

Increase in Salvation to the Nations (Christmas Day)

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[0 : 00] Not that he didn't love people of other nations, but that he primarily dealt with and had a special love and affection for the Jews. And so it was very monocultural.

If you went to church back in those times, it would be very monocultural, very much unlike what we have here today. But the glorious truth of the gospel is that we're going to hear this morning, is that God, when he came to earth in Jesus Christ, when he came as a baby and grew up and lived and died, he ushered in a whole new way of doing things.

As we're going to see today in the words of Simeon, that God's light, his gospel, his salvation has come to people of all nations. And so that's a brilliant thing, isn't it?

And we're a testament to that this morning, that we have a church in Australia, let alone a church full of people from different cultures, is a testament to the fact that God has brought salvation to all people.

So let's take a look at it. Let's go. Verse 21. We'll start there. It says, After eight days had passed, that's after Jesus was born, it was time to circumcise the child, and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

[1 : 16] So eight days after a baby was born in that Jewish culture, I think according to Genesis 17 and Genesis 21 and Leviticus 12, instructed the people of Israel to circumcise that child after eight days.

And that was a way of the parents saying to God that this family honors God, that this family belongs to the people of God. That was a way to set apart your family as a family that worshipped the one true God.

And so we see Jesus being circumcised on the eighth day. That's not very unusual. However, the name that he is given is very important. Very important. Back in those days, probably more than today, but back in those days particularly, it was really important what your name was and what it meant.

So Jesus is given the name, obviously Jesus. That's not very significant. There was a common name back then, same name as Joshua. But the meaning of the name is really important.

Anyone know what it is? God saves, exactly. God saves. And he was given that name by God through the angel Gabriel speaking to Mary saying, his name will be Jesus.

[2 : 34] God saves because he will save all people who put their trust in God. That's kind of my big point for this morning. You're going to hear that over and over again.

God saves. Let's keep going. Verse 22. 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 firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord. And they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons.

So this is, we're fast forwarding about a month now, about 33 days later, after his circumcision, they would go to the temple in Jerusalem to present their firstborn son, Jesus, to designate him as holy to the Lord, according to the law, as stated in the law of Moses.

And so what they're doing now is going up to Jerusalem. It's one of the major cities in the world. It is the major religious center of the world. As you know, situated on top of a big hill or a mountain.

[3 : 46] And so to go to Jerusalem, you would need to ascend the mountain. And so you see there, it says they go up to Jerusalem, but it would be more than just going up physically. The people of Israel would believe that they were going up to the Lord himself, which they were because God's

very presence dwelt in that temple on top of that hill.

And so to go to Jerusalem was more than just a bit of a picnic hike. It was more than just a pilgrimage. It was going to the very presence of God.

And they would sing hymns and psalms on their way up the hill. And they would say, our psalms are ascending to the Lord. So it's a significant place, this place, Jerusalem. And just on a side note, we know today that we don't need a temple, that we don't need a holy city, a Jerusalem.

We don't need to ascend a mountain to go to God. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we have access to God wherever we are. Whether we're in Jerusalem or in Doncaster and Diamond Creek, whether we're in church or at work, we've got access to God because of what Jesus did.

We don't need a temple anymore. But at this stage, the temple is still really important. And they want to honour God. And we see that Joseph and Mary are both very committed followers of God. [5 : 07] And so they go to the temple. And we see too that they are committed, despite the fact that they're poor, the fact that they've offered there at the end of the passage, a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons.

To offer those birds was kind of, it was the bare minimum. If you were wealthy enough, you'd offer a lamb or a goat or whatever, but to offer birds, not so wealthy, but they still want to honour God, even though they're poor, even though they've kind of had this whole birth thing imposed on them in a way, they still want to honour God with their lives and with Jesus' life.

So they go to Jerusalem. See what happens. Verse 25. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. So we get to meet a pretty obscure character now in Simeon. We're also going to meet another obscure character in Anna.

But these people aren't really mentioned outside of these gospel accounts. But this man we see is a devout man. He's a righteous man. He spends a lot of time in the temple.

[6 : 23] We see that the Holy Spirit is resting on him. That is, God is working particularly in his life. And above all, this man is waiting for something. So if you go to the end of the Old Testament, you'll read the book of Malachi.

And that's sort of God's last word to the people of Israel, his last prophet, for 400 years until Jesus comes on the scene. So for 400 years, the people of Israel are waiting and wondering, what is God doing?

He promised us a Messiah. He promised a Saviour. He hasn't talked to us in a while. What's happening? And in addition to that, this old, old, old man has been spending his whole life waiting for this Messiah that God would promise.

It says there, he's waiting for the consolation of Israel. At this time, Israel was under the oppression of the Roman Empire.

They were being sort of under a dictatorship. And so he's waiting for that to be lifted, for Israel to be liberated. But even more than that, more than a lot of his contemporaries, he's waiting for the day when God will come to save not only Israel, but to save all people.

[7 : 37] You'll see that in what he says in just a minute. But the Holy Spirit rests on this man and he gets it. He gets it.

Luke, throughout this book, will highlight people, men and women, throughout the book who just get it. Among a whole bunch of people who don't get it, this guy gets it.

Listen, verse 27, let's go. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him, took Jesus, into his arms and praised God saying, Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

He just gushes when he sees Jesus. He gets it. He sees who he is. I want to come back to that at the end, that little poem, prophecy word that he says at the end there.

We're going to come back. That's the major point. But let's move on. Verse 33. He says, What he's saying is, when Jesus comes on the scene, many people are going to fall and many people are going to rise.

[9 : 26] And the people who are going to fall are going to be people like this. Arrogant people. Religious people. People dedicated to rules and regulations rather than to the God who governs all things.

You see, in Jesus' ministry, he butts heads constantly with Pharisees, Sadducees, religious men. Because these men had taken rules and regulations and they'd made them a little God of their own and they failed to acknowledge the God who is over all those things.

And so when he comes into the world as Jesus, they're going to be opposed to him and they're going to fall in the end. But there's also going to be people who rise.

These are humble people, faithful people, the poor in spirit. We constantly see Jesus coming to humble, lowly people, widows, outcasts, sick people, and they respond to him with faith.

And so they're raised up by God. We also see there in verse 34 that he says, Jesus will be a sign that will be opposed, that's predicting his persecution, his death.

[10 : 42] And also he says to Mary, a sword will pierce your own soul. That is, Mary, you're going to witness this man's death, his crucifixion. And so we see now, and this is really important, see now that Jesus, even as a baby, Jesus is a dead man walking.

That Jesus came into the world to die. That's the plain truth of it. That Simeon sees this little baby and sees a man on the cross in 30 odd years time.

Jesus is destined to die for you and for me. Let's keep going. Verse 36. There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of 84. She never left the temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer, night and day.

At the moment she came, at that moment she came and began to praise God and speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel. It's another very obscure character.

[11 : 50] She doesn't make it into the kids' Christmas stories, probably because she'd kind of scare them. She's a really old lady, probably start pulling your cheeks if you went anywhere near her. She's been a widow for many years.

It says that she was of a great age. That's another way of saying she's as good as dead, literally. So she's really old. She hangs out at the temple constantly. She's fasting and praying there and she's a really faithful believer in God.

And like Simeon, she's looking and waiting for this Messiah to come. Just every waking moment praying, God, please send your Messiah. And so when she sees Jesus, she sees the Messiah.

She sees the Savior. God saves. So here we've got another example of a lowly widow who gets it while the priests and the religious guys wearing the collars don't get it.

They don't get it. So I want to ask you, look at me. I want to ask you a question. This morning, who are you identifying with? Is it possible that this morning you're here on Christmas Day and it's great to have you, but is it possible that you're here like the priests in the temple fulfilling religious obligations, doing the religious thing and all the while being blind to who Jesus actually is?

[13 : 19] It's a possibility. Or you're here this morning and you're like Anna and you're like Simeon and through the religious stuff, you can see Jesus for who he is, the Savior.

God saves. Something to think about. Let's keep going.

Finish it out at 39. It says, When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favour of God was upon him. And so the story continues Jesus grows to be a man. He grows in knowledge.

He grows in favour with God. And so if you want to come in two days' time, I'll be back up here preaching the next passage. I encourage you to come back and you'll see what happens as we go from here through the story of Jesus coming to earth to save us.

[14 : 25] But I want to track back. I want to go back to verse 29 to 32. We'll finish on this. This is really key. Simeon here really reveals a lot to us about what we should be thinking about when it comes to Christmas.

Verse 29, he says this, Master to God, that is, Father, God, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word. What he's saying is, now I can die happy.

He's really old. He's been waiting a long time. God had said to him, you won't die until you see the Messiah, the Saviour, and now he sees Jesus, he gets it, he acknowledges him as the Saviour, and

now he says, I can die in peace.

I can die in peace. Now, why is he so looking forward to the Saviour coming? That's the question. It's not just so that Israel can be, it's not just so that Israel, have we got an answer here?

Do you want to give us the answer? That's alright. Kids, help me out.

[15:37] I'll answer it in a second. He's been waiting all his life, exactly right, and it's not just so that Israel can be redeemed, it's not just so that Israel can be liberated from the Romans.

He's been waiting this long because of this. Verse 30, For my eyes, as he looks at Jesus, have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

He looks at Jesus and see that God saves. He looks at Jesus and sees salvation, and it's not just salvation for Jews. That would have been understandable if he had a thought in those terms, that was his cultural context, but no, he sees Jesus and he sees salvation for all peoples.

He says there, all peoples, and for revelation to Gentiles, that's everyone outside of Israel. That's you and me and for the glory to your people Israel. that is, God has come to save all people.

That we have access to salvation, every single one of us. The Bible is clear on two points. everyone needs salvation and everyone is offered salvation.

[16:59] And you might be sitting here, let me talk about this for a second. You might be here this morning, like me, in years past, thinking, what do I need to be saved from? Right?

I mean, many of you will go from here to a lunch, beautiful big lunch with family and friends and loved ones and beers and presents and just goodness flying everywhere, right?

So what do you need to be saved from? It's a fair question. Here's what the Bible says. Sin. Exactly right.

And that's the end. Thanks for coming. Can I just draw that out a bit? I'm not going to be here in two days.

These guys are. They're going to be here. Seriously, this is what the Bible says. Stone cold fact.

Every single one of us is born into a situation where we are living in sin.

[18:01] And whether you want to call it sin or falling short or doing wrong, you can label it whatever you like. But we know from the Bible and from our own experience if we're honest that it's not just bad governments and bad dictators and bad people.

Actually, it's everyone who sins. Every one of us wrong one another. Every one of us wrongs God in failing to live out a life that He commands us to live.

And so the Bible says that fractures our relationships with each other and with God. The Bible says that God being holy and perfect cannot live in the presence of an ungodly imperfect people.

So that means heaven is empty if we're left to our own devices. Absolutely empty apart from God. So you can start to see why we need saving.

If every one of us is destined to be separated from God forever, if every one of us is living in fractured relationships, if every one of us is out of relationship with God who created us and loves us, then we need saving.

[19:05] Now here's the thing. In times past, people have tried to live perfect lives in order to be with God forever. If you can live a perfect life, you can be with Him forever.

But here's the truth. No one has ever done it bar one person and it's He who we worship today, it's Him who we remember at His birth, that's Jesus.

the one man who lived a perfect life. Everyone else is in a lot of trouble. Now here's the great truth, here's the good news. The Bible says that the reason Jesus came, the reason Jesus was in a manger, the reason Jesus came to save us was so that He could live a perfect life, so that He could die on the cross for our sins.

The Bible says that God made Him, that's Jesus, who knew no sin, who did not sin, He made Him to be sin for us. That is, when He died on the cross, He took my punishment, He took my sins and He took yours too.

Whether you know it yet or not, He's paid the price for you that opens the door to you, to heaven.

What God requires is that we respond in faith.

[20:23] What God requires is that at Christmas time or any other time, we see Jesus and we say, God saves. We get it. And then we submit ourselves to Him.

We acknowledge that He is God, that He is Lord, that He is Saviour. We put our trust in Him, not in our own good works, because we'll never be good enough, but in His merits and dying on the cross.

That's what Christmas is all about. If you want to put the Christ back in Christmas, then you need to have Jesus on a cross dying for your sins. That's the picture you need.

That's why He came. I want to tell you, I don't know where you're at. I don't know many of you here this morning. I don't know if you're just doing the religious thing and not seeing Jesus for who He is, but I want to beg you this morning, seriously beg you, to see Jesus as your Saviour, to see Him as the man who died to reconnect you with God.

That's why I'm here, to tell you that. That's why God has brought you here today, to hear that. There are people here in this room who I'm looking at now who have recently submitted themselves to Jesus and had their sins forgiven, and they'll never be the same.

[21 : 45] And they will spend eternity with Him. So let's, let's just, this Christmas, can we, can we cut away some of the rubbish that has accumulated?

Can we cut away some of the good stuff that we enjoy and just focus on Jesus who came, was born, lived, and died, and was raised again for us?

Let's do that. Can I pray for you? Alright, let's pray. Father, thank you so much for an opportunity this morning to hear the good news, the fact that you, in response to our rejection of you, in response to our sin, you took the initiative to send your one and only son to earth, to live as a human being so that he could identify with us, to die on a cross so that he could save us, to be raised from death so that we could be raised too.

Father, I pray that you would be just moving in the hearts of people here today. for those who don't know you as their saviour, Lord, please speak to them powerfully. Help them know that anyone who comes to you, you will never, ever reject, regardless of history, regardless of cultural background, regardless of anything.

you will never reject anyone who comes to you. So this Christmas, Lord, please help us to remember Jesus. God saves.

[23 : 48] Amen. Amen. Just before I get down, I want to just reiterate what Wayne said at the start of the service about the Introducing God course. This is a really good course if you want to learn more about Jesus, if you don't know anything at all about Jesus, if you want to reconnect with faith after a period of absence, if you just want to brush up on the essentials of the Christian faith, then please speak to us afterwards.

You've got a card, contact Matt Sheffer who's here, he's running the course, it's a really good thing to be involved in.