The Wait is Over

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0:00] Our reading is Luke 2, verses 22 to 38, which can be found on page 1033. 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 the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed him and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.
[1:16] 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.

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 own soul also, so that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asha.
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 praying day and night.
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.
[2:32] Well, good morning. My name is Andy. I'm the acting lead pastor here. As Benji said, it's wonderful to see you all this morning. Let me pray as we start. Heavenly Father, now we pray that you be with us to focus on the Lord Jesus and the reason for his coming.

Amen. I'm going to start this morning with a bit of poetry. Of course, we all know that's from the nights before Christmas, first published 200 years ago today.
It encapsulates the anticipation of Christmas Eve, doesn't it? Those with children, perhaps you can feel the excitement building.
Perhaps you're here visiting family for Christmas, and already the house is quite chaotic and excited. In fact, one of the most googled questions at Christmas is, how do I get to sleep fast on Christmas Eve?
But soon the wait will be over. The light of Christmas morning will be here, though I suspect many of us will be up when it's still dark.
[4:02] Well, waiting for Christmas is not a new thing. God's people in the Bible had been waiting for Christmas for centuries.

And then, on that first Christmas, some 2,000 years ago, we see from the lips of Simeon that it's here. The scene is set in verse 25.
If you look down at our reading and follow along on our service sheet or on the screen, verse 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.

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And the Holy Spirit was upon him. 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 the arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.
[5:08] Here is Simeon then. We don't know much about him other than he's been given a specific promise from God that he would see the Christ. He would see the God child come.

Who knows how long he's been waiting for. And then he comes in by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads him to this newborn baby, days old, Jesus Christ. And he says, the wait is now over.
And through Simeon's words, we are to see that Jesus is the end of the wait in two ways. So firstly, Jesus is the end of the wait for rescue.
Jesus is the end of the wait for rescue. The heart of what Simeon says in the temple is to do with rescue. He takes the baby up in his arms and verse 29, he announces this.
Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation. Salvation, it's a Bible word that means rescue.
[6:14] Rescue is here. Yet this theme is not in just what Simeon says, but everything that surrounds this passage is to do with rescue. You see, when we think, when we read through Luke chapters 1 and 2, we tend to read it with a Christmassy background music, don't we?

We hear the opening chapters with Christmas carols and a mulled wine and reindeer swirling around in our heads. And if we're feeling especially festive, we think of that greatest of all stories set on Christmas Eve, Die Hard.
But the reality is that Luke's background Spotify playlist here would be a selection of Old Testament passages and promises and classics to do with rescue from the likes of Exodus and Isaiah.
We see in verse 22 that Mary and Joseph take the baby Jesus up to the temple in order to perform the dedication of the firstborn.
Those in youth group will know, because we've just been doing Exodus, that this is an official ceremony designed to remind every family that they had been rescued by God from slavery in Egypt, which we read in the Exodus.
[7:37] I've put some verses on the handout that you can go over later from Exodus 13. But the firstborn animal and the firstborn son of every creature born in Israel was to be dedicated to God, to remind them they had been rescued out of slavery in Egypt.

And so this picking up of the baby Jesus comes in a ceremony designed to remind God's people of rescue.
And then we're told in verse 25 that Simeon is waiting for the consolation of Israel. Consolation is a Bible word that essentially means rescue. It's what the prophet Isaiah spoke of hundreds of years before Jesus.
I put Isaiah 40 on the handout. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.
Isaiah looks forward to a day when God is going to rescue his people. The day will bring an end of warfare between God and his people. It will result in the forgiveness of sin, iniquity pardoned, that sin being paid for, in that she will receive double for all her sins.
[9:05] And now Simeon is waiting for this consolation, waiting for this rescue, this comfort, the rescue of Israel. And he sees this baby with his parents and he picks the baby up and says, the wait is over.

I'm ready to die, effectively says, because of this child. My eyes have seen your salvation. I guess we can't quite imagine it really.
This little baby, days old, being picked up in a temple, announced as the rescuer of humanity. This is the one who's going to save us from our sins and put us in a right relationship with God, our creator, and so that we can enjoy knowing him forever.
And then at the end of our passage, there's the prophetess Anna in verse 36 to 38. She's in the temple, a righteous lady and a widow for many years. And when Simeon says, and he sighs, oh, now I'm ready to die, Anna, the octogenarian, is just getting going.
Verse 38 of our reading, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

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[10:21] Redemption, again, being a rescue word. This is not just acute christening service, but the announcement of rescue.

Imagine when you got home and you saw an ambulance outside your neighbor's house with flashing lights. What do you think? Well, you could think, oh, I do like the flicker of ambulance lights. Let's turn off all the other lights so we can focus on those lights. You could comment on the parking or the tire pressure, but that's not the main thing, is it?
It's not a friend's car. It's not even a doctor's car. It's an ambulance. There is an emergency rescue taking place. And that is the main thing Luke wants to see about Christmas.
Like the call out of an ambulance, Christmas is about a rescue mission. And yet it is possible to think a rescue is not needed.
[11:27] A few years ago, the explorer Benedict Allen, he disappeared in Papua New Guinea. He was eventually found and brought back to safety. He had no phone, no GPS tracking.

He made a video will for his children. He was hallucinating with the effects from malaria. And he was in the midst of a tribal war. But later in an interview, he said he wasn't lost and he didn't need to be rescued.
We might think that's a bit foolish. Of course he needed rescuing. Well, it's possible to think the same about Jesus, to think that we don't actually need a rescue.
Last week, I was with some end-of-term class drinks with other parents from a child's class at school. I spoke to one guy, one dad, who asked me, what sort of people go to Grace Church?
You don't want to know what I said. That's a joke. I said, we're a pretty normal bunch of people from a mixture of ages and backgrounds. It was a bit of a fluff answer, to be honest.
[12:35] Just reflecting on it afterwards, I should have said, the people who come are those who are humble enough to realise that we need a rescue. That we've seen in Jesus, the Saviour of the world, who was born on earth to die on a cross and rise again.

And with overwhelming gratitude, we come together every Sunday and we spend time together encouraging one another throughout the week to hear about the wonderful truth of Jesus coming to save humanity.
That's what I should have said. Because that is the truth. So if you're a Christian, a follower of Jesus here this morning, it's Christmas Eve. I hope you can be excited.
There is a lot of excitement around Christmas Eve. But let's be excited afresh at the main thing. A rescue is here. And when life is hard, even on Christmas Day, which it will be, we can look to the rescue God has brought us through Jesus and be thankful like Simeon.
Even ready to die, perhaps. Ready to meet God himself and be welcomed into his kingdom. If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus here, you're very welcome with us.
[13:49] I hope you can see that this is the big claim of Christmas. And if we are under the impression that Jesus came to do anything other than primarily rescue people from their sins, then we've actually misunderstood Jesus.

And we've misunderstood Christmas. But rescue is available. If we humble ourselves and welcome God's rescue, we will find forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ.
that Jesus is the end of the wait for rescue. Well, Simeon then goes on to say for whom this rescue is made available.
And so secondly then, Jesus is the end of the wait for revelation. Jesus is the end of the wait for revelation. I grew up on Christmas Lane, believe it or not.
My parents still lived there in Suffolk. Each year, every house on the road goes big on Christmas lights, raising money for charity. That's actually my parents' neighbour's house right at this moment.
[14:56] It makes it onto the local news. BBC News website every year. It's taken very seriously in the road. I can assure you of that. When new residents move in, they're told about the responsibility that comes with living on Christmas Lane.

Around 300 people went to the switch-on at the start of December. I'm actually looking forward to see them and see what my dad's done this year. It's very competitive as well.
And yet the scope of the Christmas Lane lights, it's extremely local. It's only if you live in Lowestoft, really, that you're going to go see them, even with BBC coverage.
And yet Simeon, in verses 30 to 32, declares the scope of this Christmas light that he holds in his arms. So verse 30, Jesus has come to bring revelation to all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, meaning he will bring people out of spiritual darkness and into the light.

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And he will do this for people all over the globe. That is the claim of Christmas. Now, to properly understand this, we need to understand what spiritual darkness means in the Bible.
[16:33] So blindness in the Bible pretty much always refers to spiritual blindness. Again, we're back in the Isaiah playlist. He spoke a great deal about blindness, darkness, light, and sight.

So 700 years before Jesus, Isaiah announced a day when God will rescue his people from judgment by sending his servant. So Isaiah 60, that I put on the handout.
Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples.
But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.
It's this prophecy, and others like it, that Simeon is riffing on here, he's picking up. God giving light to the spiritually blind.
[17:41] If you're Christian here, if you can remember back to your pre-Christian days, those, remember the blindness with regard to God. Perhaps we had a vague sense of who God is, and what he's like, that he's out there somewhere.

But in terms of actually knowing him personally, we were in the dark. The people of Tromso in Norway know what it's like to live in continuous darkness.
From the 26th of November to the 15th of January, the sun doesn't rise at all. The polar night, they call it, it lasts all winter.
Electricity usage soars, sunglasses sales plummet. And what is true for Tromso physically, is also true for them spiritually, and for all people all over the world, in the dark to God, spiritually blind.
So much so that they're not actually waiting for a light because they don't know they need a light.
Now the people of Tromso, they live through months of darkness, and yet light comes.
[18:52] In fact, from May to July, it does come, and the sun never sets. It is complete reversal.
Well, the prophet Isaiah speaks of a day when this great shroud of darkness would be removed, blind eyes would be opened, and God's judgment will be lifted through a servant who will do it.

And Simeon picks up this baby in his arms and says, he is the light, a revelation for all people. I guess it's easy, really, to underestimate the scope and the scale of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ and the claims of Christmas.
This baby is the one who will open the eyes to spiritually blind people and remove the threat of God's judgment for people across the world. No matter the ethnicity, the class, background, religion, this baby is the one who God has appointed to lift the darkness.
The American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift was named Time Person of the Year 2023. Here's what Time editor Sam Jacobs had to say about her.
Picking one person who represents the eight billion people on the planet is no easy task. We picked a choice that represents joy, someone who's bringing light to the world.
[20:23] Now Taylor Swift has had an impressive year and I don't dislike her work, but bringing light to the world? If I'm so bold to say, Taylor Swift is not the light nor the rescue that our world needs.

But the message of Christmas is that Jesus was born as the light. He is the light to the world, the light of revelation to all people, the one who brings joy, this one and no other.
So on Christmas Eve with the hustle and the bustle of people finishing preparations or carrying out traditions, what's God's analysis of the world? Actually, it's in the dark, blind, in need of rescue, because every single one of us has shaken a fist to God personally, decided to run my life my way. Decent, yes, but desperately in need of rescue. But for each one of us, God has made available in the person of Jesus Christ a light for revelation.
Maybe you've been invited somewhere today or you're going somewhere for Christmas, lunch tomorrow and there's always that chat, what should we bring? What do we bring? That quick dash out to the shops to buy that bottle or something, those chocolates or something.
[21:50] You're nodding because you know it's true. I mean, what is Jesus going to bring at Christmas? What is he going to bring on Christmas Day? He will bring rescue and revelation.

And yet, he also brings division and derision. Because Simeon isn't quite done yet. Did you spot that in verse 34, 35?
And Simeon blessed them and said to his mother, 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

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pierce through your own soul also, so that thought from many hearts may be revealed.
Jesus brings division. He's been appointed for the rise and fall of many. There will be people who want to find out more about Jesus. The rise.
Some will say, I don't want Jesus running my life. The fall. And Jesus also brings derision. He is the sign, the light that will be opposed.
[23:00] This servant who brings light to the nations is also misunderstood. That can knock us, can't it? When you're having that conversation with someone over Christmas who wouldn't call themselves a follower of Jesus or maybe is really opposed to Jesus.

We might think, yes, well, the nations are coming in but so many dismiss him. Yes, Simeon and Anna rejoiced but my mates at school or uni oppose him.
It can make us waver. Yet this is all normal. This is Simeon's words. His words thousands of years ago tell us this was to be expected.
As we close then, it's interesting to know the origins of famous Christmas songs. I found out recently that Chris Rhea's classic Driving Home for Christmas is about him driving to Middlesbrough.
Insert your own joke here. And also read recently that the Christmas song Do You Hear What I Hear was written as a call for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.
[24:18] So the line A Star Dancing in the Night with a tail as big as a kite yes it evokes the Star of Bethlehem leading the Magi to the Son of God and yet it's also meant to get us to picture a nuclear missile in the sky.

Our world is a world that still longs for peace isn't it? Well at Christmas we can rejoice that heaven's peace has arrived.
It was in the announcement of the angels to the shepherds a peace with God a rescue from sin light in the dark has come and like Simeon and like Anna we are to rejoice the wait is over that Simeon the old servant ready to retire departing in peace Anna the force to be reckoned with that over 84 at sharing the good news that Jesus is the end of the wait for rescue the light to the nations and we are to hold fast to Jesus and hold fast to that Christmas message and wait for his second advent his second coming when he will come again and he will bring many sons and daughters to glory from all across the globe and we do so knowing that like Simeon and Anna our waiting now will one day turn to joy too let's pray together heavenly father we praise you for the birth of the Lord
Jesus that he is the end of the wait for rescue from sin for revelation that we can know you personally and be in your family forevermore amen

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