

A Hint of Things to Come

Luke 2: 22 - 40

January 10, 2010

I. Introduction

A. They probably didn't know, when they woke up that morning

1. What an exciting event was going to happen in their lives that very day

A. Simeon, who had been given a promise from God

1. That he would not die until he had seen the Messiah

A. And Anna, who was at the temple continuously

1. "Every time the church doors were open" we might say

A. It probably started out pretty much the same as any other day for Simeon and Anna

1. And for all the other folks who were gathered in the temple

a. On that particular day when Joseph and Mary came in

(1) To perform the duties required by the Levitical law

A. We aren't told how many other people were in the temple courts on that day

1. Or whether any of them recognized that anything special was happening

A. I sometimes wonder about the temple priests who performed the purification ritual

1. And received the sacrificial offering from Joseph's hands

a. Scripture does not suggest that it was anything out of the ordinary for those folks

A. One question that I would like for us to consider this morning -

1. What made the difference for Simeon and for Anna?

a. Why did they recognize the special-ness of this event/particular baby

2. When it seems that for everyone else there, it was just another ordinary day

a. Another day for carrying out the daily work of temple worship

(1) Or another time for worshipping at the temple as usual

A. And of course, the question that follows quite naturally is –

1. How many times do we experience an ordinary day, or even a time of worship

a. And miss seeing the special event that God is bringing about in our midst

(1) The unstoppable purposes of God being fulfilled right in front of our eyes

b. And we don't even notice that it is happening

(1) Because we are so focused on the everyday stuff that's going on

II. Sadie and Bessie Delany, sisters who once wrote a book of delightful, commonsense sayings

A. Had this to say about the way we approach a new day or perhaps a new year –

1. "See each day as a chance for something new to happen," they wrote
 - a. "Something you've never experienced before."
 - A. That must have been the attitude of Simeon and Anna that day some 2000 years ago
 1. Perhaps that was part of the reason they noticed something unusual
 - a. About the young man and woman carrying the baby Jesus into the temple
 - A. I believe our scripture gives us some other clues to what made the difference
 1. And why they were open to the new thing that God was doing among them
 - a. That many other people didn't seem to notice
 2. Let's look a bit more at the setting for the events in our scripture passage
- III. Our story begins when Jesus is about six weeks old
- A. Luke's account moves quickly from the birth of Jesus and the visit of the shepherds
 1. To the circumcision and official naming ceremony eight days later
 - a. And then, to this event that takes place after the passing of some time
 - A. So we can't say for certain the exact sequence of all the events that are recorded
 1. In other scriptures, or if Joseph and Mary have stayed in Bethlehem up until this time
 - A. In any case, following the directions included in the OT law given through Moses
 1. A trip is made to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements
 - a. Of purification and the redemption of a first-born son
 - A. According to the Law, every first-born male in every Jewish household
 1. Whether human or animal, was to be dedicated to God as a holy sacrifice
 - a. Many of the animals offered in OT sacrifices were singled out and dedicated
 - (1) For this purpose because they were the first-born males in a flock
 2. Oldest sons were not literally sacrificed on an altar
 - a. But they were specially dedicated to the Lord's service
 - (1) We see that in the case of Hannah's dedication of her son, Samuel
 - (a) Who was actually sent to live and serve in the temple at a very young age
 3. But the law also specified that the requirement of dedication could be met
 - a. By bringing an offering to the temple – A lamb, if the family was wealthy
 - (1) Or two doves or pigeons if the family could not afford a lamb -
 - b. This offering was given "in place of" or to redeem the life of the first-born son
 - A. Two things we might note about this act of Mary and Joseph –
 1. Under the law, it was the parents who were required to make this sacrifice
 - a. On behalf of their new-born son

2. Later, Jesus would voluntarily give up his life as a redeeming sacrifice
 - a. An offering that has purchased the salvation of all who believe and accept it
 3. Second, while Jesus' death would forever fulfill the requirements
 - a. Of the OT sacrificial system, his parents were still living under that system
 4. If we need more evidence of the sincerity of the faith of Mary and Joseph
 - a. And their careful obedience to the Law of God as it had been given them
 - (1) We can see it in this trip to the temple for these special ceremonies
- A. Luke then describes a man who lived in Jerusalem, Simeon by name
1. A righteous and devout man who was also careful to observe the law
 - a. And who lived in such a way that his neighbors and all those who knew him
 - (1) Considered him to be a Godly man
 - b. That's the meaning of the word righteous as it is used here
 2. A man who, Luke tells us, was looking forward to "the consolation of Israel"
 - a. That was common language used to refer to Jewish hopes for a Messiah
 - (1) A rescuer sent from God to deliver Israel from her enemies
 - b. And in the last phrase of Luke's description of Simeon, we read
 - (1) That he was a man on whom the Holy Spirit of God rested
 3. How many people do you know who would fit that description today?
 - a. Any of you guys who would make that claim? What if we asked your wives?
 4. It sounds like a person who would be a good role model or example for us to follow
 - a. But, as far as I know, he is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture
- A. Simeon has obviously talked about a particular revelation that he had received from God
1. Luke simply tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon at some time
 - a. That he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah
 2. We are not told exactly how this revelation came about – in a dream
 - a. Or an audible voice, or if the Spirit just made it known in Simeon's heart
 - (1) But it does give us a glimpse of what is meant by the words we read earlier
 - (a) About the Spirit of God resting upon this man
 3. I take that to mean that Simeon lived so closely to God
 - a. Spending time in prayer, meditating on God's Word, listening to God
 - (1) That he could hear the Spirit of God giving him this message
 - (a) Without any special angelic messenger or handwriting on the wall
 - (2) Or any of the dramatic ways scripture records that God sometimes has spoken

- A. You know, sometimes when we read in the Bible about people hearing God speak
 - 1. Or the special ways God has gotten people's attention so they would listen to him
 - a. I don't know about you, but I am just a little envious at times
 - 2. Sometimes I wish that God would speak to me that clearly
 - a. Especially when it involves an important decision that needs to be made
 - (1) Or a choice that will affect my life or the lives of others in a significant way
 - 3. This description of Simeon seems to indicate that if we are living close to God
 - a. We may receive a spiritual revelation or direction in life
 - (1) Without a lot of lights flashing or bells ringing
 - 4. Perhaps it is the still, small voice of God speaking to our heart that is more important
 - a. And perhaps the key is to share what we believe we are hearing
 - (1) Both to test our understanding with other believers
 - b. And also to demonstrate our faith in the belief that God is truly present
 - (1) And that God wants to be revealed to us through the Holy Spirit
- A. It must have sounded strange to the people who heard Simeon share his promise
 - 1. But I believe it was because of living with that expectant hope
 - a. That Simeon was prompted to go to the temple on that particular day
 - 2. Then, to walk up to Joseph and Mary, take the baby up in his arms
 - a. And proclaim to everyone within hearing distance –
 - (1) Now I can die in peace, because I have seen with my eyes
 - (a) Not only the fulfillment of God's promise to me
 - (2) But the ongoing fulfillment of God's plan and purpose for the world
 - (a) A plan for the salvation of all people – both Jew and Gentile alike
- A. What amazing insight – something even the closest disciples of Jesus
 - 1. Would have a hard time understanding and believing – but Simeon knew!
- A. And Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph were still amazed at what was being said
 - 1. About their little baby, even with all they had been told about his birth
 - a. And what they already knew about the special-ness of their son
- A. Then Simeon gives his blessing to the parents of this child he has longed to see
 - 1. And he has a message to give to them as well, especially to Jesus' mother
- A. Referring back to the words of the prophet Isaiah, he says –
 - 1. This child is destined to bring about the falling and the rising of many in Israel
 - a. That's quite a statement to make about a six-week old baby

- A. Both Old and New Testaments declare that the Messiah would be the corner stone
 - 1. On which God's kingdom would be built of people who would receive the truth
 - a. But a stumbling block to those who would refuse to believe
 - 2. A sign from God that will be opposed by many, Simeon says
 - a. One that will reveal the inner thoughts, the real hearts of people
 - 3. And then a word of personal warning along with the description of Jesus' destiny
 - a. Mary, he says, a sword will pierce your own heart, too
- A. As great as the "good news" of the Messiah was to those who waited for him
 - 1. Simeon is clear that Jesus' life would not be all about victory and deliverance
- A. Perhaps he was recalling the prophecies concerning the rejection of the Savior
 - 1. Perhaps he was given a new revelation/vision of what was to come
 - a. With the birth of this baby, sent from heaven to bring fulfillment
 - (1) Of the ultimate purposes of God in the world
- A. It's been suggested that one reason God seldom lets us know in advance
 - 1. Everything that is going to happen in our future
 - a. Even though that might seem like it would be a good thing sometimes
 - 2. Is because we might not be able to bear seeing all the hurt and pain
 - a. Along with the great joy and gladness all at the same time
 - 3. That must surely have been true for Mary and Joseph
 - a. If they had known how Jesus would be treated – rejected by so many
 - (1) And the dreadful way he would suffer at his death
 - b. I don't know if they could have truly enjoyed anything about his life
 - 4. But they, and we, are given some warning of the pain that is always a part of life
 - a. So that we should not be surprised when troubles come our way
 - (1) In fact, we can be comforted by the assurance that God knows/cares
- IV. As if to confirm everything Simeon has expressed, Luke goes on to tell us about Anna
 - A. A woman who is also known as a devout believer
 - 1. Whether she, too, has been given a divine revelation concerning Jesus
 - a. Or perhaps she has simply heard Simeon's words, we aren't told
 - 2. But she also recognizes that there is something special about the baby Jesus
 - A. And she does not keep silent about her understanding
 - 1. She immediately begins to offer praise for what God is doing
 - a. And she starts telling everyone who shares her hope the good news –

(1) God is at work among us – look and see!

- A. We might think that with these revelations made in the temple, the very center
 - 1. Of Jewish religious activity, a great celebration would break out in Jerusalem
- A. But Luke simply says that when Joseph and Mary had completed the customs
 - 1. Required by the Law, they took Jesus and went back to Nazareth, their hometown
 - a. And there Jesus grew up and became strong and filled with wisdom
 - 2. And we hear that “the favor of God was upon him”
- A. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will look at how that favor of God began to find expression
 - 1. In attracting those persons who would become Jesus’ closest followers
- A. But I want to keep in mind the events of this day, early in Jesus’ life
 - 1. A special day? Yes indeed, especially for Mary and Joseph, and for Simeon and Anna
 - a. A day that would no doubt linger in their minds for as long as they lived
 - (1) But for many others, that day was probably little different from other days
 - 2. What made the difference? A special promise. A divine revelation from God
 - a. Or perhaps it was more of an attitude, an awareness of God
 - (1) That allowed certain people to see God at work in their midst
 - (a) While others saw only the common, ordinary stuff of life
- A. What will we see today? Or in the new year ahead of us?
 - 1. It may very well depend on what we are looking for
- A. Are we living close enough to God, spending time in his Word, in meditation and prayer
 - 1. So that we are able to hear when the Holy Spirit has a message for us
 - a. Giving us a new revelation of God’s plan and purpose in our world
- A. I pray that God will give us eyes to see God’s hand at work
 - 1. In new and special ways, but in the middle of the common, ordinary stuff of life
 - a. That’s where most of the work of God’s kingdom gets done anyway