

# God Paints With His Eyes

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[ 0 : 00 ] And please turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 2 and verses 21 through 40. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.

May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. A few weeks ago on the BBC website, I read a rather wonderful story about a 19-year-old art student called Becky Taylor.

Becky makes up quite magnificent artwork, using not her hands, but her eyes. She's a quadriplegic. She suffers with cerebral palsy. And she uses a computer with very advanced technology, which tracks her eye movements, and then represents them digitally as artworks.

Far from being crushed by her disability, Becky Taylor is producing the most wonderful art with her eyes. She perfectly translates the images in her brain onto the medium of digital art.

[ 1 : 20 ] It's just one person's story, one person's inspiring story, of her determination to pursue her dreams of being an artist.

Well, this passage in Luke chapter 2 from verse 21 through 40 is the story of how God perfectly translates the images in his mind onto the medium of human history.

It's the story of how he paints the most amazing of all artworks. The story of our salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those images in his mind are his eternal purpose to present to himself a church made up of an innumerable multitude, all of whom have been washed clean of all their sin and are being conformed to the image of his son.

And what we read here in this passage are the first strokes in this greatest of all artworks, the story of our salvation.

[ 2 : 36 ] Now, the hero of this passage is Jesus. And therefore, it is this young child we want to focus our attention upon. For after all, that is who God the Father's attention is upon.

Because it's through Jesus. He is painting this great artwork of salvation. And the story of his presentation at the temple here is composed of two great brush strokes.

Jesus and his fulfillment, and then Jesus and his church. Jesus and his fulfillment, and then Jesus and his church.

First of all, Jesus and his fulfillment. As you read through this passage, one particular phrase jumps out. According to the law of the Lord.

According to the law of the Lord, or some such phrase. We find it in verse 22, 23, 24, 27, 39. So, we're no longer in a stable in Bethlehem.

[ 3 : 48 ] We're in the temple in Jerusalem, surrounded by all the ceremonies and all the rituals of Judaism and the Old Testament. Both Simeon and Anna are righteous, and that's code for them being respected, law-keeping Jews.

We're a world away from the courts of Caesar Augustus back in chapter 2, verse 1, and the fields of the shepherds in verse 8. We're now in the beating heart of everything it means to be Jewish.

The temple, the law, ceremonies, rituals, the righteous people of God. So, just like John the Baptist in chapter 1, verse 59 is taken to be circumcised, that is the mark of being set apart for God, so is Jesus.

Just as Zechariah and Elizabeth had given their child the name that the angel had told them to, John, so Mary and Joseph gave their child the name the angel had told them to, the name Jesus. So, thus far, they are obeying all the laws and regulations of Judaism. Then the time comes for him to be taken to the temple and sacrifices to be offered to God.

[ 5 : 12 ] And these sacrifices serve three purposes in Judaism. First, to thank God for the birth of the child. Second, to purify Mary from the uncleanness of childbirth.

And thirdly, as it's written in God's law, to offer their firstborn child for service to God. Hannah did exactly the same when she gave birth to her firstborn, the prophet Samuel.

So, thus far, everything in this passage has been done in order to fulfill the law of God. As I said a few weeks ago, although the whole gospel of Luke is written in a very classically Greek style, the first two chapters of Luke belong really in a world of Jewishness.

In fact, the first three chapters, Jewishness and Judaism. If it wasn't for the explicit mention of Jesus here, you might suppose you're reading something from Judges or Kings or Chronicles, not from a New Testament gospel.

But then perhaps there are times when all of us are guilty of making too sharp a division between the Old Testament and the New Testament and we forget that Jesus lived in a world dominated by Old Testament thinking.

[ 6 : 40 ] So, it's at that point we meet a man called Simeon, described in verse 25 as being righteous and devout. These are words to describe someone who is well respected in the community.

To the maximum of his ability, he keeps the laws of the Lord not because he must but because he wants to. He is devout. His heart is in it. He clearly has an active spiritual life because in verse 26 we read, it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.

So, if you want a perfect portrait of a Jewish follower of God, you have it right here in this man, Simeon. It's rather like in Simeon, this old man, you have a culmination of all the faithful Old Testament prophets and priests and kings in one man.

And what does this portrait of Old Testament faithfulness do when he sees Jesus with his parents? Well, over the course of many years attending the temple, he has seen tens of thousands of Jewish babies being taken to the temple to do for them exactly what's been done for Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit draws Simeon to this child. How is it that he knows? We don't know. But having been convinced that he would not die before he'd seen the Lord's Christ, Simeon now reaches for this child and holds him up in his arms.

[ 8 : 14 ] We're to understand that action of holding Jesus up in his arms not as that of cradling him to his chest, but of holding the child in both hands and raising him up to the heavens like that.

On one hand it's an action of great triumph, the same kind of triumph a victorious captain feels when he lifts the cup above his head. But on the other it's an action of great praise, praising God's fulfillment of the promise he made to this man Simeon so many years ago.

And he's holding this child Jesus up to the heavens as if to say, Lord I praise you that you have kept your promise to me and to Israel for here in my uplifted hands I hold the Christ.

This action of uplifted arms held up to God it's truly amazing. It's a staggering brush stroke in God's amazing painting.

Think about it this way. The child Simeon is holding up in his arms to God is one at the same time that God who is holding Simeon up in his arms.

[ 9 : 33 ] What an amazing thought that the son who sustains all things in motion by his powerful word is at the very same time being held up in the arms of this old man.

What is it that Simeon understands in this child? He understands that this tiny wee baby is the Christ the Messiah the long awaited deliverer of his people from their slavery the new Moses the last Adam the king greater than David the prophet greater than Isaiah the priest greater than Aaron the answer to the prayers of all God's people for a thousand years and yes even for more and here he is and he's holding this wee baby up in his arms the fulfillment of God's long promise to his people and then there's Anna the prophetess Anna her title respect dignified she held position albeit unofficial in the temple like Simeon she's well respected she's righteous she's devout the portrait of what faithful

Jewish womanhood should look like she spent her whole life in the temple worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day everyone looks up to Anna because her heart's in it hers is not merely an external piety hers goes deep into the heart she really loves God and when she sees that baby Jesus her reaction is very similar to that of Simeon praise and proclamation she gives praise to God and she speaks of this child to all who will listen what drew her to him we are not sure perhaps it's when she saw Simeon's reaction of holding up this child in his arms but with greater spiritual sensitivity this ideal portrait of Jewish womanhood praises God and points to Jesus as God's redeemer well what's the point of all this what is Luke getting at by referring to Jewish laws

Jewish people and Jewish promises simply this Jesus is the keeper and fulfiller of all the laws and the promises of Old Testament Jewish religion he is the fulfiller and keeper of all the laws and promises of Old Testament Jewish religion from his birth as we'll see in a couple of weeks he observes all the laws of the Old Testament and he is the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament he is the Christ he is the fulfiller and the keeper of the Old Testament Simeon and Anna may be portraits of faithful Jewishness but they pale into insignificance beside this greatest of all portraits the child Jesus Christ God could not have painted a more perfect picture of what it means to keep his laws than

Jesus he could have not made a more wonderful sketch of what it looks like to fulfill his promises than Jesus Isaiah could not have dreamt of a more faithful fulfillment to all the promises he made than Jesus Moses could not have imagined that someone could have kept all the law that God gave him on Mount Sinai like Jesus did David could not have figured a more perfect king than Jesus was as we go through the book of Luke and the book of Acts we're going to see Jesus encountering many needy people many needy people and it's almost as if you can hear David or Isaiah or Moses saying to themselves I wish I could have been so wise righteous and loving as Jesus that's what I meant to do and that's what I meant to be but because of my sin

[14:02] I could not and so Aaron the great priest he sees Jesus offering himself up on the cross for all the sins of the world and he says to himself that's what this all pointed to all the ceremonies and all the regulations and all the rituals that God commanded me to perform that's what it all meant and then Samuel he hears Jesus preaching the sermon on the plain and responding to the questions of all his accusers and Samuel the prophet says to himself I wish I could have expressed myself with the authority Jesus did I wish I could have got to the point like Jesus did and the great King David he sees Jesus exercising authority over all the demons and death and sickness and over sin and he watches the development and the growth of the early church and he says to kingship is not the pathetic attempt

I made of it and my own sinful shortcomings that's what a true kingdom likes the kingdom of Jesus looks like the kingdom of Jesus one that never ends I want to give you a hint that Lewis kind of got earlier whenever I'm giving a kids talk and I ask the kids a question the right answer is always Jesus you don't really even have to worry what I'm talking about whether it's football or television or something else if I ask the kids a question the right answer is always Jesus Luke 2 21 through 40 is telling us that the answer to the whole of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ the answer to all the hopes and dreams of the righteous the prophecies and the promises of the devout the stories and the songs of the godly you know with only her eyes

Becky Tyler draws the most amazing digital art check out her art on Google but with the history of 10,000 years and more the sacred writings of the Old Testament and the perfect law keeping righteousness of his son God paints a picture which is the answer to the question of a thousand million hearts and minds today his answer to all things is his son Jesus Christ held up high in the arms of Simeon the paragon of all it means to be a faithful Jew what could be a better way to begin 2022 than to focus your attention upon the Lord Jesus Christ God's ultimate fulfillment what could be better than to follow in

Anna's footsteps in giving thanks for Jesus and telling as many people as we know the good news about Jesus Jesus and his fulfillment well secondly Jesus and his church Jesus and his church you know rather like a tree this is a passage with many branches and side arms I've already preached it ten times in my years of ministry among you so I really want to keep it as fresh as I can now in our series on Luke Acts which we're engaging in over the next few months and years we've agreed upon a central historical setting the early church is made up of all kinds of people here's the historical setting they've got one thing in common their shared faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour but that's about all they have in common for there are Jews and there are Gentiles that are male and they are female that are slaves and they are free as often happens in our world today some are more equal than others in the early church if you were an ethnic Jewish Christian young or middle aged male and a free man you had it made if you were a Gentile slave female you weren't quite so equal these are just the plain facts it's into that setting that Luke is writing a setting where he wants the whole church to know that there is full equality in Christ Jesus for everyone who believes in him and has entrusted their lives to him everyone so as you pass through

[19:16] Luke chapter 2 think about this you meet a remarkable group of people all of whom are followers of Jesus Christ you have Joseph and Mary fair enough we have many young couples in

our church then you have the rough and ready shepherds we don't even know if they were Jewish they may have been Gentiles but they became followers of Jesus also and now you have two old singles Simeon and Anna and we have our singles as well the sheer variety of people that Luke is writing about is a reminder to the early church of the breadth of the church that there are to be young and there to be old there are to be shepherds and there to be prophets and there to be male and there to be female and there to be Jews and there to be Gentiles all of them that's what it means to be the church and they're all equal in verse 38 we read about the redemption of

Jerusalem Jesus as the saviour of the Jews but in verse 32 we read about him being a light for revelation to the Gentiles Jesus as light to the Gentiles a few years ago I was speaking to one of our church planters I should say not from this presbytery he had just completed a really slick website for his church plant with pictures of all the people in his congregation and they were all very shiny happy people the vast vast majority were young white smiling happy and healthy looked so great so attractive but then there's a picture of an old man in the middle of all this and he seemed rather out of place and I said to this church plant and I said well who's that and he whispered in my ear a bit laughingly he said

I'm really glad we had an old man visiting us that day he didn't stay but it gave us an opportunity to take a picture of him with all the young people we know I don't like pouring cold water over another man's work but whatever that church planter was taking pictures of that day it was not a genuine new testament church there were no colored people there were no poor people there were no troubled people there were no old people there were no mentally challenged people there were no asylum seekers there were no weirdos there were no demented people there were no uber conservatives nothing at all except boring white smiling young healthy people I wouldn't have belonged there because although

I'm white I don't smile very much whatever he was taking pictures of that day wasn't a new testament church it wasn't a reflection of the church of Luke acts and certainly not reflective of the kind of people Jesus loves and saves there were no shepherds with rough ready hands there were no old people who make everyone else feel awkward I would like to be in a church like that where everyone is just the same it's like being in a Stepford Wives movie boring unbiblical I love being part of a church containing all the variety of humanity I like it not just because it's very far from being boring but because it's a genuine new testament church take a photograph of our fellowship you'll see a reflection of a variety of the world around us we're all colored in our own ways there are male there are females there's young there's old there's those who have it all together and those of us who aren't quite so good at hiding what's inside us we are not all boring smiling white unhealthy people we're a messy new testament church the kind of church

God loves Jesus died to save and the holy spirit delights to working and work through we're all equal there's not one of us that's more equal than anyone else we're all one in Christ Jesus the apostle Paul will make that clear in Galatians 3 28 the book of Acts will make that clear in the story of Peter and the Gentile centurion the gospel of Luke makes that clear in the sheer variety of people that Jesus chooses to forgive from their sins and to choose to follow him there are coarse handed shepherds who need to watch their P's and Q's and there are smooth handed Jewish prophetesses and there are lepers and there are demon possessed and there are deaf people and there are blind people and there's me and there's you of course as well as the white well adjusted happy smiley young people the thing is that in a church made up of only young smiley happy healthy young people you don't find artists like

[ 25 : 07 ] Becky Tyler a quadriplegic who suffers from cystic fibrosis you only find people whose biggest problem in life consists of the temperature of a latte they just bought from Starbucks not people who were struggling with life as a whole and themselves and with God in particular for that reason you don't find people like King David in those churches you don't find the prophet Isaiah in those churches you don't find Moses in those churches because none of them are happy enough white enough or have it sorted enough but because Jesus is a church made up of all different kinds of people you have the Becky Tylers with their magnificent digital art she can't use her fingers they don't work so she uses her eyes you've got the Simeons and the Anas you've got the coarse handed shepherds Jesus grace is so all embracing and his love for this very world so huge that the cross becomes the symbol of our belonging the sacrifice the sacrificial death prophesied here in

Luke 2 and typified by the sacrifice of the pigeons will herald the beginnings of a new heavens and a new earth where the church will be made up of all peoples nations tribes languages colors united

in this their common faith in Jesus the keeper and fulfiller of every question a human being could ever ask and so on the second Sunday of 2022 rather like Simeon holding up the baby Jesus in his arms so the whole temple could see him I hold Jesus up to you the only one in whom men and women young and old black and white slave and free will find genuine equality and oneness because it's only in this child they'll find salvation what will you do with the Jesus who is held up to you today the greatest masterpiece God ever painted what will you do with a child held up in front of you today reject him as Lord or accept him as Lord reject him as saviour or accept him as saviour what will you do with Jesus let us close in prayer we thank you Lord that Jesus is the fulfilment and keeper of all the prophecies the predictions the songs the stories the ceremonies and regulations of the Old Testament and he's the answer to all the questions a human being may ever ask about guilt about forgiveness about confusion and about meaning and about loneliness and about unity we pray that not one of us would leave this place thinking today that we don't belong that the only measure of our belonging isn't our ethnic background or our mental health or our state of happiness the only measure of our belonging is our common faith in Jesus Christ and for those of us so Lord we pray who perhaps this new year doesn't really herald any new great thing in our lives we pray that you give us a renewed fascination with the person of Jesus that like Simeon holding that child up in his arms we too would hold him up so that others may love him and worship him also in his name we pray these things Amen