

Luke 2:21-40

2:21-23 Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby's birth: (1) Circumcision. Every boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3; Luke 1:59,60). Circumcision symbolized the Jews' separation from Gentiles and their unique relationship with God. (2) Redemption of the firstborn. A firstborn son was presented to God one month after birth (Exodus 13:2, 11-16; Numbers 18:15, 16). The ceremony included buying back-"redeeming"-the child from God through an offering. Thus the parents acknowledged that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life. (3) Purification of the mother. For 40 days after the birth of a son and 90 days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the Temple. At the end of her time of separation, the parents were to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove for a sin offering. The priest would sacrifice these animals and would declare her clean. If a lamb was too expensive, the parents could bring a second dove instead. This is what Mary and Joseph did.

Jesus was God's Son, and his family carried out these ceremonies according to God's law. He was not born above the law; instead, he fulfilled it perfectly.

2:28-32 When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated to God, they met an old man who told them what their child would become. Simeon's song is often called the Nunc Dimittis, which comes from the first words of the Latin translation of this passage. Simeon could die in peace now, because he had seen the Messiah.

2:32 The Jews were well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of the Messiah's blessings to their nation. They did not always give equal attention to the prophecies saying he would bring salvation to the entire world, not just the Jews (see, for example, Isaiah 49:6). Many thought he had come to save only his own people. Luke made sure his audience understood that Jesus came to save all who believe.

2:33 Joseph and Mary marveled for three reasons: Simeon said Jesus was a gift from God; he recognized him as the Messiah; and he said Jesus would be a light to the entire world. This was at least the second time that Mary was greeted with a prophecy about her son; the first time was when Elizabeth had welcomed her as the mother of her Lord (1:42-45).

2:34,35 Simeon prophesied that with Jesus, there would be no neutral ground: people would either joyfully accept him or totally reject him. As Jesus' mother, Mary would be grieved by the widespread rejection he would face. This is the first note of sorrow in Luke's Gospel.

2:36 Although Simeon and Anna were very old, they still hoped to see the Messiah. Led by the Holy Spirit, they were among the first to bear witness to Jesus. In the Jewish culture, elders were respected, and Simeon's and Anna's prophecies carried extra weight because they were not young. Our society, however, values youthfulness over wisdom, and potential contributions by the elderly are often ignored. As Christians, we should reverse those values wherever we can and encourage older people to share their wisdom and experience. Listen carefully when they speak. Offer them your friendship and help them find ways to continue to serve God.

2:36, 37 Anna was called a prophetess, indicating she was unusually close to God. Prophets and prophetesses did not necessarily predict the future. Their main role was to speak for God, proclaiming his truth.

2:39 Did Mary and Joseph return immediately to Nazareth, or did they remain in Bethlehem for a time (as implied in Matthew 2)? Apparently there is a gap of several years between verses 38 and 40-ample time for them to take a house in Bethlehem, flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, and return to Nazareth when it was safe to do so.

2:40 Jesus demonstrated wisdom beyond his years, which is not surprising since he stayed in close contact with his heavenly Father. James 1:5 says God "is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him." Like Jesus, we can grow in wisdom by walking with God.

WORKSHEET:

Jesus Presented in the Temple

Luke 2:21-40

Looking into the Scripture



1. What does this story reveal about the parents of Jesus?
 - a. they were very poor
 - b. they were religious
 - c. they were very young
 - d. they knew their son was very special
2. Why do you suppose this was such a meaningful occasion for Simeon?
 - a. he had waited so long for this moment
 - b. he expected to see the Christ (God's Anointed One)
 - c. God had not forgotten his promise
 - d. he marveled at how God could use a baby to bring his salvation
3. Put yourself in Joseph and Mary's shoes. How would you have felt if two old people came to you and gave startling predictions about your son?
 - a. proud
 - b. scared
 - c. confused
 - d. overwhelmed
4. In Simeon's prophecy about the child, what was he predicting?
 - a. Roman Empire would collapse
 - b. Israel would reject God's Messiah
 - c. national bloodshed
 - d. the parents would experience pain
5. Do you think the parents of Jesus understood what was going to happen to their son?
 - a. maybe a little
 - b. probably not
 - c. not at first
 - d. his mother probably did
 - e. I would like to think so
6. What strikes you as significant about Anna and Simeon?
 - a. they were both old
 - b. they both spent all their time at the temple
 - c. they were very close to their God
 - d. they lived life expecting to see God at work
 - e. they were both concerned about the welfare of Israel
 - f. they recognized their need for a Savior

My Own Story

1. Briefly tell your "roots," what your parents were like when you were born:
 - a. financially
 - b. religiously
 - c. socially
2. What do you know about your baptism as an infant?
 - a. don't know anything about it
 - b. I have a certificate/pictures in my baby book
 - c. we did not go to church then
 - d. it was a big family affair
3. Do you think your parents understand what is going on in your life now?
 - a. I hope not
 - b. probably
 - c. maybe a little bit
 - d. for sure
 - e. no, but I'd like them to
4. Do you think God has a plan and purpose for your life like he did for Mary and Joseph?
 - a. not at all
 - b. in a way
 - c. maybe, but not the same plan
 - d. definitely
5. How open are you to God's will for your life at the moment?
 - a. a little bit
 - b. a whole lot
 - c. just don't send me to Africa
 - d. ask me tomorrow
6. What would be the crowning joy for you in your old age?
 - a. to see my children's children
 - b. to strike it rich
 - c. to look back on a life full of surprises
 - d. to leave the world a better place to live in
 - f. to feel I have done God's will