

Jesus: God's Loving Promise

Lesson 4: December 23, 2018

Bible Background • LUKE 1:26–31; 2:21–35

Printed Text • LUKE 1:26–31; 2:22, 25–35 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 49:1–7

Some people wait a long time for a promise to be kept. What assurance do we have that God's promise about salvation will be kept? God's angel spoke to Mary, and the Holy Spirit spoke through Simeon, to declare that in Jesus God was sending a Savior and keeping the promise.

Words You Should Know

- A. Espoused *mnesteuo* (Gk.)—Engaged or promised to marriage.
- B. Consolation *paraklesis* (Gk.)—Comfort and encouragement.

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: REMEMBER God's words of affirmation and comfort to Mary; CONSIDER the love and sovereignty of God revealed in Jesus' birth; and SHARE testimonies of how Christ's birth impacts our faith.

In Focus

Grandpa James beamed as his grandson Reggie strode up the walkway. No, it's Reginald these days, he reminded himself. "Reggie" was the little kid he took to the circus, not the grown man before him wearing the uniform of the U.S. Marine Corps— complete with a chestful of medals and ribbons, and a major's gold leaf on his shoulders. Reginald called, "Grandpa!" and matched his grandfather's wide smile with a happy grin of his own. Right behind him were his mother Regina and father Dwayne. "I never thought I'd see the day when you came back to us," Grandpa James said. Reginald's postings during his years in service had taken him all over the globe, from South Carolina to Afghanistan, and more. But after 10 years in, Reginald was back home. Over lunch, the family discussed the circumstances that had prompted Reginald to retire in order to run the family business: Grandpa James' stroke and limited recovery. "I have to caution you: It won't be easy," James said.

"I can handle it, Grandpa," Reginald said.

"I know that, boy, but I'm worried about them," James said, pointing at Dwayne and Regina. "They're going to be anxious about you, because you're young; and people will criticize, complain, and try to undermine you. But I have faith in God you'll do well."

Have you ever had someone in your life who believed you would succeed and supported you unconditionally?

Keep in Mind

"For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people" (Luke 2:30–31, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV

Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,
27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.
28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

NLT

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee,

27 to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

28 Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

30 "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

2:22 Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

25 At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him

26 and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

27 That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required,

28 Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, 29 “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

30 I have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared for all people.

32 He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

33 Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him.

34 Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him.

5 As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

People, Places, and Times

Nazareth. The name of a city meaning “branch.” Nazareth only gained prominence after the ministry of Jesus. Located in lower Galilee, it lies halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. In Jesus’ day, Nazareth was a small village with only one spring to supply fresh water to residents. Today that spring is known as Mary’s well. Nazareth did not have a good reputation in Jesus’ day, as reflected in Nathanael’s question, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (from John 1:46). Jesus was rejected by His townspeople and thrown out of the synagogue there (Luke 4:16–30; Matthew 13:54–58; Mark 6:1–6).

Firstborn. Jewish families had to adhere to strict ceremonies after the birth of a child. If the child was a male, he had to be circumcised and named on the eighth day. God made a covenant with Abraham and commanded that, as a sign of the covenant, every male should be circumcised (Genesis 17:10–14). This included slaves and foreigners before they could become Jewish citizens or take part in Passover. Moses clarified that circumcision was a legal requirement (Leviticus 12:3).

Firstborn children had to be redeemed when they turned one month old. In memory of the death of Egypt’s firstborn and the preservation of the firstborn of Israel, all the firstborn of Israel belonged to God (Exodus 13:2, 11–16). An offering of five shekels was given to the priest to redeem the child from God (Numbers 18:15–16).

Background

Luke strongly affirmed that Jesus was Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, King and Deliverer. Christ was the fulfillment of God’s promise to His people to send a Savior. The first part of Luke’s Gospel is devoted to divinely orchestrated events that lead to the birth of the Messiah. Previous verses in Luke 1 tell how the angel Gabriel spoke to Zacharias and told him that his wife was going to bear him a son; the son would become known as John the Baptist. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel appeared to her relative, Mary. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews who adhered to the requirements of the Law. They had Jesus circumcised on the same day that he was named, as John the Baptist’s parents had done (1:59). They followed the angel’s instructions and named the child Jesus (v. 31). Luke described Mary in such a way as to elevate two ideas: first, that she was still a virgin; second, that she was espoused, or engaged, to Joseph. Engagement in those days was a much more serious affair than it has become. According to the type of engagement Joseph and Mary had, she was already considered his legal wife.

A period of time normally elapsed between the espousal and the actual celebration of the marriage, when the couple would begin to live together.

At a Glance and In Depth

At-A-Glance

1. Testimony of God's Favor (Luke 1:26–31)
2. Testimony of God's Faithfulness (Luke 2:22, 25–28)
3. Testimony of God's Fulfillment (vv. 29–32)
4. Testimony of Prophecy (vv. 33–35)

In Depth

1. Testimony of God's Favor (Luke 1:26–31)

Gabriel addressed Mary as “thou that are highly favored,” indicating that the Lord had a special purpose for her. Understandably, the sight of Gabriel and the words he was saying were a lot for a young woman to absorb. Mary was trying to figure out what Gabriel was talking about. As much as being afraid, she was probably overwhelmed.

Sensing Mary's fear, Gabriel assured her not to be afraid. She was not in trouble with the Lord. On the contrary, she had found favor with God. She was about to conceive and give birth to a son. Gabriel even told her the son's name would be Jesus. The name Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word “Joshua,” meaning “the Lord is salvation.” The boy to whom Mary would give birth would bring salvation to the world. Undoubtedly, every mother believes she has given birth to a wonderful person. Gabriel wanted Mary to understand the full extent of what she was about to experience. Her son would be called many names, including Son of the Highest.

What importance has your given or adopted name had in your life?

2. Testimony of God's Faithfulness (Luke 2:22, 25–28)

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be ceremonially dedicated to the Lord as was required for all firstborn sons in Israel according to Jewish Law. Joseph and Mary's encounter with Simeon did not happen by accident. God fulfilled His promise to Simeon by allowing him to be in the Temple at just the right moment. He was able to gaze upon the consolation of Israel: the Messiah. Rabbis commonly used the phrase “consolation of Israel” to mean the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hopes. Like Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon was devout in morality and faith. The Holy Ghost had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Simeon's desire was to witness the fulfillment of God's promise for His people.

There was also a law requiring the redemption of the firstborn child (Exodus 13:2, 12–16). Because God had spared the firstborn of Israel during the tenth plague in Egypt (Exodus 12:12–13), He required that Israel's firstborn be dedicated to Him. Later the Lord allowed the tribe of Levi to become a substitute for the firstborn (Numbers 3:11–13). Joseph and Mary's observance of this ritual at the time of Jesus' birth symbolized their commitment to the Lord. Keeping the ritual was an act of worship in obedience to God, recognizing that children, like everything else, come from God and belong to Him. The redemption price for male children was five shekels of silver (Numbers 18:16). This requirement was to be fulfilled when the child was a month old. Apparently, Joseph and Mary fulfilled the two requirements at the same time.

Exactly where Simeon met them in the Temple is not known. Since Mary was present, they were either in the Court of Gentiles or the Court of Women. It must have been the most magnificent feeling Simeon had ever known, to hold the baby Jesus in his arms. Simeon identified Jesus as the embodiment of God's salvation. Seeing the promise of the Lord as a living being and holding the babe of promise in his arms moved Simeon to bless God before singing a song of praise.

How does Simeon's role in the Gospel demonstrate the sovereignty of God?

3. Testimony of God's Fulfillment (Luke 2:29–32)

The song of Simeon's praise begins in verse 29. This song is now known as the "Nunc Dimittis," which are the first two words of the Latin translation. Simeon was now ready to die, having witnessed the fulfillment of God's promise, knowing that the salvation of his people had come to earth. He was faithful to God's Word and to the law of Judaism. His song contained not only praise but a prophetic aspect. By recognizing that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise, Simeon then took on the attitude that would have been fitting for all of Israel. While Jesus was yet a babe in his arms, the Jewish prophet foresaw that salvation was intended for all of humanity.

Two thousand years ago, Simeon prophesied that Jesus was sufficient for all—Jew and Gentile alike. The Gospel is not reserved for a select few, as some would have it. Simeon and those who lived during Jesus' day had the privilege of seeing salvation in the flesh. Today we see salvation through the eyes of faith as we invite others to join us. Even though He is no longer with us in the flesh, we too can marvel at the hope that lies in Him, just as Simeon did that day in the Temple.

How do you respond when you finally receive something you have long awaited?

4. Testimony of Prophecy (vv. 33–35)

Understandably Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was said about Jesus. Simeon foretold the great and powerful effect Mary's Son would have upon the world. The presence of her Son would divide the nation. Those who rejected Him would fall, but those who received Him would be lifted up. The Messiah would do away with the proud and lift up the downtrodden and oppressed.

The baby, who was totally dependent on them at that moment, had the future of the world in His hands. Joseph and Mary would have to continue to trust in Him to lead and guide them as they raised and nurtured the child who already held the name Savior.

How does the birth of Jesus push us to make a choice between acknowledging or rejecting God?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Mary react to Gabriel's words (Luke 1:29)?
2. What words did Simeon say to indicate that Jesus was the Savior for all people (2:32)?
3. What difficult prophecy did Simeon give Mary concerning her own fate (v. 35)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Mary was troubled and confused when the angel Gabriel visited her until he assured her that she was favored by God. How can such assurance give you the confidence to fulfill God's will?
2. Simeon faithfully waited to meet the Messiah before he died, not knowing how the wait would be. Can we be so patient?

Lesson in Our Society and Make it Happen

Liberating Lesson

It can be easy to take for granted the tremendous blessings we have compared to our elders and ancestors. Much of what we now enjoy in our lives are things for which our parents, grandparents, and ancestors hoped, dreamed, prayed, and worked. How can we share the gifts, accomplishments, and blessings we have with those in the generation before us who have long waited to see what we have every day? How can we share those blessings with the generation that comes after us, allowing them to enjoy the things for which we prayed and worked?

Application for Activation

It seems like we wait a long time to see some of God's promises in our lives. When they arrive, it can be challenging to give back to God or accept the responsibility that comes with the promised thing. Whether a promotion, a relationship, a home, a healing, or a breakthrough, how can we make sure to give it back to God for God's glory? Take some time to write down what you have asked for and received from God and how it is being used to bring Him glory. What are you waiting on from God now? Ask God for wisdom to use your blessings to glorify Him and love others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light On The Text

Luke 1:26–31; 2:22, 25–35

Luke, the physician, begins the book that bears his name with a preface stating the purpose of his writing and to whom he is writing the Gospel (1:1–4). He begins the historical narration with the story of John the Baptist's birth—from the angel's announcement to his father, Zacharias, until the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (1:5–25). Luke then turns to the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary of the conception and consequent incarnation of Christ, and Mary's reaction to this unusual news (vv. 26–38).

1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

It has been six months since Gabriel told Zacharias he would have a son. The angel's mission is to announce the coming birth of yet another son.

Gabriel, which means "my warrior is God," is one of the chief angels. He is sent "to a virgin espoused to a man." The word translated "espoused" (Gk. *mnesteuo*, *muh-nace-TEW-oh*) means to be promised in marriage or to be betrothed. Betrothing in the Jewish custom was the most important part of marriage. It was as legal as the actual marriage; and could not be broken off except by a bill of divorce. Although the couple was regarded as husband and wife, they did not engage sexually until the actual marriage took place according to

the custom. Girls were usually espoused only a few years after the age of puberty, i.e., in their early teens. Usually the parents of the adolescent chose the spouse for their child.

This Jewish custom is comparable with many African marriages, where not only do the parents arrange or negotiate for their sons or daughters' marriages, they also arrange for their betrothal at infancy. Traditionally, in most communities in the Igbo land of Nigeria, families betroth their children at birth. When a boy is born, the father starts planning for his wife to be. He looks for a good family, preferably among family friends, in which a girl is born. He places a token (engagement present) into the cup of the newborn girl. This signifies a promise of marriage between the two.

This act is usually binding and honored by the two families. The children are introduced to each other at a very young age and told they have been betrothed to marry. Although they are regarded as husband and wife, they cannot have sex until they are officially married. They are to keep themselves pure and reserved for each other. The girl lives with her parents until after the actual marriage ceremonies are completed. She then goes and lives with the husband. This is the idea expressed here by Luke.

The angel goes to the village of Nazareth, and approaches a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph. The virgin's name is Mary. Luke refers to Joseph as "of the house of David," and Matthew's genealogical account traces Joseph's lineage also to King David. This is in fulfillment of the messianic prophecy that the Messiah will be from the lineage of David (Psalm 132:11, 17; Isaiah 9:6-7, 16:5; cf. Luke 1:32).

28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

"Hail" here is the Greek *chairo* (KIE-ro) a common form of greeting, used in various ways and on various occasions. "Highly favoured" is derived from the noun *charis*, which means grace, usually interpreted as unmerited favor from God. *Charis*, "grace" with "peace" (Gk. *eye-REE-nee*) was a form of Jewish greeting, and was used also in ancient correspondence. Here the angel says both *chairo* and *charis*, probably to reflect both the Jewish and Greek culture of the time.

Next the angel adds "the Lord is with you." Mary is not only endued with divine grace or God's favor; the angel assures her of the Lord's presence with her. Finally, the angel adds, "Blessed art thou among women." The idea here is that above all women, Mary was the most "blessed" (Gk. *eulogeo*, ew-lo-GEH-oh). The word means to praise, to speak well of, or to invoke a benediction upon someone. It also has the idea of making happy or bestowing blessings. Because of what God is going to accomplish through her, Mary would either be the most well spoken of among all women, the most blessed, or both.

29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. 30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

The word "troubled" (Gk. *diatarasso*, deeah- ta-RASS-so) means to disturb wholly or to be greatly agitated or alarmed. She was gripped with fear. Earlier, when Zacharias saw the angel, "he was troubled," (Gk. *tarasso*, ta-RASS-so), which means the same as *diatarasso* but to a lesser extent (v. 12). Both of these imply inner commotion.

Mary was more perplexed at the angel's greeting than the angel's appearance. She "cast in her mind," (Gk. *dialogizomai*, dee-ahlow- GEED-zow-my), simply means that she pondered the type of greeting it was. She was more afraid and agitated than surprised at the strange greeting. That's why the angel calms her and tells her not to fear, assuring her that she has found favor with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

The angel goes on to explain why and how she has found favor with God, that she has been chosen by God to bear a son: Jesus. Mary is to be the agent through whom God fulfills His divine plan. Notice the wording here is identical to the virgin birth passage of Isaiah (7:14), and reminiscent of the Lord's assurance to Hagar

(Genesis 16:11). She would “bring forth” (bear) a son whom they would name Jesus. The name Jesus (Iesous, ee-ay-SOOCE) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua (Yehoshua), which means “Yahweh is salvation.” It is the earthly name of God’s Son. It describes the purpose of His birth—to deliver and save the people of God from their sins (Matthew 1:21). The name also means “deliverer.” The name Jesus/Joshua, was common among the Jews, perhaps because they yearned for their son to be the promised Messiah, or at least a great leader like Joshua of the Old Testament.

This practice is common among Africans. In many cases, names reflect the parents’ wishes for the children. However, choosing the name “Jesus” for Mary’s son was a direct command from God, and it described distinctly the purpose of Christ as the real Redeemer, the one Israel had been expecting.

2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord. 25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

Luke 2:21–38 is a narrative of the purification ceremony of Mary and Jesus according to the Jewish custom. Luke explains an extraordinary event, which is unique to Jesus—the confirmation of the mission of Christ through prophecy. Here Luke introduces us to Simeon whom he describes as “just and devout,” a man “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” We know nothing about Simeon outside of this brief narrative. However, he must be a devout Jew who is expecting the coming of the Messiah.

At the time of Christ’ birth, religion in Israel was at a low point. Yet in the midst of the religious vacuum was a man Luke describes as “just and devout,” a man who “the Holy Ghost was upon.” The word “just” (Gk. dikaios, DEEkie- oce) is equivalent to righteous. He not only observed the divine law but conformed to the will of God. Hence he is described as “devout” (Gk. eulabes, ew-lah-BASE), a pious man, one who is devoted to and who reveres God (see Luke 1:6; cf. Philippians 3:6).

Simeon was among the few pious men expecting the coming of the Lord Jesus, which Luke called the “consolation of Israel.” The noun “consolation,” (Gk. paraklesis, pah- RAH-klay-seese)—comfort, exhortation, or encouragement—describes the coming ministry of Christ. Paraklesis is related to the word Comforter (parakletos) applied to the Holy Spirit especially in John’s Gospel (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Here, the coming of Christ was to be a comfort for the people of Israel, who at this time were under the rule of the Roman Empire. Israel had been promised a deliverer and a counselor, one who would restore to Israel the Davidic kingdom (Isaiah 9:6–7). The word “waiting” (Gk. prosdechomai, pros-DEHkho- my) implies doing so patiently and with confidence. Simeon was waiting confidently and patiently for the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise of the Messiah. His confidence lay in his relationship with God and in his trust in the God of Israel who is faithful in keeping His promises.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit had assured him that he would not die until he saw the Lord’s Christ (Messiah). The word “revealed” (Gk. chrematizo, kh-ray-mah-TEED-zo) used here is often used for divine communication. Here Simeon had been told through the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah in his lifetime. Luke does not give details about Simeon’s age, status, or background except to say he was full of the Holy Spirit. If he were a priest, Luke likely would have made that clear in his narrative as in the case of Zacharias (cf. 1:5). Unlike the prophetess Anna, whose age is hinted at (vv. 36–38), Luke does not share Simeon’s age.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

It was a requirement for Jewish worshipers to routinely go into the Temple to pray. As a devout Jew, Simeon, therefore, must have formed the habit. On this special occasion, however, “he came by the Spirit into the temple” and met with Mary and Joseph with Jesus as they came to fulfill their Jewish rites. The language here seems to indicate that the meeting was neither prearranged nor was it a coincidence. Rather it was divinely planned with providential timing. He came by the Spirit, which means that he was led by the Holy Spirit into the Temple in order to fulfill the promise of verse 26. One function of the Holy Spirit is to lead God’s people.

While Simeon was in the Temple, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to perform the Jewish ritual of dedicating the firstborn. Through divine revelation, Simeon was informed that this child was the long-awaited Messiah.

Simeon takes Jesus “up in his arms”—a common practice in the Jewish tradition (Mark 10:13–16)—and blesses God. We transliterate the Greek word *eulogeo* to the English word *eulogy* or to *eulogize*. During funerals, when we speak well of, or praise, people for what they have done for others or achieved in life, we eulogize them. Here Simeon is praising God, which includes a thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promise not only to Israel but to him personally.

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

Simeon begins his eulogy to God by expressing his gratitude for being allowed to see the Messiah in fulfillment of God’s promise (v. 26). The underlying tone here is of satisfaction for a task accomplished. Now that the Messiah has arrived, Simeon seems to say that the Lord should let him go. With Jesus in his arms, Simeon has seen the promised “Star out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17), the “Sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). He has beheld the redemption of God in the person of Christ Jesus. Now the watch is over. He is now to be discharged according to God’s word. Note the contrast between God the “Lord” and Simeon “the servant.” The word “peace” (Gk. *eirene*, eye-REE-nee) used here has the sense of tranquility or rest and contentment.

After seeing God’s promised salvation, Simeon is ready to depart peacefully into God’s presence. Simeon does not say that he has seen the Messiah (although it is implied), but that he has seen God’s salvation personified and embodied in Christ Jesus—the Messiah. To see Jesus is to see salvation, a theme Luke repeatedly emphasizes in his book (1:69, 71, 77; 19:9).

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Contrary to the expectation and belief of the Jewish religion that the Messiah was to come only for the people of Israel, salvation is universal in scope. The phrase “before the face of all people” supports this fact. God’s plan of salvation is not only available to the few pious people, or to the nation of Israel, but to all people of the earth because His love is universal (John 3:16). Verse 31 echoes the prophecy of Isaiah (52:10) and the psalmist’s song which says “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (from Psalm 98:3).

There are dual functions of this salvation. First, it will dissipate the spiritual darkness that has enveloped the Gentiles for centuries. The darkness represents ignorance, sin, and misery; it is a symbol of death and disobedience. In place of the darkness, redemption will bring light—a symbol of life, growth, knowledge, and obedience—to the nations.

Second, salvation will bring glory to the nation of Israel. That means nations will realize the glorious special privilege Israel has enjoyed in its relationship with God through the ages, a privilege now consummated and perfected in the birth and person of Christ Jesus. Here, we see that the same light that brings revelation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)—those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luke 1:79)—also brings salvation to Israel, God’s people (1:77).

33 And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

Mary and Joseph knew through the announcement of the angel Gabriel (1:26–38; Matthew 1:20–21), that their child was the Christ—the expected Messiah. This destiny was confirmed by the supernatural conception, by the words of Elizabeth (1:41–45), and by the words of the shepherds (2:15–19). Still they could not fully comprehend the significance of it all. They were amazed and overwhelmed at the words of Simeon. The word “marveled” (Gk. *thaumazo*, thou-MAD-zo) used here is not expressing doubt but excitement. It means “to admire, to have in admiration, or to wonder.”

After that, Simeon blessed them all. Simeon then addressed Mary, predicting the effect Christ’s birth will have on the nation of Israel, and on her. Notice that Simeon now addresses Mary alone. The reason is clear. Joseph did not father Jesus in the natural sense of the word. Joseph can be described as a stepfather. It is apparent that Simeon is aware of this unique situation. Apart from this meeting with Simeon, the visit to the Temple when Jesus was twelve (vv. 42–48), and in the genealogy of Christ (3:23), there is only one other mention of Joseph in the rest of Luke (Luke 4:22).

Luke uses the emphatic Greek word *idou* (ee-DOO), translated “behold” here, to call attention to important information. Simeon informs Mary that the “Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” Simply stated, this means the presence of Christ will be a curse for those who reject Him but a blessing for those who accept Him. The prophet Isaiah says, concerning the Messiah, “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” (Isaiah 8:14–15; cf., Matthew 21:42–44; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 1:23). Simeon says that Jesus, on the one hand, will be a stone on which some will trip, fall, and perish; on the other hand, He will be a stepping-stone that will enable others to arise and be saved.

Not only that. Christ will also be a means by which those who have fallen will be able rise “again.” The idea here is that He will be the means of salvation for sinners, or those who first reject Him and later repent. They would rise again into new life; their relationship with God would be restored. The phrase also speaks of those who fall because of Him “rising again,” referring to the resurrection of the saints—the raising of the dead in Christ into eternal life. Either one is theologically sound. There is no neutrality, Simeon seems to point out. Either He is rejected, which results in a downfall, or He is received, which results in a rising again.

Simeon adds that Jesus is also set “for a sign, which shall be spoken against.” The birth, death, and the person of Christ have been the basis for untold controversies among many throughout the generations. Christ always has been the object of hostility among unbelievers. He was rejected to the point of crucifixion. From the beginning, many rejected and persecuted Him, and many have spoken against Him, rejecting God’s salvation.

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Simeon foretells the anguish that Mary will experience because of the Christ. It will be a heart-piercing sorrow—as sharp and painful as the sword. He describes the extreme anguish Mary will undergo seeing her Son suffer. This was fulfilled at the Cross when she stood watching her son die (John 19:26).

Through Christ, His life, death, and resurrection, “the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” The Gospel brings light to the inner being of all humanity and exposes their character and attitude toward God and His Christ. The Gospel of John describes Jesus as a light that shines in the darkness (1:5) and gives light to everyone in the world (1:9). Later in the same Gospel, Jesus calls Himself the “light of the world” (8:12; 9:5; 12:35).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Birth of John Promised
(Luke 1:11–16)

TUESDAY

The Lord Was with John
(Luke 1:57–66)

WEDNESDAY

Let It Be According to Your
Word (Luke 1:32–38)

THURSDAY

Joseph Obeys the Lord
(Matthew 1:18–25)

FRIDAY

Anna Speaks of Child Jesus
(Luke 2:36–38)

SATURDAY

Angels Announce Good
News to Shepherds
(Luke 2:8–14)

SUNDAY

Testimonies to the
Promised Savior
(Luke 1:26–31; 2:22, 25–35)