**Reading A: Luke 2:21-35**

Intro: Is there a war on Christmas? In our sermon this morning we’re going to see the original war on Christmas. And it is announced by a creepy old man.

**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.**

This shows their obedience to the law, and that Jesus himself, from his eighth day of live, was busy fulfilling God’s law.

**When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed** (so Jesus was 40 days old), **Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 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.”**

It's less than a two hour’s walk, and these were people who walked a lot. They were staying in Bethlehem for a while. Since Joseph was a carpenter, he could easily set up shop wherever he lived. They stayed in Jerusalem for a while. They kept the law as found in the book of Leviticus.

This information is not surprising or particularly noteworthy, but what happens next is:

**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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.**

It’s hard to imagine what this man must have been like. He was famous within Jerusalem for being a righteous man, just like Zechariah and his wife had been. But this man was even more famous. He apparently had revelations from God. He was filled with the Holy Spirit in a special way, and knew, for sure, that as old as he was, he was not going to die until he saw the Messiah. Did he realize he would see him as a baby? How did he recognize baby Jesus as the Messiah? It says that the Holy Spirit moved him:

**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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.**

These are famous words and sometimes we sing them in church. Can you imagine how surprised Mary and Joseph would be when he picked up this little baby, a month old, and starts praising God. He had spent a lifetime doing who knows what, serving God, prophesying, but primarily waiting. But now he is ready to die in peace.

Is there anything for you that would be so wonderful that once it happens, you would be ready to die in peace? I can’t imagine that. Kelly’s grandmother actually died while her husband, Kelly’s grandfather, was in surgery. Apparently, according to Kelly’s mom, right before the end she told her, “Louie made it through surgery.” Even though she had been out of it all day, she seemed to understand what she was saying. She gave a small smile, said very faintly, “Good” and shortly thereafter breathed her last. She just wanted to know he was going to be okay. But Simeon’s case was far more dramatic. He had been waiting years and years. And what is it that he had been waiting to see:

**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.”**

He knew that Israel needed was salvation. And this was not simply political salvation, as some people thought. We often say, “At the time of Jesus, most people were expecting a political Messiah.” And that’s true. But there were people like Simeon, or like Zechariah and Mary, who understood more because they had reflected on the scriptures. They knew that what mankind needed was salvation from sin and death.

Last night we talked about how Jesus is a light shining in darkness. He is light for the people living in the shadow of death. He is there for all people to see. ***(expand)*** The message about Jesus is not hard to understand. People from just about every culture and language on earth have heard and believed it. And this was not to stay confined to Israel, it was to go to the Gentiles. That refers to non-Jewish people, or in other words, the whole earth. Jesus was God himself coming to save us from our sins. We all need that, whether we realize it or not.

But here is where Simeon adds a little something new to the mix. As good as Jesus is, there are some negative consequences as well:

**The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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.”**

This is the first mention of hostility and contention surrounding Jesus. He does not want any to fall, but when you really comprehend the Christian message, you have to take a stand. You’re either for him or against him. You can’t be indifferent to him. He reveals the sin in our hearts. Take the sermon on the mount. He can see right through all of our excuses. He gets to the bottom of sin. He stops the blame game and holds us accountable. And in your reaction to Jesus you see your reaction to God.

What are the sins that we all commit? I think we’re selfish. We’re not that concerned about others. I think we have a lot of hate and resentment. We have a lot of pride. We deny that we have obligations towards God. Imagine a child who was totally flippant and disrespectful of their parents. But they have so little respect for them that they don’t even realize it. That’s how we can be towards God.

Mary’s own heart was going to pierced. Think how much it must have hurt to see her son treated like a crazy person. Ultimately killed. It must have been terribly difficult. She loved him, but she did not understand him. There were even times it seems she tried to stop him. It was just too hard.

It's hard for us on two levels. It’s hard to admit our sin. It’s easier, or it might seem that way, to condemn Jesus than to condemn ourselves. It’s also hard, once we believe in him, to see other people mock and reject him. It hurts. That is the necessary consequence of light coming into this dark world. But the people of this world hated the light, John says, because their deeds were evil. When the ultimate good confronts evil, there cannot help but be conflict. Simeon’s message to us: make sure we’re on the right side of the conflict. Today, when people mock Jesus or anything in the Bible, even if they put it in the form of a question or a lighthearted comment, don’t for a minute think it’s okay. Stand up for Jesus. He was born, he lived, he died for you. You are his. Don’t let the world trick you into thinking it has something better to offer.

Part B: Luke 2:36-40

**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, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.**

This story is similar to the other one. She had been in the temple all this time. That is not the main part of the temple (the holy place), but the outer court. So, and I’m sorry if this sounds like I’m making fun, but she was kind of like a homeless person. She lived in a public space and probably lived off of donations. But this would not have been looked down upon. Her piety would have been highly regarded, and people would have kept her clothed and fed.

**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.**

The phrase “ to all who were looking forward to the Redemption of Jerusalem” is a loaded phrase. Jerusalem was free in some ways but not in others. It’s not clear what exactly Anna said, but she realized that this baby would be the fulfillment of God’s plans.

Joseph and Mary no doubt needed this. What was happening to them was unlike anything that had ever happened to another person. Who else had ever conceived by the Holy Spirit? So all these things strengthened and reassured them. The angels in dreams, the miracles with Elizabeth and Zechariah, the shepherds, Simeon, and now Anna, plus the wise men, wherever that fits into the chronology. It all made it clear that God was with them in a powerful way and they only need to obey him.

**When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.**

This is all we know about Jesus’ childhood, save one incident we will look at next. But Jesus fulfilled the law in our place. He was wise, and God continued to watch out for him in lots of ways similar to what we see here, no doubt. In the early church it became popular to write fictional accounts of what Jesus did as a child, but almost no one believes those infancy or childhood gospels contain any true stories. There is only one reliable story of Jesus’ boyhood, and we’ll turn to that next.

Part C: Luke 2:41-52

**Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”**

Mary and Joseph needed a rebuke. Joseph was not his father. God was. And notice how subtly Jesus corrects them: **“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

We see how the divine and human natures in Jesus worked their way out in this story. On the one hand, he is obedient. On the other, he is independent. His knowledge is greater. But he submits himself to them. This is a microcosm of his whole ministry. He humbled himself. But he humbles himself so much that they forgot, he was actually great. He wasn’t humble by nature but by choice. And they needed a little rebuke to remind them of this.

Do we every misunderstand Jesus? We get to used to him that we miss who he really is? He forgives so many sins, we start to think our sins don’t matter? He cares for us so often that we start to live recklessly. We stop praying or we stop keeping our obligations because we figure, “He’ll work it out.” Jesus is humble by choice, but one day he will come again as judge. He is the Son of God. We should eternally thank him for humbling himself to save us, but we should not forget that he will not hesitate to condemn the unrepentant to Hell on the last day.

It’s interesting too, Jesus could have started his ministry at the age of 12 if he wanted. He already knew enough. But God knew when it would be just the right time.

**Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**

Still it comments that he was very wise? Why? Because he was God himself. Now here is a mystery. Jesus was God. He was fully God. But he laid aside the use of some of his divine attributes for a time. This is a technical thing but it’s actually important. He only used his divine knowledge, power, etc., when it was needed for the plan of salvation. He did not use it selfishly. It’s really amazing how obedient Jesus was. Can you imagine yourself as a teenager with that amount of power? I can’t imagine all the crazy things I would be doing. But this was his version of getting in trouble. A three day Bible study with a bunch of pastors. Can you imagine a 12 year old gets lost today. You find him over at Whitworth. He’s sitting in theology classes all day, blowing the professors’ minds. I sure wish I could be a fly on the wall and just see what Jesus was like. But this is the only glimpse we have.

But the main point to take away is that it shows his perfect active obedience for us, and it shows how the divine and human natures interacted a one person. That’s what we celebrate at Christmas. The eternal Word of God, the Son, the Second person of the Trinity, took on a human body and soul. The resulting person was 100% God and 100% man. He humbled himself by not making full use of his divine powers, but he always had them, ready to go at a moment’s notice, but never for selfish purposes. Only for things that were necessary for our salvation or helpful to someone else.

Next week we’re going to jump ahead in time to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. It’s going to be pretty amazing. I hope you can join us. These last few weeks we’ve been looking a lot at who Jesus is. Over the next two weeks we’ll look a little more at what Jesus calls us to do. In the meantime, remember that since he is God and man united, Jesus is everywhere. He’s with you now. Let that give you comfort and peace this week. God has come and saved you. Rejoice in his salvation.