

# Luke 2:22-38 AM

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[ 0 : 00 ] Pray with me as we stand. Father God, we pray that you would illuminate our minds and soften our hearts, that we would hear and understand your word today.

In Christ's name, amen. Please be seated. Well, friends, if you didn't notice, I'm not the Reverend Cannon David Short.

Our rector has discerned a new calling to ministry to finish out his time here at St. John's in the puppet ministry with the kids. So I'm filling in for him today.

My name is Jacob Vandervo. If I've not had a chance to meet you, I am a curate here at St. John's. I typically serve at the evening service, but I'm happy to be with you this morning.

And in case you're new with us or if you've been away, I want to catch you up on where we are in our sermon series. We're sort of flying 40,000 feet above the story of the Bible.

[ 1 : 03 ] And each week we're touching down in places along the way so that we can get a picture of how God has worked in history. And we're doing this so that we can better understand who God is and how his works and his plans for the world give shape to our lives.

So in the first three weeks of this series, we saw that our God speaks. Week one was God the creator who speaks all things into existence.

Week two was God the revealer who speaks to reveal himself to us. And last week, we saw God the promise maker.

Our God speaks to invite humanity into covenant relationship with himself. And we heard from Jeremiah 31 that God promised to make a new covenant, a new kind of covenant, where he would put his law into our hearts and our sins would be put away and he would establish this covenant forever.

And this week, we get to see how God keeps this promise. And shockingly, we discover that God does this by becoming human.

[ 2 : 31 ] The theological word for this is incarnation. And incarnation means that the transcendent God of the universe who created everything, who stands outside of space and time, he takes on flesh and becomes a human being in real time and in real space.

Now this, I think, unfortunately, often becomes very commonplace for us Christians. We all often kind of just take it for granted.

So I want to remind us that this was absolutely scandalous to people in Jesus' day. And it still is. This is an audacious claim in our modern world.

There are plenty of other religions, secular or otherwise, claim to know the way to enlightenment or claim to have the truth or promise a method for living a good life.

But no other religion claims to follow a person who told us that he was the way, the truth, and the life.

[ 4 : 03 ] So we need to ask, why did God become human? And we find our answer in Luke chapter 2. So that's where we're going to touch down today.

Luke chapter 2. It's on page 857 of the Pew Bible. Join me there, if you will. It's chapter 2, beginning in verse 22. And this passage tells us that God became human for three reasons.

Number one, to fulfill his covenant promises. Number two, to bring salvation to all people. And number three, to reveal the hearts of every person.

So let's get into it. Point number one. God became human to fulfill his covenant promises.

And just so we can kind of catch up on where we are in the story of the Bible, we're in the beginning of Luke's gospel. And we're picking up just after the birth of Jesus.

[ 5 : 18 ] But in case you don't remember from Christmas a few weeks ago, Luke has told us that angels have been appearing all over Israel to declare that this child, miraculously born of Mary, is

the Son of God, the Savior of all humanity.

He's the Christ and the Lord of the world. And now in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel, he wants us to see that Jesus is also the fulfillment of all God's promises.

Because God becoming human is not totally out of left field. It's been the plan the whole time. So how does Luke do this?

Well, he shows us in this way. God's word, his law, his covenants, they're all over this passage.

They're like the three-dimensional background to everything that we see play out.

Nine times in this passage, Luke frames what's happening as the fulfillment of God's word. And we see this with everything that Mary and Joseph are doing.

[ 6 : 38 ] Everything they do is a fulfillment of God's law. They circumcise the child. They name him Jesus. They present him to the Lord.

They offer a sacrifice for purification. And verse 39 says that they only return home after they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord.

So why is Luke telling us this? Well, it's not so that we would be amazed at their piety, as beautiful as it is.

But rather it's to show us that God accomplishes his purposes for the world through the faithful obedience of his people who simply hear and follow his word.

And the same is true today. God delights to work in and through our faithful obedience. It's how he works in the world.

[ 7 : 46 ] So what do we see is the result of Mary and Joseph's obedience here? Well, it's no less than Jesus being shown to be the fulfillment of all God's promises.

We see this in Simeon. Luke tells us that he was righteous and devout. He was diligent in his waiting for the consolation of Israel.

He waited his whole life. And he lived in constant hope that God would come and fulfill his promise of a new covenant. And the Holy Spirit had assured him that he would see the Savior of the world before he died.

And so as this old man holds Jesus in his arms, he knows that he's holding the fulfillment of all God's promises.

And we also see this in Anna, another faithful, long-waiting servant of God. Her habit had been to worship, fast, and pray night and day, looking for God's salvation with hope and expectation.

[ 9 : 09 ] But what do we see? Now, when she lays eyes upon Jesus, her habit is transformed because her hope is fulfilled.

She goes from looking for God's salvation to proclaiming it. She cannot stop talking about Jesus.

Friends, this means that even if we've been waiting a long time to see God fulfill his promises, this tells us that God is faithful.

He is the one who sustains us and all his promises are fulfilled in Jesus. And when we come face to face with Jesus, our waiting takes on a new register.

It moves into the register of confident hope and proclamation because we've seen salvation. And our part in all this is to remain faithful and to keep our eyes on Jesus.

That's point number one. My second point is that we see that God becomes human to bring salvation.

[ 10 : 42 ] Salvation. Now, saying that Jesus came to save us I think also can just become commonplace for us and it threatens to lose its meaning.

or worse, sometimes we can make this word salvation sort of mean whatever we want it to mean.

So it's important for us to be reminded what salvation is according to scripture.

So let's look together and see what Luke says about the salvation we have in Christ. Look with me at verse 29. Here Simeon has taken the child Jesus in his arms and he's blessing God for sending the Messiah and he says 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 before the presence of all people to be a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Okay. So we see three things here about salvation. And the first is pretty straightforward. It says that salvation is offered to all people.

[ 12 : 03 ] It's not just one ethnic group. It's not just one political nation. It's Jews and Gentiles together. Jesus brings salvation for the whole world.

world. And the second thing that we see is that Simeon says that salvation in Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles.

What does this mean? Well, this metaphor of light throughout the Bible means spiritual revelation. So in scripture, light is that which reveals what's really spiritually true.

Okay. So what is the spiritual truth that the light of Christ reveals? And to see this, I think Zachariah really helps us here because he uses the same metaphor of Jesus as the light of the world.

So look with me just right across the page at Luke chapter 1 starting in verse 76. Here Zachariah is speaking about John the Baptist and he says, verse 76, and you child, that's John, will be called the prophet of the Most High.

[ 13 : 30 ] For you will go before the Lord, that's Jesus, to prepare his ways. What will he do? To give knowledge of salvation to his people.

what kind of salvation is it? In the forgiveness of their sins. Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high, the light of Christ, and give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

What this means is that when Jesus comes into the world, he reveals that our greatest enemy, the thing that we need deliverance from more than anything, is sin and death.

Here's the image. Death is looming large over all creation because of sin, and we are in its shadow. We're spiritually dark.

We're subject to death, and we're under judgment. But when the light of Christ dawns, he shines on all those who are under sin, revealing both our need for a Savior and the way that we can be saved.

[ 14 : 55 ] So this is why God became man, to reveal our need for him and to sacrifice himself for us, to suffer all the penalties of sin, so that we would be ransomed and we would no longer have to suffer those penalties, that we would be released from the power of sin and death.

This is the revelation to the Gentiles. And it's also the glory of Israel, because it's God's glory for justifying and saving his people, people.

And God's redemptive glory shines out through the testimony of his redeemed people in the world. This is what salvation is all about.

And I wonder, brothers and sisters, where do we feel the need for salvation today? Maybe it's in our physical health, maybe it's in our finances, maybe it's in politics, maybe it's in our families, maybe it's difficult situations at work or in school.

And the Bible tells us that God cares deeply about all of these troubles that we suffer in our lives. And he is present with us as we walk through suffering.

[ 16 : 25 ] And what our salvation in Christ means is that because we've been redeemed, we can hope with confidence that our suffering is not forever and it's not pointless.

Because what's in front of us is eternal life with God where he will redeem and renew every circumstance in our lives. this is the salvation on offer in Jesus Christ.

And this salvation is why God became human. That's point number two. My last point is that God became human to reveal our hearts.

And friends, because the light of Christ reveals our need for a Savior, the truth is it's often opposed. Simeon says to Mary in verse 34, Behold, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel, 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.

God will be healed. And what this means is that the news of God becoming human and offering salvation from sin will cause people to be scandalized and to disbelieve.

[ 18 : 06 ] And this is how many people respond to Jesus. We know this. It was so in Jesus' day and it continues to be so today. Some will not accept Jesus for who he says he is.

People, especially today, might be willing to accept Jesus as a great teacher, a great prophet, maybe a spiritual guru, but the God of the universe who's come to save us from our sin, surely not. But lest we Christians take on a holier-than-thou attitude about this, I actually don't think Simeon is setting up two different categories of people here.

He's saying that we all stumble on the news of Jesus at some point. Even Mary herself, who had every advantage in believing Jesus for who he was, even she would be cut to the soul in anguish and doubt about who he was when he hung upon the cross.

We all stumble on the news of Jesus because at times it seems to go against everything that we think is natural. we think God is distant, but Jesus says God is very close.

[ 19 : 43 ] We think God doesn't care about this world. Jesus says God is intimately involved. We think we are self-sufficient and able.

Jesus confronts us with our neediness. We think that we can justify ourselves in our own power. And Jesus says that he is the only way to be justified.

We are prideful because of our accomplishments. But following Jesus requires humility and repentance.

So what are we to do? How are we to go from being people who stumble and fall at the news of Jesus to people who rise back up?

Well, the apostle Peter knew a whole lot about this. He, of course, was Jesus' closest disciple, and yet he denied him from his very heart and soul just before Jesus was crucified.

[ 20 : 56 ] and yet he received grace. So we might want to hear from him.

So I want to show you just as I close what he says because he says it so clearly. Turn with me, if you will, really quickly to 1 Peter chapter 2.

It's on page 1015. 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 6. We'll start right at the top of 1015.

So the apostle Peter here is talking about Jesus, and he says, for it stands written in scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone.

And this is Jesus. A cornerstone chosen and precious. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

[ 21 : 59 ] So the honor is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But hear this. But you, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Friends, the honor, the gift of salvation is for anyone who will repent, turn to Jesus, and believe.

Peter says all that's required for salvation is that we step out into the light and believe in Jesus. And though we will surely doubt in those moments and seasons of our life when the sword of anguish pierces our souls, what Luke tells us is that if we just turn to Christ and believe, Simeon says we will rise.

We will be resurrected. It's the same word in Greek. So, brothers and sisters, let's receive Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.

[ 23 : 41 ] Let's believe in him for our salvation. And we will be resurrected on that final day. Not to judgment, but to friendship and joy with God forever.

This is why God became human. Let's rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.