

Today we'll be talking about the events that followed on the heels of the birth of Jesus Christ. By way of background, in the last few classes we have covered the story leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ. We talked about the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. We talked about conditions that had to be right in that part of the world—the *Pax Romana*—for the appearance of the Messiah and for the message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God to go out. We talked about the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, telling this elderly priest that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son whom they were to name John, and John the Baptist would be the one who prepared the way for the coming of the Lord.

Then we talked about Gabriel's appearance to the young woman Mariam, or Mary, told her that she would supernaturally conceive and give birth to the Messiah. We talked about her visit to Elizabeth. And then we talked about Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, and how an angel appeared to him in a dream and told her that her child had been divinely conceived and that he should go ahead with plans to marry Mary. We talked about the timing of the conception and pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary and how Jesus was most likely born on the Feast of Trumpets or the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and showed how He wasn't born on December 25.

And in the last class we talked about the specifics of Christ's birth and how the traditional view of that has nearly everything wrong. We closed by talking about some of the lessons we can learn from the lives of individuals involved as well as how God chose to do things at that time.

Today we pick up the story in **Luke 2:21** with the circumcision of Jesus.

Luke 2:21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

As we talked about with John the Baptist, Jewish boys at that time were named on the eighth day, the day they were circumcised. And we see that here with Jesus, that He is named on the eighth day. We see throughout this section that Joseph and Mary are scrupulous and following what the Lord told them to do. You might want to write down in your notes **Genesis 17:12** and **Leviticus 12:3**, which read:

Genesis 17:12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.

Leviticus 12:3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Continuing with the story in Luke 2:

Luke 2:22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who 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."

So after Jesus was born, He was circumcised according to the law. Then, 40 days after His birth, He was taken to Jerusalem according to the purification law. We see two different laws and several Scriptures quoted here, so let's look at them.

Leviticus 12:6 When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter,

What this meant was that after childbirth a woman could not go to the temple or participate in religious ceremonies until 40 days were past in the case of the birth of a son. She could go about her normal household and daily business, but she could not go to the Temple during that time. And then she was to bring a sacrifice in recognition of the gift she had been given in the form of a child from God. Continuing—

she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

...

8 And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering . . .

So they were to bring a lamb and a pigeon or dove, which together was a fairly expensive offering. But there was allowance so that if the family couldn't afford that, they could instead bring two doves or pigeons, which is what they brought. There was even a name for this, which was "The Offering of the Poor." That's what Mary brought. What does this tell us? This was one of the study questions I asked: What does this tell us about Mary and Joseph?

It tells us that they were poor, but also that they were very obedient to God's instructions. It tells us that Jesus was born into an ordinary home and family, a family where they didn't have luxuries, where they had to pinch pennies, where they knew what it was like to have difficulty making ends meet. Jesus knew what it was like for His family, and He knows what it's like for us when we're in those circumstances.

Another law is mentioned here in verse 23, and we find that back in **Exodus 13:11**:

Exodus 13:11 "And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you,

12 "that you shall set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the LORD'S.

...

14 "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

15 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

Another passage that explains this in more detail is **Numbers 18:15**:

Numbers 18:15 Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the LORD, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem.

16 And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

So the firstborn lambs and goats and calves were sacrificed, and the firstborn children and animals like donkeys or horses were redeemed with money—five shekels, or about a month’s wages. So Joseph and Mary are also doing this at the temple at this time.

Keep in mind that what we’ve read about here—not the circumcision, but them coming to give these offerings—**is taking place at the temple in Jerusalem**. The temple, as we’ve talked about earlier, is this magnificent and huge structure atop a platform covering an area about the size of 30 football fields. So what we’re reading about here probably takes place somewhere in this large courtyard.

The Bible doesn’t mention this, but Jewish writings do. Two other things would’ve happened. While at the Temple, the priests would’ve recorded the genealogy of the child. When we talked about the genealogies in Matthew and Luke earlier I mentioned that the genealogical records were kept in Jerusalem and that may have been where Matthew and Luke got their records. And of course, the family would’ve had that memorized as well. But what’s relevant here is that the priests in recording the genealogy of Jesus would’ve noticed that Jesus was a descendant of King David on both Joseph’s side and Mary’s side, and that would’ve stood out to them.

And something else happened at that time also. Once the offerings were given and the redemption had been paid, the priest would announce the name of the child. He would shout out there in the temple courtyard, “Let it be known in Israel—the child’s name is Yah Shua—*Yeshua*—‘God Saves!’” So it would’ve been announced at this time that Jesus’ name is “God Saves!” And everyone around would’ve heard it.

Continuing with the story in **Luke 2:25**—

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just 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.

Simeon was a special person. He was a very righteous, very devout and very devoted to God. What was Simeon’s mind focused on? He’s looking for the time when Messiah would come and bring comfort and peace to His people Israel. Here is a man in whom God’s Spirit is working, too. There weren’t many of them before Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came on the Church, but there were some and Simeon is one of those. And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ, or the Lord’s anointed one, the Messiah.

27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. So apparently the Spirit has moved him to come to or be at the temple at this particular time when Joseph and Mary and their 40-day-old Son would be there. We’ve probably all had times when God put us in a particular place at a particular time to carry out His plan for us, and that’s what’s happening here so God can carry out His promise to Simeon.

And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law,

28 he [Simeon] 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;

In other words, “I have now seen the Consolation of Israel, the Lord’s Anointed, and now I can go to the grave fulfilled. That which I have asked You for, that for which I have given and devoted my life to see, You have now given me and I can depart this life in peace. And in his praise and thankfulness to God, Simeon begins quoting scriptures that obviously mean a great deal to him, especially at this moment. Let’s look at some of them. He starts with:

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation

He's quoting from or referring to **Isaiah 52:10**:

Isaiah 52:10 The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

And Simeon continues:

**31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."**

Here he's referring to a number of passages about God sending His light and salvation to the gentiles. Here are some of them:

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

Isaiah 42:6 I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles,

Isaiah 49:6 Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.

3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Of course, reading through these it's obvious that God planned to offer salvation to the gentiles, but we'll see that this is a huge issue during Christ's ministry and in the early Church after that. Simeon understood that and praised God for it, but 30 years from now people would want to kill Jesus and the apostles for it. And of course, God had determined this before the foundation of the world, that He would offer salvation to all according to His time frame. He knew that Adam and Eve would sin and that He would have to send a Redeemer to pay the way for the removal and forgiveness of those sins.

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.

34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother,

Here again we have this private conversation between Mary and someone else, and Luke is writing this about 50 to 55 years later. Where did Luke get this information? There's only one logical explanation, and that is that Luke must have talked with Mary in researching and writing his Gospel.

"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against

Let's look at a couple of scriptures here that tell us Jesus Christ is going to be a stumbling block to some. The Rock of Israel, the Rock of salvation, Jesus Christ, is either going to be the foundation we can build on for that which will last forever, or that rock can also be a stumbling block. Let's turn to **Romans 9:33**, which is quoting from **Isaiah 8:14**.

Romans 9:33 As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

Isaiah 8:13 The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.

14 He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

So there would be those who would stumble at Jesus Christ, and there would also be those who would accept Him as their Savior and Rock of Salvation and Rock of their faith. He was also going to be the foundation of the Church. Some would lose their salvation over Jesus Christ, and others would gain salvation as a result of Christ. Simeon had remarkable insight into the impact Jesus Christ would have on people’s lives. Some would love Him and give their lives for Him, and others would hate Him and try to murder Him.

Something else to think about is, why did Simeon tell this to Mary? Was this God sending a special messenger to deliver a message just to Mary? Was Simeon, under the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit, perhaps helping Mary to get a fuller comprehension of who it was and what it was that Jesus was to do? Mary had been told that Jesus was to be the Messiah who would save His people from their sins. But did she know what that really meant, that the way that He would save them would be to die for them? Did she understand that He would be hated and persecuted? There’s none of that in the message the angel Gabriel gave to her when he told her almost a year earlier that she would conceive and give birth to the Messiah. I wonder if this is the case because notice what Simeon tells her next in **Luke 2:35:**

35 “(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Simeon tells Mary that she would be very deeply hurt, as though having her soul pierced by a sword. What would happen would hurt her incredibly deeply, and obviously it had to hurt her to see her Son treated and dealt with as He was. And notice this word “also.” This is indicating the way Jesus would die, by being stabbed by a spear as He is being crucified. Jesus would die a horrible death, but she would also experience something horrible herself as she saw her firstborn Son go through that.

And through all this “the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Some of those thoughts would be very dark and very murderous. And some of those thoughts would be joyous as people came to know the Messiah and be transformed from carnal to converted, from selfish to unselfish, from hate to love and joy and peace through God’s Holy Spirit.

Now, in verse 36, we come to Anna another individual who is there that day at the temple.

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;

37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

There are several things to think about here. One, if you remember back to the background on the four Gospels that we covered months ago, Luke is one who includes a lot of incidents that include women and children—the people more or less overlooked in that day and age, those on the fringes of society, like the shepherds out in the fields around Bethlehem to whom God sends

a choir of angels. Luke is a very inclusive writer. And we see that here. He includes not only the story of Simeon, who appears to be a fairly old man, although we're not told that for sure, but we are explicitly told that Anna is an 84-year-old lady who has been widowed for about 60 years. She seems to be a kind of mirror image of Simeon—someone completely dedicated to God whose great hope is to live to see the Messiah. You might say that Luke was trying to cover as many individuals as possible to show that Jesus Christ *is* for *everybody*. He's for Israel, but He's also for gentiles. That's why Luke reports here what Simeon said. That Jesus is a light to Israel but also to the gentiles.

There's something else to think about here. How many people are there on that day who testify of who this 40-day-old baby boy is? *Two*. Maybe three, if you count the priest who said, "Let it be known in Israel that the child's name is 'God Saves!'"

Under the law, how many witnesses did it take to testify to something for it to be a legally established fact? *Two (or three)*. Notice **Deuteronomy 19:15:**

Deuteronomy 19:15 By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

So what do we have here? Two witnesses who appear in the Temple to testify that Jesus is the true Messiah.

First, Simeon, a righteous man, had received a vision from God that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. When Jesus arrived at the Temple, Simeon was led by God's Spirit to go to the Temple and to see the Child. When he saw Him, he took Him in his arms 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 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

to Mary, 'Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Simeon predicted Jesus' ministry would be filled with controversy, and his cruel death would pierce Mary's heart.

Then Anna, an aged prophetess, appears and gives her testimony as well.

38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

So God the Father provides His own two witnesses as to the identity and Messiahship of Jesus.