

SERMON SERIES:
GOD IS WITH US
Witnesses to His Coming

Grace Christian Church
206 Marco Ave, Panania | gracepadstowpanania.org.au



GOD IS WITH US: THE LAW, THE PRIEST, AND THE PROPHET (Psalm 62:1-2,5-8; Luke 2:21-40) Graeme Odgers

Introduction:

If you sat down to write a letter to a friend today, what would you put in it? Probably if you lived in the Northern Beaches area you would write about being locked down due to COVID. And then you might write about some of the highlights of your family from this year. The reader would understand the settings and things you wrote about, but you would not be able to describe every detail of the events surrounding your life.

So it is hard for us in 2020 to understand a very Jewish, life style that occurred at the time of Jesus birth in those who were faithful towards God. However, the short passage read from Luke this morning is embedded in that lifestyle and describes 3 special events that relate to:

- The Law - Jesus and Mary
- The Priest - Simeon
- The Prophet - Anna

At the beginning of Luke 2 we find that Caesar Augustus has decreed that the entire world should be registered in a census and Quirinius the governor of Syria oversaw that people go to their own town to register. So we find Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and at this point Jesus has been born.

The Law:

Luke 2:21 records: *Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.*

Eight days have passed since the birth of Jesus and we find this small and poor Jewish family honouring the Law handed down to Moses from the LORD, as written in Lev 12:1-8.

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.'"

This was a very important ritual in a Jewish family. First because the circumcision of the males was a sign that they were a people set apart for God. Secondly it involved naming the child. And as told by the angel Gabriel, Mary has the baby named Jesus, which means "the Lord saves"

Every good Jewish family would have had their sons circumcised, but in this case it was especially important for Mary and Joseph to make sure Jesus went through the ceremony, because He was definitely set apart for God's service.

Now about 41 days after the birth - Jesus is presented at the Temple. Reading from Luke 2:22-24:

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. 23 The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." 24 So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Leviticus 12 covers all the Law associated with the post birth of a boy and a girl and the offerings required. So we see here that Joseph and Mary knew what the Law required and they obeyed it. In addition to this they gave the priest either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This small comment tells us they didn't sacrifice a lamb as an offering but provided a poor man's offering - that of two birds.

What do we learn from this? We see a faithful man and woman who know the scriptures, who apply them to their life in obedience to the LORD; an indication to each of us that we should also know the scriptures and apply them to our life. When people see us, and the way we live according to the Word of God, hopefully, they will also see Christ and his light shining through us.

The Priest:

The second section of this passage I call Simeon "The Priest" although it is an assumption that he could have been a priest; mainly because he took Jesus in his arms and blessed God for him. In the Bible he is simply described as "a man in Jerusalem".

The first part of Luke 2:25 reads: *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.*

Simeon's name means "God has heard", and in this verse we learn three things about him. First, he was living in Jerusalem, the political and religious centre of Israel at that time – as it is today.

Secondly, Simeon was righteous (just) and devout. The word just or righteous shows his obedience to God's Word in the way he treats other people. He was a man of his word. He did what was right. His 'yes' was yes, and his 'no' was no. He was a man of character and of integrity. The word devout shows his obedience to God's Word in the way he looked to God. It shows that Simeon was a man who loved God. He served God and he prayed to God.

Third, Simeon was eagerly waiting for the Messiah (the Consolation of Israel) to come. He had been waiting a very long time by human standards as it is thought his age exceeded 100 years. As a Jew it was the hope and prayer of all that the Messiah would come, and bring peace and comfort to the people of Israel. The Consolation of Israel is a reference for Jesus and is a frequent theme found in Isaiah 40-66. Isaiah says the Messiah would come and so Simeon was waiting for him, however Luke comments:

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.

To write that the Holy Spirit was upon him shows an extraordinary factor in Simeon's life. Prior to Pentecost only a small number of Biblical characters had this said about them and it was usually expressed as *"the Spirit of the Lord came upon . . ."* Also the Holy Spirit could come upon a person for a while, and then could leave later. That's why David prayed in Psalm 51:11, *"take not your Holy Spirit from me."*

We read on in Luke:

²⁷ *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!"*

Simeon understood that Jesus would be the saviour, not just of the Jews but to peoples of every nation. Not something the Pharisees wanted to hear; even so Simeon's announcement was in the temple in front of all present, he proclaimed *"He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"* It is no wonder that ³³ *Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him."*

Finally, Simeon finished with a prophetic statement about Jesus to Mary.

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.
³⁵ *As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.*
And a sword will pierce your very soul."

The Prophetess:

³⁶ *Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years.* ³⁷ *Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.*

Anna's name in Hebrew means grace or gracious. And the grace of God was upon her as she is described as a prophetess. There are a number of other women in the Bible who were able to prophecy; for example Miriam (Exo 15:20), Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) and Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9). Anna's work as a prophetess was to speak the Word of God and share what she knew about Jesus with all who would listen to her.

Luke makes an interesting comment that she was from the tribe of Asher. You might ask, "What does that have to do with the grace of God in her life?" Well, Asher was one of the northern tribes of Israel that rebelled against God, and so was carried away into captivity by the Assyrians. And many people think that the Israelites of the ten Northern tribes were never heard from again. In fact, they are often called the "ten lost tribes of Israel." Now, prophetically, they cannot be lost, because God has promised that all twelve tribes will have a place in the events of the end times, and here we have this aged prophetess witnessing to all present.

³⁸ *She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.*

When we look at both Simeon and Anna we find Simeon, who most think was a very elderly man, he prophesied that this baby was the saviour, the Messiah, the one who is the light to reveal God to the nations, The Glory of Israel! Whereas, the prophetess, this aged and holy woman, Anna, was the one who witnessed to all present – talking to everyone about the child.

As examples to us, both Simeon and Anna had been waiting expectantly throughout their lives on the LORD. But more than that, they didn't let age get in the way of service to our Lord. Simeon knowledgeable, righteous and devout to God's word, Anna always worshipping God with fasting and daily prayer; we should look at these two elderly people as examples and encouragement to help us keep faithful, to continually study God's word and to serve the Lord in any way we can.

I'm sure both Simeon and Anna would speak Psalm 62 to each of us as encouragement:

- ¹ I wait quietly before God,
for my victory comes from him.*
- ² He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will never be shaken.*
- ⁵ Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.*
- ⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.*
- ⁷ My victory and honour come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.*
- ⁸ O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.*