

# ***A Joyful Proclamation***

**Luke 2:25-40**

The First Sunday after Christmas

Parallel Texts: None

Companion Texts: Isaiah 45:20-25, Psalm 111, Colossians 3:12-17

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:2)

Well, so much for Christmas! People all across the country have been busy hauling off dead trees. Housewives are still finding dried needles in the carpet. Toys all across this nation are already broken --- or at least have dead batteries in them. Boxes of decorations are being crammed into tiny attic spaces for another year. You need an appointment to get to the exchange counters in stores. Radio and TV programming is back to "normal" ....whatever that is.

Our world is through with Christmas. (You do remember Christmas, don't you? It was in all the papers.) It's over and done with. It is time to gear up for Valentine's Day, and rush madly toward the Easter Bunny. Shelves must be re-stocked. Inventories must be taken. Christmas 2014 is history.

And we survived it!

In fact, some of you may wonder why the Christmas trappings are still in our chancel. Why are the altar linens still white? Why are we still singing out of the Christmas section of the hymnal? Why is the Epistle Lesson still hung up on, "...the peace of Christ rule[ing] in your hearts..."? Why is our Gospel still focused on the infant?

It is time to look forward, not backward! School is going to start again. The bonus check has been spent, and then some.

What's wrong with the church? Why can't the Pastor get in step with the real world? Get with it, man. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

So here we sit....eager to get on with the process of life, and the church is still hung up on Christmas.

Before you get too focused on the church's seemingly unnecessary extension of the Christmas season, take a close look at today's small portion of Luke's Gospel.

We find an incident that occurred when Jesus was forty days old. He had been circumcised on the eighth day, and Mary and Joseph were now fulfilling the Levitical Law (Leviticus 12:1ff) by making the five mile trip from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem, 33 days later, for their purification.

The census crowds had quickly disbursed from Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph were no longer competing with animals for space in the stable but had found a more comfortable place to stay. The Wise Men (however many there were) --- with gifts in hand --- had not yet arrived in either Jerusalem or Bethlehem (in spite of what so many manger scenes show).

So it was, in connection with this Levitical act of purification, that they brought the Child "to present Him to the Lord" at the Temple.

Ancient law required that every first-born son had to be presented to God as a Priest of the Lord. Since the priesthood had been allotted to the tribe of Levi, the first-born sons in the other tribes were to be redeemed, or bought back from the Lord, for the price of five shekels.

As this family made its way across the Temple courtyard, they met a man by the name of Simeon. We know almost nothing about him. We don't even know his age, although the text would seem to imply that he was probably quite elderly. Luke introduces him as just "a man." There is nothing great or wonderful about him. He has no high office, standing, or power. He lived "in Jerusalem," the center of Jewish religious corruption, as one of God's true people. He was righteous as God judged him, and "devoted" as his life appeared to men.

It was a strange confrontation.

Imagine the surprise of Mary and Joseph as this total stranger stops them, takes the baby in his arms, and makes this most unusual proclamation:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The words are a prophesy that reaches far beyond Simeon's soul. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit. They reveal all that Jesus was to be for all the people and nations of the world.

This is the climax of Simeon's life. Nothing higher can be reached. The time of Simeon's expectation and longing for the fulfillment of God's Messianic promises is now at an end. He has the actual fulfillment in his arms, and so declares that he is like a slave who is set free by his great master.

Mary and Joseph were astonished. How did this man know the mystery of the child? How did he single out **their** baby? How could he say these things about their infant?

Simeon's words went well beyond the usual understanding of the promises of the coming Messiah. Simeon included all the Gentile nations in the salvation that this child was bringing. His words are a new revelation --- a new understanding.

His words blast into our world today, and jolt us back into the reality of what God has promised to each of us. His words cut through the confusion of the world in which we live to remind us of the greatest gift of all: Salvation.

Suddenly, Anna joins this small gathering in the Temple courtyard. The elderly woman --- close to 85 years old --- was well known around the Temple for her ability to interpret God's Word. She, too, had been moved by God to be at this exact spot at the very moment Simeon was. She, too, was inspired by God to proclaim the reason this particular child came into the world.

Simeon and Anna saw --- in the baby Jesus --- the great Redeemer of the people. They could see the One who would pay the ransom to release God's people from their spiritual bondage. They knew that this bondage required more than physical power and might, because it was a bondage of the heart. The Jewish sacrifices had long taught the people that such a spiritual ransom was paid by sacrifice and blood.

This tiny child, born just a few miles south-southeast of Jerusalem, is the one --- and only --- hope of Salvation. This child is God Himself, become man, to suffer and die for us. The price of Salvation was so great that man could not even begin to bridge the gulf that existed between God and Mankind. Only God had the power --- and the love --- to do that.

It is only through this baby that Salvation comes.

Yet, we reject Him.

Once the presents are opened, and the wrapping paper cleaned up, we don't have time for Him. Even if we made an association between the gifts under our trees at home, and God's gift of Salvation to us through Jesus Christ, that was last week's news. Christmas was last week's entertainment.

Now we are ready for more: more excitement --- more fun --- more parties --- more pleasure. We're tired of hearing the account of Luke: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus..." In fact, we're even tired of trees, Santa Clause, elves, and reindeer. We've done our bit for this holy day/holiday.

But Christmas is NOT over! It never will be! God's reason for coming into the flesh was accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of the baby from Bethlehem. Salvation was won for you and for me. That never changes.

This birth is not a seasonal ornament that we can take off the tree, pack in a box, and hide in the attic for another year. We are to make every day a Christmas Day celebration. The forgiveness of God comes to us each day, just as it did in that stable.

As we look upon this scene of Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, Simeon, and Anna, in the courtyard of the Temple, let us be aware of the dark shadow cast across it. The shadow of the cross of Good Friday places the whole event in its proper perspective. Let us look, with the eyes of Simeon and Anna, at this tiny child in the arms of His mother. Let us see in Him our own salvation.

Amen. May the peace of God, which passes all [human] understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen (Philippians 4:7)