Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23**(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%202:22-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24997a)]), **24**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.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%202:22-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24998b)]

**25**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 on him. **26**It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. **27**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, **28**Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

**29**“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
    you may now dismiss[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%202:22-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25003c)] your servant in peace.  
**30**For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
**31**    which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
**32**a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
    and the glory of your people Israel.”

**33**The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. **34**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, **35**so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

**36**There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37**and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%202:22-40&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25011d)] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38**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.

**39**When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. **40**And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

**Sermon 31st January**

I’m told that there is a quirky little carol which is sometimes sung on the first Sunday after Christmas which begins like this:

There’s snow on the mountain and ice on the pond,  
The Wise Men are home now in the back of beyond.  
The Shepherd’s have left us; the heavens are dumb;  
There’s no one to tell us why Jesus has come

The fact that there is so little information about Jesus’ childhood in the gospels, reminds us that they are not tell-all biographies, but words written to proclaim and strengthen our faith in Christ. However Luke does tell us that Jesus was born at a specific time and place into a particular cultural context. He was most definitely a Jew and his family raised him obeying the law of Moses.

In our passage, Mary and Joseph are seen carrying out the traditions expected of a Jewish couple when their first boy was born. They come to temple to present Jesus to God, demonstrating their confidence in God’s promises. The activities which they take part in, remind them that Jesus has been brought into a community, which has been living under the Old agreement, which God had established with his people Israel.

Now, as we look at the text in detail we might note the language of purification after childbirth and think it sounds odd to modern ears, if not perhaps even offensive particularly to women amongst us… because we would not consider childbirth in any sense something unclean. But of course, this ritual reflects a very ancient worldview, much of which we no longer adhere to. However at the core of what they are doing, when Joseph and Mary present Jesus to God at the temple, they are in effect dedicating his life to God and saying this one- Jesus- will be “holy to the Lord” (Luke 2:23).

Luke has been really clever here because he’s taken the original meaning of words in Exodus 13:2, &12 which told the Jews to consecrate their first-born to God, and used them to make a new and important declaration about Jesus, the holy one.

In contemporary Jewish synagogues, when Jews today, celebrate the birth of a child with thanks, they do it with a ceremony marked by prayers, songs, and food. Everyone present is invited to says these words “As little (Moshe or whoever) has been welcomed into the covenant, so may he grow into a life of Torah, marriage and good deeds.” In some ways it’s a bit like a Christian Dedication service for those who choose this over an infant baptism.

Let’s go back to that scene at the temple. We are introduced to a faithful elderly man. Whilst many in Israel had fallen away or just got legalistic about the law of Moses, here was a man who was active in his faith, and still believed in the promises of God. We so need people like that!

What an example he was and what an example our elderly folk are. We should honour them. There are many among us who have come through so many of life’s difficult circumstances. People who have seen massive changes in politics and family, illness and bereavement, community, work and play and now covid. We need these Christian brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and parents in the faith who are still faithful and still relying on God’s promises. We need examples who are still trusting and expecting God to come through for us. Let’s support and encourage our older folk too, because it’s easy to get low in these difficult days… these waiting times and periods of isolation.

Well Simeon had been there for a long time, prayerfully, hopefully, faithfully waiting. And as he takes Jesus in his arms, he wells up and declares (almost like that Lion king moment where the baby lion is held high for all to see…) that the moment of deliverance is at hand. This baby would be the Saviour of Israel… and more than that, here was a declaration that light would also come to the Gentiles. This Jewish Messiah was going to have an impact way beyond the Jewish community.

It’s like all of Simeon’s life had been leading up to that moment and having seen God’s purpose in this young child, he could now step back so that others could step up. You know we don’t quite catch the magnitude of Simeon’s statement. That is probably because we’ve been regularly heard that Jesus Christ came to save everyone, but for Simeon to state that this Messiah, had come for **all** people – not just Jews-well that was just incredible, that was something radically new!

I wonder what Simeon felt as he uttered those words. Whilst words were tumbling out, I wonder if deep inside he was asking “Is this for real God? Do you really want to bring all humankind under your umbrella again?” Yu can imagine him saying “Wow…that’s amazing. What a plan! This child that I’ve got the privilege to be holding, is actually going to be the Saviour of the world! And you’ve let **me** tell them!”

You can imagine him having to go for a good lie down and a cup of tea after that…such an amazing revelation!

Well then we are introduced to Anna. This is a faithful old lady who has also been waiting and watching, praying and fasting.

There’s lots of symbolism in her description. Again she is honoured as one who is faithful, prayerful, and thankful. **Folks if we take nothing else from this this morning, lets learn from this elderly couple in the temple that when nothing is changing and all seems lost, then hang in there and stay faithful because God will come to our rescue**.

We are not told much about Anna but Luke does point out that she was from the smallest of the tribes of Israel, which could be read as a sign that the small and fragile are perhaps more able to recognize Jesus, as Saviour.

Both Anna and Simeon are symbols of really what is the very best in Judaism. They are faithful to Jerusalem, active in the temple, waiting prayerfully and faithfully, for Messiah to come.

And yet knowing the identity of Messiah wasn’t the whole story that Luke tells here. For no sooner has Simeon made his declaration about Messiah, then he also turns to Mary and Joe and warns them, that the child Saviour among them, will also be the one, who will cause the ‘falling and rising’ of many, as people are challenged to follow Christ.

It says that Jesus will be “a sign that will be opposed,” echoing the prophet Isaiah, that “He will become a sanctuary, a stone you strike against …Isaiah prophesied that he would be a rock that people would stumble over and even, a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. That Isaiah passage tells that “They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken”

This is not an image of Jesus who is fluffy and friendly and turns a blind eye to evil. This is the biblical Jesus who speaks harsh words for example to those who cheat the poor and judge others.

Simeon continues by telling Mary that “a sword will pierce” her soul, too. She will experience great pain and agony, perhaps brought on by injustice and violence which seems to prevail…

We who live on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, sometimes forget the level of torment Christ and his family would have gone through. Let’s stand for a moment by the cross with Mary as she watches, utterly heartbroken wondering what it was all for…

Perhaps the two prophets sense this. They understand that salvation will come at a great cost.

And yet imagine too that with Mary they too would sing as they saw that Jesus would be the One who would bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, and send “the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). ..turning the world upside down.

As we near the end of this talk I want to go back to that strange little carol and read you its last verse. It says this…

But God’s in His heaven, and Jesus has come  
To show every sinner they’re welcome back home,  
To be this world’s Saviour from hunger and fear,  
And give us new courage to face the New Year.

As we watch these two older people **who look back** and remember God’s goodness and **who look forward** to all God will do…

May we like them recognise Jesus in surprising places this year and present this Christ, this Messiah, the Saviour of the world to all we meet. Amen