

A light for all peoples

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2017

Preacher: John Rees

[0 : 00] 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.

As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

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.

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. 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, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

[1 : 22] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, and a sword will pierce through your soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

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, and then as a widow until she was 84.

She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. 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.

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

Well, let me add my welcome to you to Grace Church Today. My name's John Rhys, and I'm one of the congregation here.

[2 : 54] And welcome to 2017. So at midnight last night, at the end of 2016, the population of the world was estimated to be 7,475,100,000 people.

And according to my Christmas cracker, these 7.5 billion people are divided into two types. Those that divide people into two types, and those who don't. Actually, for those scientists among you, people have been shown now to be divided, indeed, into two types.

There are those that extrapolate from incomplete data, and today we're going to see more on what Luke has to say about all these people in the world, and what really divides them.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Luke, and today we're looking at what happens when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to Jerusalem, to the temple for the first time.

We're going to look at this under three headings. Jesus is God's promised Savior, a Savior who comes for all people, but all people will not accept him.

[4 : 12] And the headings are on the back of the service sheet, if that helps you. For those of you who are visiting, or those of you whose memory has been affected by the Christmas break or New Year celebrations, I thought I'd remind you of what we've learned so far from Luke's Gospel.

You may well remember from the first four verses of Luke, we saw that Luke writes his account to give certainty to Theophilus. And as his readers, we can have certainty because Luke tells us he's gone to considerable efforts to get his information from reliable eyewitnesses, and because he's showing us how the Old Testament promises are being fulfilled in the events he's describing.

And so far these events have been the prediction of two pregnancies and the safe arrival of two boys. John the Baptist, who's to prepare the way for Jesus, and Jesus himself, who's the promised king from the line of David and who brings salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

And the responses to these events have been positive. Mary pondering them in her heart, the shepherds joyfully telling others what the angels have told them.

Today we're going to see how Luke starts to reveal more about who the message of salvation is for and what will be other responses to this message.

[5 : 47] And as Luke does, he has already given us some hints of where he's going. He's already given us some trailers to today's passage. You know, when the BBC has a big news series coming out, you get a few short trailers to whet your appetite.

David Attenborough floats in a hot air balloon telling you that a big news series is coming out to show you snow leopards. Some unknown pop star or chubby politician does some dancing just so you can know when to turn off the television.

Well, Luke, in the message of the angels to the shepherds earlier in chapter 2, has hinted that this message is not just for the Jewish people. So look back at a familiar verse, 2 verse 10.

We hear that this birth of Jesus, God coming to earth, is good news of great joy that will be for all the people. And then in Mary's song, the Magnificat in chapter 1, we had a hint about the response.

It is not going to be the same for everyone. There may be different outcomes for different groups. Mary says, he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.

[7 : 07] And these lead us into the message in today's passage. So let's look at today's passage starting on verse 22 on page 1033.

And our first heading is Jesus is God's promised Savior. So the setting is the temple in Jerusalem, the temple of God's dwelling place on earth with his people.

It's where God has shown his glory. And the glory of God has just been revealed again with the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. And here is God himself as a baby coming to his temple.

And today's passage begins and ends with Joseph and Mary obeying the law. A Jewish woman would come to the temple 40 days after giving birth to a son for her purification.

And they also bring their baby son to present him to God. Jesus and Mary came with a sacrifice and they did this because they are obedient Jews.

[8 : 11] That it is a remembrance of God's, a rescue of God's people in Egypt, the Passover, when the blood of a sacrificed lamb saved families from God's destruction, the firstborn sons in the families of Egypt.

And from then on, every firstborn son had to be redeemed in remembrance of this rescue, their life bought by an animal sacrifice in substitution of the temple.

Now a wealthy family would have brought a lamb, but a poorer family could bring a pair of pigeons or doves as Jesus and Mary do, as Joseph and Mary do. Jesus, though, is the one firstborn who is not in need of purification.

He is the one without sin, who will not sin. But Luke is again beginning to trail his later message, a reminder that God is a rescuer who redeems or buys his people's life with a sacrifice and substitution.

And we know as we read on in the Gospel that in God's new rescue, in his new salvation, it's Jesus himself who is going to be the substitutionary sacrifice.

[9 : 23] He's going to bring our rescue. He is the lamb. He will die on a cross so that we can live. And this passage today just begins to point us towards the cross as Joseph and Mary bring to the temple their sacrifice of two birds, but they also bring God's ultimate sacrifice of Jesus himself.

But the last few verses of the passage show again Joseph and Mary's obedience to the law. In verse 39, when they had done everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Nazareth.

And the child grew and became strong, and the favor of God was upon him. And in between these two sections on Joseph and Mary, the law, we, in verses 25 to 38, we're introduced to two new characters in the story, to Simeon and to Anna.

Now, I'm very pleased to see old people playing a major role in Luke's Gospel. There's nothing ageist in Luke. We've had Zechariah and Elizabeth who thought they were too old to have a baby.

Now we have Simeon. We're not told his age, but he'd been informed by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Christ. And then we have Anna, who's 84 years old.

[10 : 50] And for those younger people here today, and it's great to have eagles in with us, this is a reminder that older people sometimes do talk sense. Your parents, old as they are, may even be right sometimes.

Well, Simeon and Anna are right here. Simeon was righteous and devout. Anna worshipped and prayed night and day.

These were people who deserved to be listened to. Both of them were waiting patiently, it says. And what were they waiting for? Verse 25 tells us Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

When God's people were in exile, they were promised that they would have comfort or consolation by the prophet Isaiah and that comfort would come through a suffering servant.

The consolation of Israel would be a return of God to his people, a restored relationship of peace with God with a king from David's line on the throne.

[11 : 57] God's last prophets had been over 400 years before. The country's under Roman rule but Simeon waits and trusts in God's promises. And Anna and others in verse 38 were told were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

God's rescue of his people from exile involved the promise of a restoration of the city of Jerusalem. In Isaiah 60 and 62 God speaks of setting watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem to wait.

There are some references there to the Isaiah quotes. Redemption means that Jerusalem is brought out of bondage, out of slavery.

A price is paid to set God's people free. And Simeon and Anna like Zechariah and Mary recognized that this baby a few weeks old is the savior who has been promised.

He's the redemption price that will set his people free. Jesus' death on the cross will bring life to his people. And when he comes again it will be with a new Jerusalem redeemed where all his people will live in peace with God.

[13:14] So in this amazing faith a great example to us Simeon and Anna are waiting trusting that in God's time he will do everything he said. and when they see the first glimpse of this in the baby Jesus long before his ministry years before his death and resurrection they have complete faith complete trust the certainty that Luke wants for us.

Simeon is so trusting in this that he's happy now to die. He's seen Jesus dying is now nothing for him to be afraid of. He knows that it's just the entry to eternal life and eternal future with his Lord.

Now let's move to our second heading a savior who comes for all people. Simeon is old waiting devout he's filled with the Holy Spirit and so like Zechariah in chapter 1 he's able to prophesy what will happen through this baby.

And now we get to the key verses which I think are at the center of this passage verses 29 to 35 and Simeon says in verses 31 and 32 this is glory for Israel God's glory God's presence coming to be with his people but he goes much further he follows on from the angels trailer to the shepherds about all people but now it's much more explicit so look at verse 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles so now Simeon is clear about salvation what is the salvation his eyes have seen it's not an army it's not a revolution it's a person it's this baby Jesus he is holding God's salvation plan in his arms so salvation doesn't depend on living a good life or behaving in a certain way it depends on accepting this

Jesus as your king and Simeon says this salvation Jesus God's son is a light that's visible to everybody to all peoples although Jesus came into the world in this law abiding Jewish family the light is not confined to the people of Israel this is a revelation for the Gentiles too for you and for me it's good news of great joy for all people as the angel told the shepherds and it's fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Isaiah again has said Isaiah 42 6 a light for the nations Isaiah 52 10 all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God so this message should have come as no surprise to Simeon and Anna or for any of those faithful people who knew the prophets well they would have known that this is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies the continuation of God's story that this message of a savior is for all people it's for all the seven and a half billion people in the world today so this is great news the waiting is over the savior is here but now this great news is tempered with a warning too we move to the third heading looking at verses 34 and 35 all people will not accept him

[17:02] Isaiah 8 says many shall stumble and fall and Simeon says to Mary behold this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce through your own soul also so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed so although the good news is there for everyone to see Luke is showing us that not everyone will respond in the same way there will be opposition many will rise but many will stumble and fall and you see there are only these two responses people are divided to rise or to fall this six week old baby held in Simeon's arms has come to hold out salvation to all but also to bring division over

Christmas we tend to have looked at the image of the child in the manger and back in verse 14 the angels message to the shepherds was on earth peace but this is peace with God not peace between people and it's not for all the angels told us that it's among those with whom he is pleased those who accept him and in Matthew chapter 10 verse 34 Jesus himself says do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth I have not come to bring peace but a sword for I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and what's this going to depend on this division Simeon says it will depend on the condition of our hearts that's what will be revealed in our responses do we have a heart that responds to this promise of salvation a heart that accepts our own sinfulness accepts our inability to save ourselves and so grasps this offer of salvation with joy or will our hardness of heart be revealed so we think we can do it in our own strength and reject this good news this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in order to rise in response to this offer you have to be down on the ground on your knees acknowledging your need in humility if that's where you are then you can't fall but you can be raised up if you fall it's from a position of pride of belief in your own superiority so that's the choice we all have to make and there are only two choices either we recognize our own sinfulness that we're unacceptable to God and accept the offer of Jesus to take our sins or we don't we think we don't need saving we can get there on our own so there are just two outcomes rising to eternal life with Jesus living in the light of his glory or falling to eternal separation from Jesus there's no middle way and it'll be determined by the state of our hearts do we acknowledge our need for salvation or not although this will lead to our rising to be with him like Simeon when we die he doesn't promise this will be an easy journey even for those who accept this offer of salvation and try to live for Jesus until Jesus returns there will be suffering to encounter there's a specific warning to Mary here that she will suffer but the message is for us too there will be opposition verse 34 tells us families may be split apart friends may laugh at us in his second book in Acts

Luke will show much more how this opposition comes to be and also the way that opposition may actually help the spread of the gospel and look at verse 35 Luke is beginning to point us forward to the cross it should be agonizing for us to picture Jesus suffering on the cross for our sins but imagine how much more agonizing it must have been for Mary to be there at the foot of the cross seeing the son she had born take the punishment for her and for us and then we come to Anna a prophetess who we're told was constant in her worship and prayer and Luke tells us what Simeon says but not the words of Anna but she certainly wasn't silent when she encountered the child Jesus her response is again a sign that the waiting is over we're told she gave thanks to God and she spoke about Jesus to all who were seeking the redemption of Israel so not to everybody but to all those who realized they needed this restored relationship she told them about the salvation we don't know we're not told exactly what she said but she gets the last word in this account of the temple visit my experience from the wisdom of age is that women usually do manage to get the last word and if you're here today and you haven't put your faith in

Jesus if you haven't realized that you need his salvation what this passage is saying is that this salvation is available to you this message is for everyone it's for all people and it's for you but a response is needed you can choose to accept it or reject it perhaps you need to find out more about it before you make that choice and a great way to find out more would be to speak to someone around you or come to a course we run called Christianity Explored where you can ask all the questions you like on the question of dividing people C.S.

Lewis the great Christian writer in the great divorce also wrote that there were two kinds of people there are those who say to God your will be done and there are those to whom God says in the end your will be done and if you've made that choice already if you're following Jesus what should this passage be saying to us first it should give us great confidence shouldn't it in the saving grace of Jesus a light for revelation to us the Gentiles we should be praising God like Anna did that he did send his son to save us a salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples and it should be a reminder that this salvation raises us up that we should fall burdened by our sin but that Jesus takes that burden and makes us righteous by his sacrifice and the passage should remind us too that there are still many who need to hear this message many people in Dulwich who need to have this opportunity so with the confidence that Luke gives

[24 : 38] Theophilus and gives to us we should speak of Jesus as Anna did Luke tells us that not everyone will respond so we shouldn't be despondent if when we talk to people it doesn't bring crowds of people to hear more we're helping that message get to all people but we're not responsible for what is revealed in their hearts so Anna and Simeon were waiting confidently for the promised Messiah to come for the first time 2,000 years later we should have that same confidence as we wait patiently for Jesus to return again to his people just as he promised he will come again bringing a new Jerusalem where he will dwell with his people forever and wouldn't it be a great resolution for 2017 for us always to be prepared to speak confidently about Jesus in the words of verses 30 to 32 salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles came out of breath f hes his term he have tried he tofold

Cause got Come on he can he the He killed