

Brad Jordan / General

Encountering the Incarnate Word / Christmas; Jesus; Birth of Jesus / Luke 2:25–35

The encounter between Simeon and the Christ Child, what does this encounter teach us about the effect of the Incarnate Word on those who encounter Him with faith.

---

## Introduction

Although much of the world entered the secular version of the Christmas season several weeks ago, today marks the entrance into this season for us as a church. The next few weeks in each of our lives has become an increasingly hectic time. One filled with the demands of finding the right gifts, scheduling all of the various celebrations and rushing around trying to make sure we have a holly jolly Christmas possible and somewhere in the midst of all of that we can tend to lose sight of the real reason that we even celebrate. The season has become increasingly less about God becoming flesh and dwelling among us and more about the acquisition of the bright and shiny new things that we have convinced ourselves that we need.

For many this time of the year marks a magical, desire filled time that they have waited all year to experience. Sights and sounds proclaim some of the good news, carols ring out from churches, Merry Christmas can still be heard in the street, but underneath it all lies something that is far removed from the night that the infinite God of the universe stepped into His very creation in the form of an infant entirely to reconcile His people unto Himself. This year we are going to spend the next few Sunday's looking at encounters from Scripture as men and women come face to face with the Incarnate Word. As we prayerfully walk through each of these occurrences let us be look onto these times with fresh eyes. As each of these folks encounter the Living Word may we be reminded that we come face to face with Him daily through His Word and by the indwelling of His Spirit.

Each week as we gather we will read of the birth of Christ before we focus in our text for that morning. Each passage of Scripture that we examine is an event separated by some amount of time from His birth, but whether it

is the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon or Nicodemus, every encounter with the Living Word teaches us how we approach the King of Kings from the moment of His birth forward in time until He returns and our encounter is face-to-face. This morning our recounting of the birth of Christ comes from the Gospel of Luke, arguably the most famous encounter in all of Scripture when it comes to this time of the year. Luke 2:1–20 reads

**Luke 2:1–20 LSB**

Now it happened that in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth.

This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

And everyone was going to be registered for the census, each to his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, *and* was with child.

Now it happened that while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guest room.

In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

“And this *will be* the sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

And it happened that when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they went in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

And when they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

And all who heard it marveled at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary was treasuring all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as was told them.

As the shepherds left the encounter they had with the Christ child gave them reason to celebrate and rejoice, but even then, they really did not understand what was happening. I am quite sure they were raised on the scriptures, these were good Jewish men after all, but they did not fully grasp just what the angels meant when they declared that a savior was born to them. The culture of our day is such that the many come into contact with Christ, some even have a real encounter and may walk away

celebrating, just as the shepherds did, but do not fully grasp what has just happened.

The first encounter we are going to study deeply is one that we will mostly remember from our Sunday School days or because we have actually read our Bibles and perhaps even during the Christmas season in one reading or the other, but rarely do we take the time to take a deep look at what is recorded for us. This encounter happens mere days after the birth of Christ, eight days to be exact, when they would have made the approximately 6 mile journey northward to Jerusalem for the purpose of presenting Jesus according to the rules set forth in God's Law (Genesis 17:12 ""And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, one who is born in the house or one who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your seed." and Leviticus 12:3 ""Now on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." ). This brings us to our text for the day found in the Gospel of Luke, in the second chapter, reading verse 20-35 with our focus for the morning being verses 25-35:

## Text

Let us stand for the reading of God's holy, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and sufficient word.

### **Luke 2:25-35 LSB**

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

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.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

then he took Him into his arms and blessed God, and said,

"Now Master, You are releasing Your slave in peace,

According to Your word.

For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

Which You prepared in the presence of all peoples,

A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,

And for the glory of Your people Israel.”

And His father and mother were marveling at the things which were being said about Him.

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—

and a sword will pierce through your own soul as well—that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Father, we thank You for Your Holy Word, for it’s principles, it’s promises, it’s directions, and it’s light. As we partake of Your Word this morning, may we learn more of Christ, remind us of how dear He is to us, by the washing of water with the Word. We are one with Him by faith according to Your Word. Lord we humbly ask that our hearts are form according to Your Word in the the image of Thy Son. Father, we pray that Your words are written on our hearts and inscribed upon our lips. We ask this morning that as we gather in this place for the purpose of uniting under the banner of Christ in tender ties to one another that our instruction, discipline, example, devotion be sanctified so that our church be a garden of the Lord, enriched with trees of righteousness of Your planting for your glory. Lord grant us the strength to be attentive to our condition and character, let our speech be edifying, our hearts diligent, let us fleeing from temptation, let us mortify our sin, and let us be concerned about the salvation of other, for Your names sake and Your glory above all. Father we ask these things in the blessed name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

## Simeon

There have been many attempts to identify this man, Simeon. We are, have been and likely will be tempted to search for some divine inspiration or historical thread we can follow that will lead us to a deeper understanding of who this man is, apart from what we have recorded in Scripture. Luke presents Simeon in a fashion that leaves us with very little evidence as the pedigree of the man before us, however, I think that is exactly the point that Luke is trying to make. We do not need to be focused on who Simeon was but rather what was accomplished in this encounter, what did it mean for Mary, Joseph and Simeon, and how does it impact us today.

The information that Luke does present us with in regards to this man gives us volumes of information that is immediately relevant. First, note that Luke describes Simeon as righteous. The Greek language here is that of being just and righteous in the sense of according to God's Laws towards others. It has been widely taught in many Sunday School classes that Simeon was a very likely a priest. This is an inference from the text based on the description of him, the actions that we see in the text and the words he would speak. If this is in fact the case, then one would expect such a description, we would expect the priest to be describe as one who is just. We also know, however, that throughout the ministry of Jesus we see much evidence that although they strive to obey the law of God in perfection, they are doing so only in word and deed, and not from the heart. Whether Simeon is or is not a priest is not the important truth, it is that he was righteous or just in his actions towards his fellow men.

Along with being described as righteous, Simeon is also described for us as devout, which can also be translated as pious. This is in reference to his relationship towards God. To be devout or pious means that one is devoted to worshipping God correctly, not only in the right actions, but with the right attitude having a feeling or an attitude of deep respect and awe. By using these two words together, Luke demonstrates for us that Simeon is a man who is, in both his public life as he interacts with others, and in his private life, in which he interacts with God, concerned with being obedient to the commands of God. Taken outside of this context, again we could be describing any priest or pharisee, but in consideration with the remainder of the passage, we have a picture of a man of faith. One who, like the patriarchs and the prophets before him had a deeper understanding of the truths of the things of God.

This is evidenced by his desire to wait for the consolation or comfort of Israel. In the book of Isaiah we have two specific references; first from Isaiah 40:1 which says ""Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God." speaking of the actions of the messiah as he ushers in the eternal kingdom, and secondly from Isaiah 49:13 which reads "Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For Yahweh has comforted His people And will have compassion on His afflicted." and speaks again of the actions of Messiah. Waiting here describes a hopeful anticipation.

These passages had been taken to mean that the physical afflictions which the nation of Israel were undergoing would be removed once the Messiah entered, that there would be a physical relief from this oppression and that they would become the rulers. Many of the non-canonical texts, specifically the Apocrypha, record the rise of multiple false messiahs who promised just that only to ultimately fall away and prove themselves to be less than the deliverer they had so eagerly awaited. Any person alive can attest to the power of desire and the weakness and inability of humanity to exercise patience, we want things to happen when and how and why we want them to occur versus waiting on God. The word wait here describes a hopeful anticipation but also of a patience that is born of faith, one that simply trusts in God that it will happen in the fullness of time.

So far the description of Simeon is one that is not much different than you may expect regarding any person with strong Jewish upbringing and/or possibly even training for service in the temple as that of a priest, however, the remaining description here sets him definitively apart from others and places him in a category where he is akin to the prophets of old. Note, the Holy Spirit was upon him. The word translated as upon literally means on the surface of him as opposed to the filling that believers received after the ascension of Christ. Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to those chosen by God for a specific task at a specific time and the Spirit was withdrawn when that task was completed. Somehow we have developed the impression within the church that the Spirit coming upon men was a common occurrence in both the Old and New Testament, however this is simply not the reality. Remember, prior to the events of the last year or so of Biblical history (beginning with the announcement of the birth of John) 400 years had passed since God had chosen to speak through man. Even then, when the silence was broken, the initial contact was made by that of

personal contact through the messengers of God.

This sets Simeon up along the same lines as the prophets of old because the Spirit also had shown him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. We need to pause a moment here and narrow our focus slightly to the word translated seen. This is something deeper than a visual image formed on the retina of a man and interpreted by his brain as that of an infant child. What Simeon experienced was much greater than this and although we cannot know the fullness to which this occurred, we can know that in some way, Simeon understood much about the nature of the child he would encounter. The Spirit had not just promised an interaction with the Savior, but a comprehension of the Savior, one that we all have the opportunity to obtain through the Word of God illuminated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## My eyes have seen Your Salvation

Luke closes out the descriptive section with the words "And he came in the Spirit into the temple" meaning that the Holy Spirit acted upon Simeon in such a way as to place him in the temple at the exact time that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus in to be presented according to the Law. As we mentioned earlier, Scripture dictates the journey that Mary and Joseph have undertaken to Jerusalem but their obedience in presenting the One who knew no sin as one born under sin again reminds us that Christ became truly man and as truly man, He would undergo and experience all that men had to experience, including events that occurred while He was still under the care of His earthly parents.

As Simeon came into contact with this young family, he takes the child into his arms. As he does so, his first action was to give thanks or to bless God. He gives thanks for God's faithfulness in upholding His word, a lesson to each of us in and of itself, how often do we fail to give thanks for God's faithfulness, not just in the big things, but in the small everyday occurrences and reminders of His provision in our lives.

The language here is something to take note of, Simeon begins his blessing by acknowledging God as Master, or this word can also be translated Sovereign. Before we are truly able to give thanks we have to first be willing to acknowledge this truth. Just as it is necessary for true faith to



acknowledge Christ as Lord, it is also impossible to give thanks without seeing, knowing, and acknowledging God as Sovereign, anything less is just you praising yourself for the provisions you have given yourself. This may seem like an oversimplification or an exaggeration, however, if we do not see God as Sovereign how can we see Jesus as Lord. If we do not see Jesus as Lord then how can we ever thank Him, praise Him, or even believe in Him. This is not an either or proposition, praising God can only be done, RIGHTLY, when we know and understand His position and our position, that of Master or Sovereign and servant or slave.

As Simeon acknowledges that God is Master, and that He is faithful, he also states that he is now ready for death. Many have taken this passage to state that this must mean that Simeon is of advanced age, which surely must be the only reason anyone would welcome death, and he may very well have been of advanced age, however, we cannot determine that from the text and I believe to make this assumption actually detracts from what is really being said here. Young or old, rich or poor, good health or bad, those that have saving faith, supplied through grace, in Christ, welcome death. Note, Simeon does not say, strike me now Lord, but rather you are releasing me according to Your promise, meaning that through your Spirit you told me that I would not die until I had seen (or known) the Messiah, that promise has been fulfilled and I am ready.

Although Paul's circumstances may have been different, the meaning is much the same, "to live is Christ, to die is gain". Simeon had no fear of death, he had no concern over the eternal situation of His soul, why, because "my eyes have seen (known, understood) your salvation. Charles Spurgeon wrote in regards to this verse:

**The Spurgeon Study Bible: Notes Chapter 2**

When Simeon came into the temple, he saw a little baby and recognized in that newly born child Jesus the promised Savior. And as he took up that Savior into his arms, he said, "My eyes have seen God's salvation"—not only the worker of the salvation but the salvation itself. Whether in Bethlehem's manger, or on Calvary's cross, or on his throne of glory from where he will judge the quick and the dead—wherever we see him, we see the salvation of God.

How amazing that standing in the temple that day, holding the infant Christ child in his arms, looking into His eyes, Simeon could see the very salvation

of God. Imagine, just for a moment with me, what it might be like, to look into those eyes and see the fulfillment of the salvation of God...now stop imagining, open your Bibles and read the Word of God, revealed by the Spirit of God, that dictates and portrays the salvation of God. We have a luxury and a gift that Simeon, and even Mary and Joseph could have only hoped for, the written, authoritative, inerrant and infallible Word. The Word that contains all things needed for life and righteousness, the more sure prophetic word by which the Holy Spirit works in the life of men to open our eyes and enable us to see the very salvation of God, do you see it this morning? The whole focus of this season is the Christ Child, do you look to Him and see God's Salvation or are you so distracted by the lights, decorations, errands, gathering, food, and general busyness of the season that you miss the whole point...that the light has entered the world and the glory of God has been displayed in Christ in the presence of all the peoples.

## A Presence, A Light and A Glory

Included in the blessing of Simeon are some very powerful, prophetic statements regarding Christ. The first, as we have seen is that to look on Him is to see the very salvation of God, however, Simeon then proceeds to give us three more statements. He begins by stating that this salvation, the salvation of God, that would ultimately be fulfilled in the person of Christ, through His life, crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension, was prepared in the presence of all people. We need to recognize that this preparation happens before all people. Although Israel was the chosen people, God also makes it clear throughout scripture that His ultimate plan was to bring people of all nations to salvation. Although many times in scripture the word all pertains to a specific group of people, in this case it literally mean all. Every person has before them a display of God, Romans 1:19–20 "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

It is also evident in the events that occur in the life of Israel. Think of the deliverance from Egypt, the displays that we have been studying in Exodus and as you continue reading in the Old Testament the hand of God that is

continually on the Israelites, even when time and again they turn from and against God, still He is preparing the way for the ultimate salvation in Christ.

After declaring that Christ is the salvation that was prepared in the presence of all peoples, Simeon then proceeds to pronounce that Christ would also be described as a light. Specifically here He is being described as a light of revelation to the gentiles and for the glory of Israel. Again, we are taught over and over again in scripture that this salvation is also for the gentiles, and specifically that this light, Christ, would shed light on those living in darkness. The gospel is truly a message for all people. In Isaiah 49:6 the prophet Isaiah speaks the words of Yahweh: "He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved ones of Israel to return; I will also give You as a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'" Christ is not a light shining only for the people of Israel, but for all men, so that salvation is available to everyone who believes on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only is He a light, but Simeon also states that this is for the glory of Israel. If being a light to the gentiles reminds us that the gospel is for all who believe and that our approach to that gospel should be the continued going and teaching described for us by Christ in the great commission then that this is for the glory of historical Israel, in that He born and lived among them, but also for spiritual Israel, the church, which is the ultimate fulfillment of His promises to Israel and to the Gentiles. Isaiah 60:19: "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have Yahweh for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory." and Isaiah 45:25: "In Yahweh all the seed of Israel Will be justified and will boast." both speak of His being a light, to one a revelation and to the other for their glory as He is glorified.

## The Journey of the Savior

After making these statements, which we can tell from verse 33 both confused and amazed Mary and Joseph. Luke here refers to them as parents and then father and mother. This is not in contradiction to what he records regarding the true father of Jesus, but rather an acknowledgement of Christ's earthly legal father. Simeon blesses them both although the words he speaks regarding what this child will endure, the journey he will

take, he speaks directly to Mary. There is speculation that Luke records these events in this manner because it is likely that Joseph dies before Jesus' ministry begins, but it is more likely that he records the events as they happened, Luke, as a historian, took great care to record events in his gospel in just the manner that they occurred.

All mothers typically develop a deep bond with their children and especially, it seems, to their sons, and I imagine that the bond between Mary and Jesus may have been even greater considering the circumstances surrounding His birth. I believe that this is why the remaining words of Simeon are focused towards Mary specifically. To look best look at these words we need to separate out the clauses. In these final two verses we have three distinct statements:

1. That this child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel
2. That this child is for a sign to be opposed that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed
3. That Mary's own soul will be pierced as well

Let us look at these in the order given. First that this child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel. There are two possibilities regarding this statement, first, it could be speaking of one group. If this is the case then it refers to the humbling in repentance that the elect will experience before they are finally lifted up or rise in salvation. The other possibility is that he is speaking of two distinct groups of people. If this be the meaning then it is referring to the people who will ultimately reject, as a result of their sinful nature and desires, Christ and will experience an eternal fall into the second death as opposed to those who believe, who have been regenerated by the spirit, enabled to believe, having their very desires changed so that they, through grace, have faith in the finished work of Christ. Regardless of if we are referring to the one group or two, the end result, the rising, consists of those who come to faith in Christ and experience for eternity what they encounter as they look at Christ, the salvation of God

Secondly, Simeon remarks that the child is a sign to be opposed, or spoken against, that will ultimately reveal the "thoughts of many hearts". In Hebrews 4:12 the writer states "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts

and intentions of the heart.” Matthew Henry wrote this in connection with this passage:

**Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume** Luke 2:25–40

The secret good affections and dispositions in the minds of some will be revealed by their embracing Christ, and closing with him; the secret corruptions and vicious dispositions of others, that otherwise would never have appeared so bad, will be revealed by their enmity to Christ and their rage against him. Men will be judged of by the thoughts of their hearts, their thoughts concerning Christ; are they for him, or are they for his adversaries? The word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and by it we are discovered to ourselves, and shall be judged hereafter.

And finally that Mary’s own soul will be pierced. This could refer to the sadness and heartache that Mary will feel as the mother witnessing all that her son is having to experience and go through. Certainly this has much merit and most definitely describes what Mary would have felt as she watched on with gut wrenching agony her beloved son experience the torture that was the cross. As she watched on, was her mind recalled to these moments in the temple, just a few short days after the birth of her son? I also believe that there is a deeper truth here, the truth that there is no soul that will not ultimately be pierced and thoroughly examined by the incarnate word of God.

## Conclusion

As we conclude this time of reflection on Simeon’s encounter with the Christ child, we are reminded of the great weight and joy of Advent. Simeon, a man who waited in faithful anticipation for the consolation of Israel, holds in his arms the fulfillment of God’s promises. His response is one of worship, proclamation, and submission to the sovereignty of God—a model for us today.

The truths of this passage call us to reflect deeply on our own encounters with Christ. Have we truly seen, known, and understood God’s salvation through Jesus Christ? As Simeon prophesied, Jesus is a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, a Savior for all who will receive Him by faith. Yet, He is also a sign that reveals the thoughts of our hearts, challenging us to lay

aside distractions and sin, to mortify the flesh, and to fix our eyes on Him.

In this season, surrounded by the noise and glitter of the world's celebrations, let us remember Simeon's example. Let us approach the King of Kings with hearts that are righteous, devout, and filled with awe. Let us give thanks for God's faithfulness, rejoice in His salvation, and proclaim the light of Christ to those around us. May we, like Simeon, leave this encounter with the Word of God transformed, ready to live for Christ and, when the time comes, ready to meet Him face-to-face.

So as we continue through this Advent season, may our focus remain firmly on the Christ who came to dwell among us, who shines as the light of the world, and who calls us to worship Him in spirit and truth. Let us embrace His presence, marvel at His glory, and live in the hope of His return.