

**+ Luke 2:25-38 + Celebrate Christ Our Long-Promised Savior! +
+ 1st Sunday after Christmas + 27 December 2015 +**

Everything led to that place on that day. Centuries of watching and waiting, preparing and hoping would finally come to an end. Countless prophecies and promises scattered across millennia would finally come to fulfillment. Christ, the long-promised Savior, would finally visit the temple in Jerusalem. It should've been one of the most glorious days in human history...

...But nobody seemed to notice. People rushed by the poor family. Mary and Joseph looked like so many other poor, Jewish couples that visited the temple every day. Jesus looked like so many other six-week-old Jewish baby boys brought to the temple for consecration to the Lord.

You see, the Old Testament laws required that forty days after the birth of a child, a sacrifice had to be made for a mother who had fully recovered from childbirth. Since this law applied to every family, the laws made it possible for poorer families to sacrifice two doves rather than two expensive lambs. They were also to consecrate their firstborn son for service to the Lord or symbolically "buy him back" from the Lord. When the day arrived, Mary would be purified and Jesus would be presented to God, consecrated for his service.

Exhausted from a six-mile journey over rocky roads with an infant, Mary held the child, while Joseph carried a small cage with two doves. Nobody seemed to notice that God in human flesh had entered their midst. Nobody seemed to notice that the long-promised Savior had come.

You would think they would since all those Jewish men and women, their children and grandchildren had been raised on the teachings of the Old Testament—taught to look forward to the coming of Messiah, the Christ, God's Chosen One sent to save his people from their sins.

It wasn't like God had made a handful of generic sales pitches randomly scattered across a few months. God had given them signposts over the centuries. He had given them specific details, descriptions, locations, practically everything short of saying "Jesus of Nazareth is the one I'm talking about. He will be born on this day in this stable to this mother." Instead the Lord made promises so his people would trust him.

It had started several thousand years before in a beautiful garden. A perfect world and humanity's perfect relationship with God had been ruined. Satan had used a serpent to tempt our first parents to bring sin into the world—and that's when God made his first promise. ***"I will put enmity (hostility) between you (Satan) and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."*** (Genesis 3:15) The Savior would destroy the devil's power at the cost of his own life, and restore our relationship with God.

So the Lord guided people and events and history to keep the promise going. About 2,000 years before the coming of Messiah, the Lord provided a son to a faithful believer named Abraham. That son was more than just the first child of a couple who had difficulty conceiving. You see, the Lord had attached a promise to that son and his descendants. They would become a great nation, but more importantly, the Lord told Abraham, ***"...Through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed..."*** (Genesis 22:18) The Savior of the world was going to come through Abraham's family line.

So the Lord guided people and events and history to keep the promise going. About a thousand years passed and a descendant of Abraham named David ruled as king over Israel. He was a believer after the Lord's own heart, even though he was a sinful human being who had his own share of disgraceful decisions and actions in his life. Yet the Lord in his gracious love made King David a promise, ***"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."*** (2 Samuel 7:16) The physical line of kings would only last another 400 years, but the coming Messiah would come from David's family line and rule as King of kings over all things for all eternity.

So the Lord guided people and events and history to keep the promise going. Three hundred years passed and things didn't look good for what remained of David's ancient kingdom. God's judgment had come for the northern tribes of Israel as they were scattered to the four winds into exile. The southern kingdom of Judah was on life support.

Yet for those who remained faithful, the Lord had some of the most beautiful, glorious promises of the Savior that were ever recorded. ***"To us a child is born, to us a son is given...and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*** (Isaiah 9:6) He spoke of the child's birth. ***"The virgin...will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (which means "God with us")."*** (Isaiah

7:14) He gave the location of Messiah's birthplace. ***"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*** (Micah 5:2) He even put words in Christ's mouth, ***"...The LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ... to comfort all who mourn..."*** (Isaiah 61:1,2b)

So the Lord guided people and events and history to keep the promise going. About 140 years later, the southern kingdom was on the verge of destruction and nearly a century of exile in faraway Babylon. Yet to God's faithful people he gave them another promise, ***"The days are coming...when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land...This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."*** (Jeremiah 23:5,6b) The holy Savior-King from David's line would come to save his people.

So the Lord guided people and events and history to keep the promise going. Seventy years after the destruction of Jerusalem and after the Lord had allowed his exiled people to return home, a new temple was built and dedicated. It wasn't as grand as the first temple, which had been covered with gold and other precious metals and jewels. The elderly believers who remembered the first temple wept when they realized this one wouldn't be as grand, but the Lord promised, ***"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house... And in this place I will grant peace..."*** (Haggai 2:9) About a hundred years later, the Lord made one more promise, ***"But for you who revere my name, the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."*** (Malachi 4:2)

Then silence for 400 years. No more promises, yet in all that time, the Lord was guiding people and events and history to keep the promise going. Then ***"when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4:4,5) ***"The Word became flesh"*** (John 1:14a) and the child was born to a virgin mother named Mary with an adopted father named Joseph. After forty days, the faithful couple brought their firstborn son to the temple built by the exiles centuries before—and somebody noticed. Somebody did celebrate on that day when Christ the long-promised Savior visited his temple.

Without warning, a man named Simeon scooped the infant boy out of his mother's arms. With tears streaming down his cheeks he peered into the eyes of his Savior and sang an ancient song that only God himself deserved to hear. ***"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*** Simeon like so many others before him ***"was waiting for the consolation of Israel,"*** the long-promised Savior. Now God in his grace had made him a personal promise. ***"He would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*** ***"Moved by the Spirit,"*** Simeon had gone into the temple courts that day to finally see the Christ.

Imagine the joy, the relief, the peace he felt as he cradled that Child of promise so lovingly and gently in his arms. He was holding his Savior, his Lord, his God! He was holding the long-promised Messiah for whom countless souls had spent their lives waiting to see, but never did!

Of course, Mary and Joseph could only stand there in shock. On the day of his birth, shepherds had come worshiping their Son and celebrating the peace he would bring. Now this Simeon was giving thanks for peace their Son had given him, but Simeon had a painful promise to share with Mary.

"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Someday those tiny hands and tiny feet would be pierced for the sins of all people. Someday that beautiful brow would bear a crown of thorns and his little back would bear the wounds that would bring healing. Someday that Child would bring forgiveness and peace with God for every sinner, but it would come only through his own sufferings and death.

Simeon wasn't the only one who noticed. An elderly woman, a prophetess named Anna saw it all. She practically lived in the temple spending every day there in worship and praise and prayer. She too celebrated what happened that day. The long-promised Savior had come to his temple and had come to bring peace for sinful souls. Coming up to Mary and Joseph, ***"she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."***

Now you and I would like to think we would notice Jesus if we were there when his parents brought him to the temple. Yet deep down inside we know how easily distracted we are by the busyness of this world with all its to-do lists and running around and endless activities. The weeks leading up to Christmas are a testament to that. We get caught up in getting things done while neglecting to stop and see the Savior where he reveals himself to us.

We let our Bibles gather dust thinking we'll have time for Jesus later. We convince ourselves that we don't really need to take advantage of opportunities to spend time in God's Word when often it's really a matter of giving into the weakness of our sinful, human flesh and its desire to not give Jesus and his Word our highest priority. We gladly listen to every other voice around us except for that sweet voice of the Savior in his Word. We ignore how he has fulfilled and still fulfills all his promises. We forget what he has done in our baptisms and get annoyed when the celebration of the Lord's Supper makes worship go too long. So what is the result? Worry. Doubt. Fear. Anger. Stress. Grief. Heartache. Pain. Conflict.

...But then you open the Word again and there you see Jesus. You come to the Lord's Table and there you see Jesus. There like Simeon you stare into those eyes of love and you see your Savior who tells you, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** (Matthew 11:28) He assures you, ***"Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."*** (Matthew 28:20b) He dries your tears. ***"I am the resurrection and the life."*** (John 11:25a)

There you see again the scars of grace in his hands and feet and side—and there you find peace and relief and comfort and joy beyond all gladness. What else can you do than celebrate because the Prince of Peace came to give you peace? That Child of Light shatters the darkness of your guilt. What else can you do than tell other people about him so they can have that peace too? Christ our long-promised Savior has come, dear Friends! Celebrate! Rejoice! Shout and sing because he came to save you too! Amen.