

Lk 2:22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),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.”

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 upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 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 now dismiss your servant in peace.*

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

*³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

In English we have a saying, “You can’t send a boy to do a man’s work.” Really, it is not a very nice saying. It is just about always meant as a sort of insult – not to boys, but to an adult.

Let’s imagine one place it might have been used. An old man walks steadily, if not quickly, through the marketplace. Today, this very morning, the Spirit of God told him to go to the temple because the long-awaited Savior would be there. The temple grows close as the man’s imagination works. “What will this Messiah, this Christ be like? There was David, he was sort of savior to Israel. He killed the Philistine giant and was a great soldier.” His sandals scrape the stone pavement as he passes the low wall around the temple, the wall keeping all Gentiles out. “These Romans must be chased out by a *strong* man. Maybe the Messiah will be like Samson whose incredible strength killed hundreds!” The aging legs climb the steps to the main gate of the temple. “Or maybe the Messiah will be a wise statesman like Daniel: a politician, but also a God-fearing man of wisdom.” Entering the gate to the inner temple courtyards, a whisper escapes his mouth, “Where is he?” As the eyes in the wrinkled face scan the temple courts, he sees no Messiah meeting his expectations. “Where is He?” The Holy Spirit turns him and leads him to a humble, ordinary man and woman carrying a six week old baby. “*Simeon, HE, THE CHILD, IS THE ONE!*”

“He’s the one! You mean this baby is the Messiah! This can’t be! Israel needs a deliverer! We don’t need another baby!

How Can You Send A Baby To Do A Man’s Job?”

(Theme: God’s Humble Ways)

We thank God that the old man of our reading, Simeon, *did not* have that reaction. Yet that is a common reaction to Jesus.

- His neighbors said, “Jesus is just the carpenter’s son!”
- One of his own followers asked, “Can anything good come from that town of Nazareth?”
- The Pharisees wanted to spit at him, “What kind of rabbi would eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

- The religious big-wigs looked down their noses, “Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”
- At his death many mocked, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself!”

I. Jesus did not look the part of a Messiah to them. And anyone else in the temple this day with Joseph, Mary, old man Simeon and the baby would have said, “You can’t send a baby to do a man’s job!”

If Israel was waiting for a Savior, no one noticed when Jesus entered the temple. The only people who noticed had to be specially directed by God otherwise they would have missed him. Isaiah had predicted about the Messiah, “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him; nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*” (Isaiah 53:2)

But this humble baby can do a man’s, a Savior’s work. He was only a few days old, but before he was weaned, before walking or talking this promised Saviour has already set to work to start saving us. That was the point of Luke mentioning the circumcision and purification. That is why Luke at four different points says that Jesus was already fulfilling everything in “*the Law of Moses.*” Jesus will continue to do this work, every day of his earthly life. You and I have long been unable to fulfill God’s Law, but Jesus fulfilled it from the very beginning. This humble baby is doing the work of every single man, woman and child!

In confirmation class we use these terms: the “active obedience” and the “passive obedience” of Jesus Christ. The “passive obedience” means that Jesus was punished in our place to pay for our sins. He suffered and died for the guilt of our sins. That’s passive obedience. On the other hand, there is “active obedience.” Jesus showed compassion and patience, to cover our anger and refusals to help. Jesus respected man and God to put this respect in place of our complaints and rebellion. Jesus confronted and rebuked sin, to cover up our love of sin. He did these good things for us. We call this Jesus’ “active obedience”.

Think of it this way. I am told to write a report for an important meeting in two hours’ time. Instead I go and buy myself a nice lunch at an expensive restaurant with my company’s money. Now I have two problems. I have misused my company’s money, and I have not completed my report. I will have the guilt of doing something bad. So Jesus came to die and remove that guilt. That is “Passive Obedience”. But even when the guilt is removed, I still have a problem: my report is not done. I still need someone to write that report, to do the work for me. That is “Active Obedience”.

Or think of our life like a book full of everything I have ever done. If Jesus had only forgiven, erased, my sins (passive obedience), I would have been a book of all paper but no words. He had to keep every single law, every single moment of his life. He had to write the story of what I should have done every moment of my life (active obedience).

Jesus had to die and live for us, to be born under law to fulfill the law for us. Only then could he redeem those under law. In a way, we can say that only a baby could save us! In this time from Christmas to Good Friday, let us watch this baby grow and fulfill God’s Law for us.

II. Such a wonderful, humble Savior will be at home among humble believers.

Remember with me the people of Advent and Christmas. John the Baptist was the son of humble parents. Sure, his father was a priest, but Zechariah was one of the run-of-the-mill, backwater priests from the villages of Judah, not a high class Jerusalem priest.

There was nothing special about Joseph, Mary or the town they called home, Nazareth. They brought to the temple the offerings of poor people: two pigeons, not a lamb.

Luke tells us nothing about Simeon except his relationship to his Creator. Simeon calls God,

“Master”. He calls himself a servant of this Master. All humble, ordinary people doing God’s will in their humble way.

These people were not just humble people, but people who humbled themselves before the Lord. I am not saying that a rich and powerful person cannot be saved. I am only telling you what the LORD says in Isaiah 66:2, *“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”*

There is a degree of humility required in repentance and faith. But human nature doesn’t want to bend low, confess sins, and conform to what God says. People look with disdain on the implication that they are sinful, unable to save themselves, needing a baby (Jesus) to do it for them. God did chose a foolish way – a baby – to save helpless people.

This is hard news for Christians too. We are surrounded by humans of other convictions and we long for our Christian faith to be proven right, not because we are ashamed of our faith – Okay, maybe we are a little bit at times – but mostly because we are frustrated when people think Christianity is a sham, when they call our faith nothing but a crutch for weak people.

And so, despised by the world, our hearts cry out to the heavens, *“Oh, Sovereign Lord, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you”* (Isaiah 64:1). Prove that you are the God of heaven and earth! Another prophet complained of the Lord’s silence, *“Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”* (Habakkuk 1:13). I wonder if that isn’t a question everyone has at some time.

There once was a bumper sticker which said, “This car is protected by the blood of Jesus Christ.” I am going to try to not be uncharitable, but I don’t remember Jesus promising to protect any 21st century believer’s automobile, or any 1st century believer’s donkey. Jesus’ blood was shed for something much more valuable. I, you, we are protected by Jesus’ blood for eternity in heaven. In that sticker on the back of cars, I hear a Christian looking at the rag-tag bunch in the temple—a baby born in poverty, poor parents, aging Simeon—and saying, “Lord, how can you send a humble baby to do a man’s job, to be a Savior?”

I too stumble over that rock of offense. I wonder why God doesn’t often make honest, God-fearing Christians into wealthy powerful people respected by the world. We envy the proud and their honor among men. We look at the dishonest – and are amazed at their wealth. We are insulted, and God doesn’t speak from the heavens. Lord, are you humble ways enough?

Fellow Christians, let us enter that temple with Simeon. Leave the proud Pharisee praying in the sight of all. Pass by the television preacher clothed in a \$2,000 suit. Ignore the people who tell you that you are the most important person in the world. Though your human nature wants all that glory, kill it. Just kill that human nature with the sword of the Spirit. Join humble Mary, Joseph and Simeon in rejoicing over that apparently helpless baby, our Savior God, who has promised to be with us and to one day take us to Him.

Believe with Simeon and rejoice in the Lord’s humble ways. Hold that baby in your arms and sing with him, ***“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation”*** (Luke 2:29-30).

What an amazing thing Simeon said! By the Holy Spirit’s gift, Simeon believed in this child. Simeon knew he would die before Jesus completed his mission. Yet Simeon knew that Jesus’ future work of forgiveness would forgive his, Simeon’s, many sins. Jesus’ redemption would work back through time to save David, and Abraham, the tide of forgiveness lapping up on the shores of the source of all human sin, the Garden of Eden. Jesus’ redemption would surge forward to the end of time, forgiving sin once for all time. One modern Christian song sings like this:

*“Like a stone on the surface of a still river, driving on the ripples forever,
Redemption rips through the surface of time in the cry of a tiny babe.”*

And that is why some Christians have even adopted Simeon’s words in church services. Maybe you remember the old Lutheran liturgy which we will use next week. After the Lord’s Supper, the most holy of meals, we sometimes sing the words of Simeon. *“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace.”* Lord, we have seen your salvation. Let us go in peace, if it is your will into the world, and if it is your will let us enter eternity.

One year my parents took us on short family vacation. I was a young boy of maybe six or eight years. On the Sunday of that holiday my parents drove us to a nearby Lutheran Church. It was a warm humid summer morning. The church allowed us visitors to leave early before the Lord’s Supper. I was glad to leave before the service became too long or the day too hot. Now I am sad we left early, for we missed a miracle. As we were driving out of town we suddenly heard the siren of an ambulance. The ambulance came—and went—and we went on. Later that day my parents shared something with us children. “Do you remember that ambulance this morning? It went to the church where we worshipped. A woman died there. Just after we left, she received the Lord’s Supper, returned to her seat, and that was it. She passed away.” I was stunned. My parents stated, “What better time could there be for a Christian to die?” As young boy I had to think about that. I still am.

→ Yes, dear Father, you did send a baby to do the work we never could!. ←

“Now Lord, let your servants depart in peace, for our eyes have seen your salvation.” Amen.