

The Big Encounter – Lk 2:21-40

Welcome to our New Year's Eve services. And via livestream, welcome to our West Campus, and all those joining us from your living room on this frigid morning. I hope your Christmas celebration was a good one. Between the Christmas Eve services and our girls who were home for a few days, we were blessed.

➤ That said, this is the last message in our *Behold Your God* series, where Jesus is presented in the temple just after he was born. *The Big Encounter* I call it. It's one of my favorite passages in the Bible b/c of the *people* involved. Even though they're only mentioned here. Lk 2:21-40.

I'm going to approach this a little different than normal, by first walking our way *through* the passage and making some comments along the way . . .

And then applying it to our lives by commending some *principles* to you. Principles exemplified by those within it. So first **the text**, then the principles. You ready?

➤ V21. Regarding Jesus. Who had just been born.

[21] And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Circumcision wasn't just a medical procedure for the purpose of *cleanliness*, or the preference of *parents* for the purpose of appearance.

No, it was a mark. A symbol. The initial and primary indicator under the OT Law, that:

(A) You were a part of God's people. (B) You were included in God's covenant of blessing. (C) You were set apart for his use.

So for 2000 years, Jewish males had been circumcised to set them apart for the Lord, and mark them as his own. And Jesus was no different. How appropriate.

That given he was God's Son, he was marked as his own. He was part of the very covenant he would fulfill. And he was set apart like no other, for God's use!

At the same time, he was given his *name*. Coinciding with his circumcision I think, b/c both were indicators of his identity.

Circumcision indicative of his participation in the covenant *community*. And his name, indicative of who he is and what he would *do* in that community. Namely, save.

He was called Jesus it says, b/c he's the one who saves. That's what the name means – Savior. So that his essence and his name, are one and the same.

Like calling Clark Kent Superman. His essence and name are one and the same. He's super. Just like Jesus, is Savior.

That's why lifting high the *name* of Jesus, one of our pillars, is the same as exalting *him*. B/c his name is an expression of his essence, and vice versa. One and the same. So this entire event, circumcision and name, is a great big reveal party.

➤ *[22] And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they [Joseph and Mary] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* [devote him to the Lord; much like we do in our Parent Commitment/Child Dedication services].

They brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord *[23] (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb [firstborn males] shall be called holy to the Lord [as in set apart for the Lord])"*

They brought him to present him, *and to offer* [v24] *a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."*

Okay. 3 clarifiers here.

1. The time *for their purification* and presentation in these verses, refers to the end of Mary's 40 day waiting period specified in Lev 12.

A waiting period, so that Mary could be ceremonially "clean" for worship.

IOW there was to be no confusion between the blood of her *flesh* for the purpose of *birth*, and the blood of a *sacrifice* for the purpose of *worship*. No confusion.

One was common and the other holy. And never the two shall meet. That was the intent. So God instituted a *waiting* period after birth, to ensure it.

2. At the *end* of the waiting period, she was to offer a sacrifice. Not for the baby, but for herself. To make *atonement*, or amends, for her uncleanness.

Not that she was *sinful* in giving birth, but that she needed to be reconciled in her "common-ness," to God in his holiness. So she offered a sacrifice.

3. That sacrifice, was preferably a 1 year-old *lamb*. But if she and her husband couldn't afford it, 2 turtledoves or pigeons would do.

One for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering it says in Lev 12:8.

The *burnt* offering, to express their *thanks* for a son, and dedicate him to God.

And the *sin* offering to restore Mary's relationship with God. Back to the common/holy thing.

So here they were, 40 days after Jesus' birth, offering sacrifices in place of a lamb, while *holding* the Lamb, who would be their sacrifice himself, in *their* place.

Ending such things once and for all.

How ironic. How prophetic. How good. That we don't have to worry about such things, b/c Jesus was born to die and take care of it. Take care of us. Praise the Lord.

➤ *[25] Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel* [the rescue and comfort of God's people], *and the Holy Spirit was upon him* [God's influence]. *[26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ* [God's deliverer; the Messiah].

[27] And he came in the Spirit into the temple [under the Holy Spirit's influence], *and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God* [honored him, worshipped him] *and said, [29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace* [die in peace], *according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation [31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."* [It's the original Lion King episode.]

[33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. [34] And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

In the span of 6 verses, Simeon gives us 9 *truths* about Jesus that we can't afford to miss.

1. **Jesus is God's means of saving us from our sin.** V30 – *my eyes have seen your salvation*. Your means of saving us from the consequences of our sin.
2. **Jesus is available to everyone.** V31 – he was rolled out *in the presence of all peoples*. For *everyone* to see and embrace. Nothing secret or hidden about it.
3. **Jesus reveals the truth.** He's *a light for revelation to the Gentiles* – v32. A light for revealing the truth to the *whole* world. *So that* [as Jesus later said it] . . . *They may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*. (Acts 26:18)
4. **Jesus shines on his own.** He's not only a light to the *Gentiles* v32, but a light *for glory* to [his] *people Israel*. In that day, ethnic Israel. In ours, spiritual Israel. The church. By virtue of our connection with him, he shines on us. He makes us look good.
5. **Jesus is a stumbling block to some.** He's *appointed for the fall* . . . *of many in Israel*, v34. Many, that is, who won't *believe*, and stumble on the very cornerstone of life.
6. **Jesus exalts those he calls.** He's not only appointed for the *fall* of many, but the *rising* of many (34). The exaltation of many. Just like the Apostle Paul went on to say. *Those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified* (Rom 8:30). Exalts.
7. **Jesus is often rejected.** That's the idea of the *last* phrase in v34. He's *a sign that's opposed*. The focal point of spiritual opposition for those who won't believe. No matter *what* the evidence, he's often rejected.
8. **Jesus sometimes causes great pain in those who love him.** Like he did in Mary. V35 – *a sword will pierce through your own soul also*, Simeon said. Presumably referring to the grief she would bear upon seeing him rejected and crucified. The very thing that happens in *us*, when *we* see people reject him. Or *speak* ill of him. Taking his name in vain for instance. It pains us.
9. **Jesus exposes our sin.** God sent him into our world, *so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed* (35b). It's a negative phrase . . . Referring to things that are wrong. Things in our hearts that aren't right. And Jesus exposes them, that we might repent and be free. It's for our good. **(Summ)**

9 truths, from the Spirit-filled mouth of a godly man, that we can't afford to miss.

➤ Which brings us to the last section, starting in v36.

[36] *And there was a prophetess* [a truth speaker with godly insight], *Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher* [indicating that she was an Israelite; part of the remnant who kept the faith]. *She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, [37] and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. [38] And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. [The salvation of God's people. The restoration of God's kingdom.]*

And then Luke ends it by coming full circle to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. V39.

[39] *And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee* [their region, or province], *to their own town of Nazareth. [40] And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. (Summary)*

What an amazing passage. Confirmation, that hope fulfilled makes the heart sing.

- Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister of Great Britain during WWII, and gave a speech on October 29, 1941 . . . That illustrates *perfectly* some of the principles we find here. We hadn't yet entered the war, but they had been fighting for 2 years; enduring some very dark days, with a very questionable future.

And in the midst of that (**quote**), Churchill said this:

"For everyone, surely, what we have gone through in this period . . . this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never. In nothing, great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

It was a timely encouragement to keep on when all seemed lost. To keep hope alive. To never stop, despite the difficulties. And when the war was ended . . . There was a massive victory parade in London, confirming that their hope and resolve was not in vain. The parade confirmed that their hope was not for naught.*****

- Rewind to Old Testament times, and Churchill's speech is indicative of the very thing the prophets did when *they* spoke. Encouraging the *remnant of believers*, during *their* struggle. So that when things were dark, they kept hope alive. They didn't give up, and they didn't give in. And then passed that conviction down, from generation to generation.

So that just like the victory parade to end WWII was confirmation that the *British* hope was fruitful, so too the birth and presentation of Jesus was confirmation . . . That *Simeon's* hope was fruitful. And Anna's. And every *other* person who kept the faith. It was confirmation that their perseverance was not in vain. And assurance for us, of the same. That God fulfills his promises.

- All of which makes this entire passage a timely encouragement at the start of a new year, to keep on. To never give up, never give in, and never stop. Exemplified by those we find here. 4 principles (**The Principles**). Here's the first.

1. Never stop obeying God

The reason we *have* this account is b/c Mary and Joseph were obedient to do what God said. All that he had laid out in the Old Testament Law. How many times is that mentioned? *When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they obeyed* (22). *As it is written in the Law of the Lord, they presented him* (23). And did for [Jesus] *according to the custom of the Law* (27). *And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned* (39). They obeyed. And didn't stop.

Never stop doing what God says. Whether you *see* the results, or not. That's up to him. Never stop *going* where he wants. Responding to the Spirit's impulse *within* you, and the needs of the world *around* you. If God says do it, do it. If God says go, go. And don't stop.

2. Never stop waiting for God.

Just like Simeon. He was near death, but never stopped looking, and never stopped waiting. Righteous and devout, he never gave up, and never gave in. And in the end, at the 11th hour, he was rewarded. And not just on this side of eternity, but on the other. When he died.

Is 64:4 says – *From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. (Is 40:30-31)*
Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.
Over and over again in Scripture, waiting seems to be the catalyst, the main ingredient, that God requires to extend his greatest blessing.
No waiting, no blessing. No waiting, no reward.

You might be waiting for a trial to pass, or a blessing to come.
Either way, God doesn't disappoint. He does what he says. He fulfills what he promises. The *Bible* is full of examples, our *church* is full of examples, *my* life is full of examples, and yours can be too. But you have wait, and never stop.

3. Never stop worshipping God.

The poster child for which, is Anna. The prophetess. Who *did not depart from the temple* [v37], worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.
Not that she somehow stayed up all night, 24/7. Or stayed *overnight* in the temple, which women weren't allowed to do.
But that she was there every time the doors were open, and spent all her time in between, focusing on God. She worshipped, and never stopped.

Have you noticed that theme the last few weeks? Worship? It's all over the Christmas story. And should be. B/c God not only deserves it, but commands it.

➤ Like the Psalmist said in Psalm 100 – *[1] Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! [2] Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!* They're commands. Urging us to worship.
[4] Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! [5] For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.
God *deserves* our worship, and God *commands* our worship.

And not just when we come to church.
What if you lived your *life* as an act of worship? *Every* day. *Every* hour. *Night and day.* Doing *all* that you do for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). What if?

What if, according to Rom 12:1, you presented your body *as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*, and never stopped.
Talk about joy. And boldness. And impact. And love. And satisfaction.
Let's do it. Let's make this next year one great big experiment to never stop worshipping God, and see what happens.

And as you do . . .

4. Never stop praying to God.

J.I. Packer is a theologian and author (**quote**), godly and elderly in his own right, who said, "People who know their God are before anything else people who pray."
(*Knowing God*, 28)
I'm not sure how to measure myself in that respect, but it's a bit sobering considering the fact that I *don't* pray sometimes.
Unlike Anna the prophetess who never *stopped* praying. *Worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.*

I don't know about you, but I want to be like her. I want to pray more, and I want to pray without ceasing, more.*****
I want to pray more on my knees, and I want to make God the constant companion of my thoughts more. Dedicated times, and all times.

And I want to do those things *together* more. With *you*. I want to pray more as a church. Like right before our services. Right here.
What if we had not one, but 5 groups of people up here praying before every service? And the same at West Campus.
What if you made it a point to come to *every* Night of Prayer next year? And never stopped?
I guarantee, you will encounter God like never before, and know him like you never have.

➤ 4 encouragements (**Summary**). From some pretty big role models.
So whether you're waiting for a struggle to pass or a blessing to come, never stop *obeying*, never stop *waiting*, never stop *worshipping*, and never stop *praying*.
Commit right now, to never give up and never give in. Never, never, never.

Prayer – *I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.* (Psalm 89:1) That's our prayer, Lord. *We* will sing, and *we* will speak, and never stop. Seal our commitment now, and find us faithful.
And receive our tithes and offerings. Blessing both the gift and the giver, for your glory, and our joy.