

## I. Introduction

Good morning! On Wednesday we had a wonderful Christmas Eve, and I pray that you had a blessed Christmas. Today is our last worship service of 2008; the New Year is rapidly approaching. I do pray that you have had a good year in 2008 and that you will have an even better year in 2009. I know that the past year has been a difficult year for some; while for others it has been the best year ever. But for all of us, there is much to give thanks for. As the New Year approaches, let's take the time to count the blessings of 2008. But before I get sidetracked any further, let's take a look at our Bible passage for today, Luke 2:21-40.



## II. Scripture Luke 2:21-40 (NIV)

[21] On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. [22] When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord [23] (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), [24] and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." [25] Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [27] Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, [28] Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: [29] "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. [30] For my eyes have seen your salvation, [31] which you have prepared in the sight of all people, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." [33] The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. [34] Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, [35] so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." [36] There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, [37] and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. [38] Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. [39] When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. [40] And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

## III. Teaching Luke 2:21-40 (NIV)

This passage tells about the presentation of Jesus at the temple. Rembrandt painted the scene like this: Simeon holds Jesus, Joseph and Mary look on, and Anna stands in the background, hands raised in thanksgiving. The light falls on Jesus, the Light of the World.

Luke is writing especially for non-Jewish readers, but to the educated Jew, this passage sends a strong message that Joseph and Mary were devout Jews who observed the Law of Moses. In accordance with Jewish tradition and Leviticus 12:1-8, Jesus is named and circumcised on the eighth day. Then He is presented at the temple in Jerusalem with sacrifices, after Mary's days of purification, which by Jewish practice were 40 days. Because they are poor and cannot afford a lamb,



Joseph and Mary offer a pair of doves or pigeons, a detail which tells us that the wise men have not yet arrived with their expensive gifts. They are a devout family, and, while they are at the temple making their offering, Simeon and Anna, two elderly Jewish prophets speak over them and recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

After these things, **Luke 2:39** tells us, **“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.”** Some readers are disturbed by this because they think that this verse leaves no room for the additional events described in Matthew. But, actually, doing, **“everything required by the Law,”** could include fulfilling the prophecies about the birth of the Messiah, so with this phrase, Luke may be gently hinting that there is a gap in time between Luke 2:38 and 2:39, a gap during which the events of Matthew 2 occur.

This seems like a good place to briefly address some of the differences between Matthew and Luke, especially with regard to the story of Jesus’ birth. If you read Matthew and Luke side-by-side, you will quickly notice that the stories are very different. Take a look at this chart, which compares the four gospels.

Harmony of the Gospels				
	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Pre-existence of Christ				1:1-18
Genealogy of Jesus	1:1-17		3:23-38	
Gabriel announces John's birth			1:1-25	
Gabriel visits Mary			1:26-38	
Mary visits Elizabeth			1:39-56	
Birth of John the Baptist			1:57-80	
Angel appears to Joseph in a dream	1:18-25			
Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem	1:25		2:1-7	
Shepherds visit Jesus at the manger			2:8-20	
Circumcision of Jesus			2:21	
Jesus presented in the Temple			2:22-38	
Wise men present gifts in house	2:1-12			
Joseph's family escapes to Egypt	2:13-15			
Herod's wrath on Bethlehem's children	2:16-18			
Herod dies in Spring of 4 B.C.	2:19			
Joseph's family settles in Nazareth			2:39	
Childhood of Jesus			2:40-52	
Ministry of John the Baptist	3:1-12	1:1-8	3:1-20	

As you can see, Mark and John tell us very little about the birth of Jesus, while Matthew and Luke discuss it at length. However, most of what Luke tells us about it is not in Matthew, and most of what Matthew tells us is not in Luke. For example, only Luke includes the events leading up to John the Baptist’s birth and only Luke tells about the angel Gabriel visiting Mary. Also, only Luke speaks of the shepherds’ visit to baby Jesus and the presentation of Jesus at the temple. On the other hand, only Matthew tells us that the angel spoke to Joseph, about the coming of the Magi, and about how they fled to Egypt (see painting by Giotto di Bondone, 1306) to escape Herod’s violent jealousy.



These differences are real, but they are not a problem. Matthew and Luke are both telling the story of Jesus’ coming, but they don’t need to tell it the same way. The accounts are different, but they are not contradictory, they are complimentary. Scholars agree that Matthew was written years earlier than Luke. And, Luke tells us that he researched all things carefully, so it is very likely that Luke had a copy of Matthew close at hand.

I can easily imagine Luke sitting and praying, reading over Matthew and other sources, and then

picking up his pen to write. Does he copy Matthew? No. Luke's purpose is different. Matthew wrote to tell the Jews that the Messiah had come, but Luke writes to share the Good News of Jesus with the Roman world. Where appropriate for his purpose, Luke repeats what Matthew has already written. But in other places, Luke adds new information that Matthew left out, filling in the gaps in Matthew's account. In this way, each of the gospel authors wrote from their own unique perspective and for their chosen audience.



At first glance, the differences between the gospel accounts may seem puzzling, but as with any good puzzle, if you take the time to patiently fit the pieces together, you are rewarded with a clear picture. The diverse pieces fit together to reveal a beautiful message of God's love for all peoples.



Let's get back to today's text. In today's passage we have two wonderful examples of faithful servants waiting on the Lord. First, let's consider, Simeon.

**Luke 2:25, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Simeon was waiting for, "the consolation of Israel."**

In other words, Simeon was waiting for the Lord to bring comfort to His people. These words remind us of the prophecy of Isaiah 40. I'll read a portion of it, and you can read the rest on your own. **Isaiah 40:1-3, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."**

Simeon had waited many years for the Messiah to come. And, the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would see the Messiah before he died. And now, at last, Simeon is led by the Spirit to the temple to find Jesus, the Messiah, the comfort of Israel. Simeon takes the little baby Jesus in his arms and praises God. **(Luke 2:29-32), "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** Because he has seen Jesus, Simeon has peace. Simeon saw Jesus with his eyes. By faith, we see Jesus with the eyes of our heart. Either way, when we see Jesus clearly, we find fulfillment and peace. Simeon's prophetic words echo Isaiah 42:6 and emphasize the universal nature of Jesus' mission. Jesus is to be a light to the nations, Savior for all people.

Can you imagine how Simeon must have felt when he held Jesus, the Christ-child, in his arms after so many years of longing? Simeon must have been overwhelmed with joy and wonder. Aert de Gelder painted Simeon like this in 1700. Simeon holds the baby Jesus and looks to heaven, praising God, while Mary watches in amazement. Simeon is moved by the Spirit to prophesy again, and he continues in **Luke 2:34-35, "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'"**



Simeon's words warn of the trials that lay ahead. Jesus will bring salvation, but He will also bring division, as some people believe in Him and others reject Him. Many will rise in faith, and many will fall in unbelief. Unbelievers will speak against Jesus, revealing their heart attitudes. And Mary will suffer with great sorrow when her Son is rejected and crucified. Jesus will bring salvation, but the price will be high, salvation will be purchased with tears and blood.

Next is the testimony of the prophetess Anna, who worshipped in the temple day and night, continuing in prayers and fasting. **Luke 2:38, "Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all**



**who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”** Rembrandt painted Anna as a studious woman, studying the Bible. But I imagine Anna somewhat differently. I imagine her as elderly, but energetic and with a big smile on her face, quick to give thanks to God and ready to rush to tell others that the Savior has come. Simeon was waiting for comfort, but Anna is focused on redemption, that is, on the forgiveness of sins. And she is anxious to speak to all who are looking forward to redemption. Praise the Lord that Jesus provides both forgiveness and comfort to all who trust in Him.

This photo shows the temple mount in Jerusalem as seen from the North. The platform of the temple is basically the same as it was in Jesus’ time, although at that time the Jewish temple stood at the top instead of the Muslim Dome of the Rock. Bethlehem is somewhere in the mist in the distance. One day, a little more than 2,000 years ago, Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple. Simeon and Anna came to meet them, and they gave testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, come to His people. It is difficult to know how many people believed their testimony. But those who believed had great reason to rejoice in the Good News that the Messiah had come.



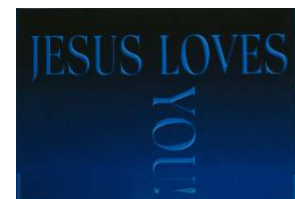
After this, although Luke does not speak of it, Joseph and Mary must have returned to Bethlehem until the wise men came from the east and they stayed in Bethlehem, possibly with Joseph’s relatives, until they had to flee into Egypt. Luke skips that part, but Matthew records it. Finally, both Luke and Matthew record that the family went to live in Nazareth. Jesus grows up there, and as **Luke 2:40** records, **“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”**



#### IV. Conclusion

This morning we have heard further testimony about Jesus the Savior from Simeon and Anna, and we have seen how the various gospel accounts fit together harmoniously. We have covered only a few pages so far in our study of Luke, but already we have seen a great deal of evidence and testimony concerning Jesus. In the opening pages of Luke, the voices of men, women, and angels have all identified Jesus as the Savior, and many ancient prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus’ birth.

But, how will we respond to all of this clear testimony about Jesus? Will we believe and accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord? Or will we reject Jesus and refuse to believe the evidence? Today is our last worship service for 2008. Whether for the first time or as a renewal of faith, it is my prayer that each of us would respond to Jesus and welcome Him into our hearts today, so that we might all begin the New Year with a firm commitment to Jesus. Jesus loves you. Trust in Jesus. Let’s pray.



#### V. Closing Prayer