

**Luke 2:21-39***NIV Harmony 37-38; Compassionate 35-40***Introduction**

1. Have you ever looked forward to the birth of a child, grandchild, or other relative?
  - a. I remember the look on my parents' faces as they held their first grandchild in their arms.
  - b. Children and grandchildren bring such joy and happiness when they arrive.
  - c. Simeon and Anna were two faithful followers of the Lord who had yearned for many years to see the Messiah, the Savior of Israel.
  - d. In this passage, they finally meet the one whom they had longed to see for many years.
2. **Read Luke 2:21-39.**

**A. Jesus' Circumcision (21)**

1. The Rite of Circumcision
  - a. The origin of Jewish circumcision lies at the beginning of the Jews as a people with their Patriarch Abraham and his covenant with the Lord.  
 "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you'" (Ge 17:9-11).
  - b. Paul gave the true meaning of circumcision.  
 "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (Ro 2:28-29).
  - c. Jesus' "circumcision" (Gk., *peritemein*) most likely did not occur at the temple but in Bethlehem.
  - d. Just as John was circumcised on the eighth day according to the law (cf., Lk 1:59), so was Jesus.
2. Remember that even though He was sinless, Jesus was still born under the law. It was important for Him to follow the Law in order that He might ultimately fulfill it. Warren Wiersbe comments, "Though He came to deliver His people from the bondage of the law, Jesus was 'made under the law' and obeyed its commands (Gal. 4:1-7). He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-18)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 35).
3. G. Campbell Morgan comments on the importance of Jesus' circumcision and naming, "According to the law of Moses, the child was circumcised,--and his name was always given to him at the time of circumcision, and when he was eight days old. . . . The rite of circumcision brought every Hebrew boy into relationship with the national life of the people of God. His birth did not do it. No boy born, from the time of Abraham when the rite was instituted, all through the running centuries, was a member of God's nation unless or until he was circumcised. It was God's sign, God's token. . . . So He entered the nation, by the rite of circumcision, and received the heaven-chosen name, which indicated at once the fact of His Being, and the purpose of His coming in that progressive economy of God; Jehovah-salvation" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 39-40, underlining mine).
4. Prophecy continued to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus as He was given "the name the angel had given him before he was conceived." (21)

**B. Jesus' Presentation at the Temple (22-38)**

1. Purification and Consecration Rites (22-24)
  - a. There were "purification rites (Gk., *katharismou*) required by the Law of Moses."
  - b. These rites would have been performed in the temple forty days after Jesus' birth.
  - c. Robert Stein comments, "The 'purification' contained three elements: Mary's purification (Lev 12:6-8), which involved a sacrifice being offered at the Nicanor Gate in the court of the women; the redemption of the firstborn son (Exod 13:1-2), which involved five shekels (Num 3:47-48) and which Luke did not mention; and the consecration of the firstborn son (cf., 1 Sam 1:11,22,28)" (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 113).

## 2. The Presentation of Jesus to the Lord

- a. According to the Law, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal. . . . you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord’” (Ex 13:1-2,12).
- b. This redemption normally required the sacrifice of a lamb, but the Law made provision for an alternate sacrifice for those who could not afford a lamb. “. . . But if she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean” (Lev 12:8).
- c. Wiersbe notes, “They also had to ‘redeem’ the boy since he was Mary’s firstborn (Ex. 13:1-12). They had to pay five shekels to redeem the Redeemer who would one day redeem us with His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). Their humble sacrifice would suggest that they were too poor to bring a lamb (2 Cor. 8:9). But He was the Lamb!” (Wiersbe, 36).

## 3. Encounter with Simeon (25-27)

- a. Who was Simeon?
  - 1) Simeon’s name means “to hear; to listen.”
  - 2) He was “righteous” (Gk., *dikaios*) and “devout” (Gk., *eulabes*) (25). These words reveal Simeon’s relationship to other humans and to God.
  - 3) Simeon was listening for God’s Spirit to speak a word of revelation to him about Israel’s Messiah.
- b. Simeon, like most of the Jewish people, awaited the “consolation of Israel” (Gk., *paraklesin tou Israel*), the Messiah. (25) – The word “consolation” in Greek is the same word used of the Holy Spirit, which also means “counselor, advocate, encourager.”
- c. Unlike most of the Jewish people, the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that “he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” (26)
- d. Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to this young couple and child in the temple courts. (27)
  - 1) This is the fifth and final song related to the coming of Jesus which Luke presents. Recall, 1) Elizabeth’s Blessing (Lk 1:42-45); 2) Mary’s Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55); 3) Zechariah’s Benedictus (Lk 1:68-79); 4) the Angelic Gloria (Lk 2:14); and 5) Simeon’s Song (Lk 1:28-32).
  - 2) Simeon’s Song is also known as the *Nunc Dimittis* from its Latin title meaning “Now let depart.”
  - 3) Wiersbe notes that Simeon lifted a song of praise to God that was “. . . a worship hymn, . . . a salvation hymn, . . . a missionary hymn” (Wiersbe, 37).
    - a) He worshiped God that the promise made by the Spirit to him had been fulfilled. (29)
    - b) He knew Jesus was Israel’s long-awaited salvation (Gk., *soterion*). (30)
    - c) He knew that Jesus was Savior for more than just Israel. He was both “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel” just as Isaiah had promised (cf. Isa 49:6). (31-32)
- e. Joseph and Mary “marveled” (Gk., *thaumazontes*) at Simeon’s words about Jesus. (33)
- f. Simeon blessed the family and prophesied further to Mary (34-35)
  - 1) “This child is destined to cause the falling (Gk., *ptosis*) and rising (Gk., *anastasis*) of many in Israel” (34b1).
  - 2) Stein comments, “Luke may have been referring here to one group that falls (humbles itself) and rises (is lifted up by God). If so, this saying is to be interpreted positively and stands in contrast to the sign being ‘spoken against,’ which is negative. On the other hand Luke may have been referring to two separate groups, one of which falls (negative) and the other of which rises (positive). The latter appears more likely and indicates that there is a double significance to Jesus’ ministry. For the humble and poor it is positive, salvation; for the haughty and rich it is negative, judgment” (Stein, 117).
  - 3) He will be “a sign (Gk., *semeion*) that will be spoken against (Gk., *antilegomenon*)” (34b2). “Our Lord’s miracles in John’s gospel are called ‘signs’ because they reveal special truths about Him” (Wiersbe, 38).

- 4) He will cause “the thoughts (Gk., *dialogismoi* – the innermost thoughts; inner dialogue) of many hearts (Gk., *kardion*)” to be “revealed” (Gk., *apokalupthosin* - revelation) (35a)
  - 5) Charles Erdman summarizes, “The ministry of Jesus will be the occasion for the fall and the rise of many. Their attitude toward him will be a revelation of character; some will reject him and thus condemn themselves; some will speak against him, even though he is the very token and instrument of divine salvation; this opposition will reach its climax at the cross, when bitter anguish like a sword will pierce the soul of Mary. Jesus is to be the touchstone of character; wherever he is known, but accepting or by rejecting him, men will disclose their true nature; . . .” (Charles Erdman, *The Gospel of Luke*, 37).
  - 6) Simeon prophesied that Jesus will also cause “a sword (Gk., *romthaia*) to pierce (Gk., *dieleusetai* – this verb is durative indicating that her heart will continue to be pierced many times) [Mary’s] own soul (Gk., *psuchen*) too” (35b).
4. Encounter with Anna (36-38)
- a. Anna, or Hannah, whose name means “grace,” was a “prophet” (Gk., *prophetis*), the daughter of Penuel of the tribe of Asher. (36a)
  - b. Anna was at least 84 years old and had been a widow for many years since her husband had died only seven years after their marriage. (36b)
  - c. She was a fixture at the temple always worshiping, fasting, and praying. (37)
  - d. She approached Joseph, Mary, and Jesus as had Simeon, “gave thanks to God” (Gk., *anthomologeito to theo*), and told everyone who was “looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Gk., *lutrosin Ierousalem*)” about this miraculous child. (38) She preached to a righteous remnant that was faithfully looking for the Lord’s Messiah.

### C. The Return to Galilee (39)

1. Joseph and Mary had fulfilled the Law regarding Jesus’ circumcision, redemption and consecration as their firstborn, and Mary’s purification.
2. They were shown by their actions to be righteous, obedient followers of God.
3. Now that the Law had been fulfilled, it was time for them to return to Galilee and their hometown of Nazareth.
4. But what about the wisemen and the flight to Egypt?
  - a. Between Lk 2:38 and 39 lies the narrative of the holy family’s visitation by the wisemen and their flight to Egypt to avoid Herod’s wrath.
  - b. We will study these important events provided in Matthew 2 in our next two lessons.

### D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Like Joseph and Mary, are you following the Lord’s commands carefully and fully each day? We follow the NT law of grace and love rather than the OT law of ritual and sacrifice.
2. Like Simeon and Anna, what are you longing to see from the Lord?
3. What is your response when you have a God-sighting in your life?
4. What pierces your heart most regarding the life and ministry of Jesus?
5. Are you faithfully proclaiming the First Coming of the Lord’s Messiah and looking with anticipation for His Second Coming?