

Sermon Transcript

Luke 2:22-40 | December 31, 2023 | First Sunday of Christmas | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

What did you notice as the scripture video played?

Did you see the two turtle doves? **(SLIDE of Turtledoves)**

It might sound like a line in the 12 days of Christmas—and tradition has it that the two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testament in that song.

We're singing a lot of beloved Christmas songs today, but as I learned last year, the 12 Days of Christmas is not a great song for caroling. It's long and repetitive. In fact, we vetoed it for caroling this year.

BUT, the story behind the two turtledoves goes beyond that verse in the song.

As Luke states, the two turtledoves represent the minimum sacrifice to the LORD that a couple could make as a presentation of a new child. **(SCRIPTURE)**

Mary and Joseph are poor—so they present what is stated in the law of the LORD—two turtledoves or young pigeons.

There's no shame. They don't feel guilty that this is all that they can give.

Then, another fascinating thing happens.

Simeon, who was told that before he died, he'd see the Messiah, approaches the parents and declares that his eyes have now seen God's salvation and he's a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory to the people of Israel.

Simeon isn't waiting for someone to make a giant sacrifice or do something otherworldly. He recognizes Jesus for who he is.

Mary and Joseph are amazed at what Simeon says. That might sound contradictory—why are they surprised, the angel already told them?

According to Luke 1, Mary already knows that Jesus will be the Messiah. And in Matthew's story, Joseph knows through the angel telling him in a dream.

But I think there's something to be said about outside affirmation. It feels good to be told that your kid is special—I know how that feels—the pride in one of my children doing something that receives a compliment—that's a GREAT feeling.

Why would Simeon specifically call out Jesus?

Because this is a big deal.

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As Luke writes this, the meaning of his passage is not so much an autobiographical account of what happened, but a theological understanding for his audience—if you're reading this, whether you're born a Jew or Gentile, this Messiah is for you.

New Testament scholar, Stephen Hultgren, writes that “The presentation in Jerusalem is motivated by specific requirements of the law of Moses. According to Leviticus 12, after a woman gives birth to a son, she is impure for forty days. At the end of that period, she is to bring an offering to the temple, which the priest offers as a sacrifice, effecting her purification.”

“According to Numbers 3, the redemption involved the payment of five shekels to the priesthood. However, according to another tradition in the book of Numbers, the tribe of the Levites takes the place of the first-born sons of Israel as the Lord’s possession. Thus the biblical notion of redemption included the idea that the first-born son “belongs” to the Lord in a special way and is dedicated to serve him (as the Levites were also dedicated to serve him).”

Can you see how this dedication and blessing sets up Jesus for his life in service to the Heavenly Father? The way Luke tells the story shows how this was meant to be.

I'm struck by the way that Simeon and Anna factor into the story.

They aren't major characters and they don't appear again. Is Jesus reminded frequently of what was said about him at the age of 8 days old?

I doubt it.

But, the ways that we lift up each other—especially words of affirmation at a young age can go a long way.

When I was a teenager, a retired pastor at my church always wanted to tell me how I'd be a pastor someday.

At that age, I didn't want to hear it.

I assumed he was saying it because of my dad being a pastor.

It didn't register with me until later that my dad had nothing to do with it—Pastor Ed thought that God had a calling in my life to serve as a pastor because of the gifts of ministry I was displaying.

I have been very aware of how the words and ways of encouragement we speak to youth have a lasting impact—not because what we tell a kid to be is a prophetic sign that this is their only path.

In fact, I knew that God called me to do multiple things along the way before I ever discerned pastoral ministry.

But think about the youth or younger family members that you may have been in contact with over the last week or two.

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What happens when you compliment or lift up something that they're good at? Maybe they get a little embarrassed if it's in front of others, but chances are, it really boosts their self-esteem and self-worth.

Telling a young grandchild, a cousin, or a neighbor that they're gifted in a skill—maybe sports, music, or academics—might be the subtle encouragement they need to hear.

Being honest with someone about where you see their gifts and talents is something we might take for granted, but it could plant the seed or help fertilize a feeling that has been waiting to spring forth.

Why would Anna begin to praise God and tell everyone who came to the temple for redemption about this child?

Nobody tells her to do this.

But she trusts the spirit. She believes. She knows that something special is happening.

Simeon and Anna are the messengers of the salvation and redemption that is to come through Jesus. Simeon gets a glimpse of the salvation that one-day the whole world will see: forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death. That is the ultimate meaning of Christmas, the incarnation of the Son of God.

Why do they proclaim the good news?

Because through Jesus, they have hope. They see the promise of the future.

Why do we proclaim the good news?

For the same reason. Because we have hope. Because we see that the generations that are coming after us have an opportunity to make the world even better.

Today, on the 6th day of Christmas, our true love, Christ, gives to us more than 6 geese a laying. We are given the gift to affirm and bless others.

Tell someone that they're special. Text someone you haven't heard from in a while and tell them you are thinking of them. Give a relative a call and say hi. Go for a walk in the winter-wonderland and check-in with a neighbor.

Simeon and Anna affirm the call in Christ. May Christ affirm the call in us. Amen.