week, we returned to the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Their son, John the Baptist, is born, and a miraculous thing occurs: Zechariah gets his voice back. And, without skipping a beat, the old priest burst into song, praising God for all he's done. All told, we learned that faith can change a cynic's heart when he's been lovingly reproved by God.

In the fifth week, we explored Luke's take on the Christmas story. And while there is no shortage of applications, we honed in on how God's sovereignty permeates Jesus' birth. From a Roman emperor to an angelic host to a shepherd band, God has directed events according to his will. And if God uses the bad, the good, and the ordinary to accomplish his will, he can use us if we are willing.

Today, Luke shifts the narrative from a nondescript stable to the famed Temple. And in those hallowed halls, two voices proclaim God's Messiah. The first to speak up is a man who had been promised he would not die until he saw "the Christ" with his own eyes. The second is a

woman who had spent a lifetime fasting and praying for God's deliverance. Out of the throngs of people at the Temple this day, only these two saw the babe cradled in Mary's arms for who he was: the Savior.

But what set these two witnesses apart? In a word, **προσδέχομαι** (*prosdéchomai*). *Prosdéchomai* refers to “awaiting to welcome” someone or something. Simeon and Anna saw what others didn't because they were paying attention and they were ready to receive the Messiah. In other words, they were both aware and active.

READ: Luke 2:22-40 (ESV)

²² And 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 ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, **waiting for the consolation of Israel**, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the Temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the Temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were **waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem**.

³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Though the baby Jesus is the catalyst that sparks all the activity in this passage, he is not the one orchestrating events. Instead, it is God who moves the pieces into place, and it is to God that our characters are oriented. Thus, I want you to notice how God choreographed the rendezvous of three different people in three distinct ways:

i. God's word led devout parents to present their child in the Temple (vs. 22-24).

Before we get into the testimonies, Luke provides us with some helpful details to lay the groundwork for what's to come. Verses 22-24 refer to two separate Jewish ceremonies.

First, Luke tells us about **the purification ceremony**. In this ceremony, a Jewish woman would wait forty days after her child's birth before going to the Temple to offer sacrifice (cf. Lev. 12:2-4).

Secondly, the **presentation ceremony** where devoted Jewish couples would present their firstborn to the Lord to show thanksgiving for the child (cf. Ex. 13:2).

Interestingly, Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary presented Jesus with birds to sacrifice rather than a lamb *and* a bird, as was customary. This was because they were poor. Leviticus 12:2-8 stipulates that two birds would suffice if a couple was not wealthy enough to present a lamb for the burnt offering. One bird—which would act as a stand-in for the lamb—would be for the burnt offering that atoned for the individual's sins, in this case, Mary. The other bird would be for the sin offering, which purified an individual and allowed them to enter the presence of the Lord. In fact, most of the couples in Israel presented this kind of "poorer" offering as most of the populace was poor. To offer a lamb was usually only done by those who were *very* wealthy.¹

The point in Luke mentioning this highlights Joseph and Mary's commitment to the Jewish faith. Caesar Augustus' decree brought them to Bethlehem, but God's law brought them to Jerusalem.² Any Jew reading this account would've instantly respected and liked Joseph and Mary.

¹ Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 235.

² Garland, David E., *Luke*, The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Clinton E. Arnold, Editor, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2011), p. 131.

ii. God's Spirit led a devout man to prophecy in the Temple (vs. 25-35).

Though lack any official title, Simeon was a pretty impressive man.

Luke tells us that he was "righteous." The word used is **δίκαιος** (de'-ki-os), which means "just," "upright," "virtuous," or "one who observes divine and human laws." Throughout the N.T., it is often used to describe prophets and martyrs.³ It's the same word used to describe Joseph (cf. Mat. 1:19), John the Baptist (cf. Mr. 6:20), and it is the same word that Pilate's wife used to describe Jesus himself (cf. Mat. 27:19). Meaning, Simeon was a blameless and law-abiding citizen.

Simeon was also "devout." Again, the Greek word used here is **εὐλαβής** (yoo-la-bace'); which means religiously faithful. Interestingly, *dikaios* speaks more of moral uprightness, whereas *yoolabace* speaks more of religious piety. Meaning Simeon was not only, generally speaking, a pretty good dude, but he was also an outstanding and exemplary Jew.

Simeon was not only righteous and devout, but he was filled with the "Holy Spirit." This last characteristic is the most telling. To have the Holy Spirit upon an individual is to have favor and power with God. Because Simeon was filled with the Spirit, he went to the Temple at the precise moment when Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus were there. So it wasn't only his words but his movements that were directed by the Spirit.⁴

We're also told that Simeon was so righteous, devout, and filled with the Holy Spirit that God said he would see the Messiah before he died. How remarkable to know your life would be preserved until you saw THE promised One of God?! What sort of life had Simeon lived to be given such a reward as that? He is like a sentinel on the city's wall, awaiting his King, and now that the King has finally come, the watcher's duty is done.⁵ His post on earth is no longer needed. It is time to be honorably discharged from service. EXAMPLE: Binoculars

Simeon's prophecy has a ton of implications. But, specifically, for us, the Lord's salvation is not only the glory of Israel but a revelation to the Gentiles. Here at the Temple—the locus of God's presence—from the mouth of a devout Jew in the audience of two faithful Jewish parents, God

³ Bock (1994), p. 238.

⁴ Garland (2011), p. 135.

⁵ Bock (1994), p. 241.

affirms His plan to see the non-Jewish world saved (cf. Isa. 55:5).⁶ The salvation of all peoples, not just Israel, was always a part of God's plan.

From here, Simeon moves to address Mary, and with these words, we get the first glimpse that Jesus' advent in our world will be met with opposition. According to Simeon, Jesus will be such a controversial character that he will be the "fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed...." And, apparently, Mary herself will not be exempt from trouble as Simeon explains that "a sword will pierce through [Mary's] own soul...". And not just any sword, the Greek word Simeon uses is **ῥομφαία** (*rhomphaia*), and it refers to a large, slightly curved, one-edged sword whose handle would be almost as long as the blade.⁷ In fact, the root of *rhomphaia* means to break or tear.⁸ It had a superior cutting ability that forced many armies to reinforce their armor if they knew they'd encounter such a weapon on the battlefield.⁹ Looking at pictures online, it appears to be an over-engineered machete with a long enough handle that could easily accommodate two hands.

The point is that Simeon was telling Mary that her baby boy would bring her extreme emotional pain someday. Mary, the one who heard the Son of God's first cries in Bethlehem, would also hear His last cries on Calvary. And how tragic it is for a mother to realize that her own Son would have to die in her place to receive God's forgiveness. This truth would be like a sword piercing her heart. You see, any mother would've gladly taken the place of their own Son if it meant saving their life. Yet here, in this unique way, only the Son could take His mother's place so His own mother might be saved.

iii. **God's providence led a devout woman to praise in the Temple (vs. 36-38).**

Lie Simeon, Luke gives us Anna's credentials. She'd only been married seven years when, tragically, her husband died. Rather than remarry as would've been custom, she remains a widow for the next 84 years, which would've made her over 100 years old in our text. And Luke tells us that she did "not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day." She had spent a lifetime begging and pleading for God to send His salvation to redeem

⁶ Green, Joel B., *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1997), p. 146.

⁷ Bock (1994), p. 248.

⁸ General Editors, "Knight Fight: The Rhomphaia Sword (Season 1, Episode 3) | History," *The History Channel*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w41YVv9OzWI>, [accessed December 20, 2020].

⁹ Wikipedia contributors, "Rhomphaia," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rhomphaia&oldid=993261393>, [accessed December 20, 2020].

Jerusalem and her people. She, like Simeon, was hungrily awaiting God to do what He had promised He would do for His people.

Notice Luke mentions that Anna thanks God and tells us how she spoke to everyone about God and his "redemption of Jerusalem." But nowhere do we see Anna actually interacting with Mary, Joseph, or the baby Jesus. Quite to the contrary, Luke does not highlight a meeting but the timing by saying, "And coming up at that very hour...."

To any passerby in the Temple that day, they would've been edified by Anna's words, but they wouldn't have thought anything was out of the ordinary. If there was going to be an outburst of praise, would not the Temple be the likeliest place? However, only Mary, Joseph, and Simeon can see the significance of Anna's timing. It is possible that Anna didn't even know why she was so moved to give thanks at that time. As Simeon ended his words, another, from across the courtyard, began to give thanks. The timing is too perfect to think it a coincidence. God is forever orchestrating events in history to highlight the importance of his Son.

Effectively, this passage shows us that surrounding our Jesus are two devout and faithful Jewish parents and two remarkable prophetic character references. These individuals represent the best that Israel has to offer. They all testify to the extraordinary nature of who Jesus was.

The Temple was the nerve center of the nation of Israel. One could quickly think of that city as the heart and soul of all Jewish people. And right where Judaism is most condensed—the very epicenter for every Israelite—we find the poetic praises and sincere adoration for Jesus Christ. Worship is freely offered at the feet of the child Jesus by two very pious Israelites. The effect of these two testimonies, right at the beginning of Luke's gospel account, impresses upon us an idea: Jesus, the Christ, was not an outsider; but the rightful recipient of the glory offered by all those who love and follow God.¹⁰ It doesn't matter if you are male or female. And, more shockingly, it doesn't matter if you are Jew or Gentile. This carpenter's Son was recognized by the best of the Children of Israel as the Savior for anyone who believes. They proclaimed that Jesus had come for all. It didn't matter whether you were a man or woman, Jew or Gentile; the Messiah had come for you.

So, what's the takeaway?

Just as faithful watchers eagerly awaited—i.e., *prosdéchomai*—the Messiah's initial coming, so, too, should we eagerly await Christ's second coming.

¹⁰ Bock (1994), p. 233.

Throughout the N.T., this principle is highlighted repeatedly: Jesus is coming again (cf. Titus 2:11-14, Heb. 9:28; Mat. 24:36-51; 25:1-13). And since he is coming again, Christ's followers should be **awaiting** his return so they might be **ready** to **welcome** him when he returns. In fact, Luke ensures that the Lord's teaching on this topic is not lost.

READ: Luke 12:35-40 (ESV)

³⁵ “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are **waiting** [*prosdéchomai*] for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds **awake** when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them **awake**, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Some actively waited for the coming Messiah (cf. Joseph of Arimathaea, Mar. 15:43). Simeon and Anna were not caught off guard when Jesus entered the Temple that day. Simeon noticed with his eyes and Anna with her spirit. And even though he did not come walking on his own two feet but was cradled in his mother's arms, Simeon took Jesus in his arms, knowing him to be the Savior. And even though she did not see the child for herself, Anna sensed that her waiting for the redemption of Israel had come to an end. Neither Simeon nor Anna skipped a beat. Instead, they immediately began to praise God. They were watchful, vigilant, and looking for his arrival, and they were ready that day. This practice of actively waiting to welcome the Messiah is what set Simeon and Anna apart back then, and it is what should set us apart today.

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Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: