

**Epiphany**  
**January 5, 2014**  
*Jesus Revealed*  
**Luke 2:21-38**

**Introduction – Meet the Parents**

I'm glad I only got married once. (I know. That's a strange way to start a sermon...). Of course, there are all kinds of obvious reasons why you only want to get married once. First, it's God's ideal. But seriously, who wants to date to try and find "the one" again. All the emotional ups and downs; the questions and the insecurities. And then there's the proposal. I was scared to death, so I made my proposal to Diane in phases so that before she knew it she was committed. But perhaps the worst of it all is when you have to "meet the parents." The whole idea is so full of awful possibilities that they've made a really funny movie based on the idea.

I always told my mom that I wouldn't bring any girl home until she was the one that I was going to marry. The harassment by my older brothers wasn't something I wanted to deal with. And the gleam in my mom's eyes that had visions of grandkids dancing in her head was simply embarrassing. Since our late adolescent years, my brothers and I had endured years of incessant questioning by my mom, "What about *so and so*? She's a nice girl" I wasn't going to bring any girl into that. As for my dad, he wisely stayed out of it and just went along. Well, by the time I brought Diane home, my mother was so desperate for grandkids she would have embraced anyone. That I had chosen wisely with Diane – a godly woman who would be a dedicated mother and wife – has been a blessing to my parents. My dad took to Diane right away and my mom has found a kindred spirit in many ways.

And then there's the other side – meeting her parents. I've already told you that my father-in-law was a retired Lt. Colonel in the Marine Corps and that he worked for the IRS. How'd you like to face that? Interestingly enough, we hit it off really great even though he was Niner's fan and I was a Cowboy's fan. He even offered to loan me one of his wife's rings if I couldn't afford one for Diane. My mother-in-law? She was gracious, as etiquette would require, but it took a while for me to grow on her.

In the end, Diane and I were both very fortunate because our in-laws loved us and embraced us into the family.

There are moments in every person's life when they will have to choose a response to a question that is presented to them, just as our parents had to choose how they would respond to their child's future spouse. In such a situation, how one responds to the question will determine the destiny and quality of the rest of that person's life. This occasion of Epiphany Sunday – the

revelation of Jesus Christ to the world – presents one of those unavoidable questions to each one of us.

### **The Word – Luke 2:21-38**

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation 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 do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

### **The Setting**

The Scriptures say that “...when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). Jesus did not come to abolish the Law of Moses; he came to fulfill – to complete it (Matthew 5:17). And so it was, on the eighth day after his birth, that he was circumcised as sign of the Covenant between God and his people. Thirty-three days after his circumcision, he went with Mary and Joseph to the Temple for her purification

rites and his dedication, as required by the Law of Moses. At that point, both mother and father had adjusted to the new life in the family and they were beginning to settle into the family routine. Since Jesus was Middle Eastern, I'm certain he was born with plenty of hair on his head. A month-old infant with lots of hair... Probably pretty cute. I'm sure he got lots of attention. It's not surprising then, that they encountered Simeon and Anna in the Temple courtyard.

### **Simeon**

Simeon was most likely an older man. Tradition has it that he was 113 years old when he encountered Christ, though there is no biblical evidence to suggest a particular age. He was a righteous and devout man, who longed for the Jewish Messiah to come. Expectations for a coming messiah were very high among the Jewish people at that time. They suffered under Roman rule and desperately wanted release from their oppression. The Old Testament prophets had promised a Savior. Daniel had even alluded to a time when he would come and many believed they were living in that era. The time was ripe and many in Israel, including Simeon, were anticipating Messiah's coming. In fact, as our text says, God had supernaturally told Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died.

Simeon was not a prophet – one who receives and delivers a word from God. But he was uniquely empowered by the Spirit of God to offer his song of praise and a prophecy regarding Christ's divisive impact on the world. Luke's account is unique among the gospels for citing of the work of the Spirit in the stories about Jesus' birth. Along with Matthew, he affirms that Mary conceives through the power of the Spirit, but Luke also recounts that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and Simeon were filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke, of course, tells us the story of Pentecost, the Spirit's outpouring upon the church in Acts 2. So it is significant that he is careful to tell us of the Spirit's work surrounding the birth of the Savior.

### **Anna**

After Simeon offered his praise and prophecy, Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus also encountered Anna. She was an eighty-four year old woman who had been a widow for over fifty years. She was gifted as a prophet and because of her poverty and her spiritual role in the nation of Israel, she lived in the Temple grounds. Her words of blessing and praise are not recorded like Simeon's but because of her standing in the Temple, they were certainly heard! Along with the shepherds, she was one of the first Gospel evangelists!

Christianity was birthed in a world that didn't think much of women. They had few rights and were often thought of more as property than people. But Christ brings men and women before God on equal ground. Throughout his gospel, Luke regularly relates stories that affirm the place of women in God's kingdom. He begins with Mary's genealogy rather than Joseph's. Luke also records many parables that Jesus taught where a woman is regarded as a positive example.

Luke's inclusion of Anna in the story of Jesus' birth is a wonderful affirmation of the equal place of value that women have in the Kingdom of God.

### **Simeon's Song and Prophecy**

Simeon's Spirit-inspired song is well-known to classical musicians. It has been set to music countless times. Along with Zechariah and Mary's song, it is the third in Luke's story of Christ's birth. (As a musician, I find that greatly affirming!) Simeon's song begins with a personal expression, "now I can die in peace." But its meaning is not limited just to Simeon. Peace, as you recall, refers to not the absence of conflict, but the idea of fullness or completeness. Simeon can die in peace – not because he is no longer agitated – but because the promised Messiah has come to put all things right for the Gentiles as well as Israel.

Each word of Simeon's song is loaded with meaning. His song is the first public revelation of the meaning of Christ's birth. It is the perfect message of Epiphany – the unveiling of God's plan for all. Salvation has come, not just for the few, but in the presence of all peoples. Simeon declares that this Salvation – through this little boy – will be:

“... a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

His song is the fulfillment of prophecies from Isaiah nearly a thousand years before:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;  
I will make you as a light for the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 49:6

The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:10

And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Isaiah 60:3

This little child – Jesus – would be the fulfillment of all of the Law of Moses and all the Jewish prophets. In him, God would bring his plan to climax through the nation of Israel for the whole world. He is truly the Hope and Consolation of Israel and the Light of the World!

### **The Encouragement of Faith**

Simeon and Anna had waited patiently for many years to see the Messiah come. The Book of Hebrews tells us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Simeon and Anna were people of unshakable faith who waited a long time to see the promise they hoped for. Some of you are like that. You have persevered through many years of trial and blessing and you have remained faithful. Like Simeon and Anna, one day you will see the fullness of all that you have hoped for in Christ. Someday, you will see this same Jesus who was greeted by these old saints on his dedication day. We will see Jesus face to face. But our hope is not just for the future. In this mortal life, God brings his light into our hearts even now. The Apostle Paul prayed for you and me:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

Ephesians 1:16-19

In these long, cold and bleary winter days, it is good to have the light of Christ that was revealed so long ago shining brightly in our hearts. Don't you agree?

### **Simeon's Prophecy**

After he sang his song, Simeon turned to bless Mary and the child. It wasn't an easy word.

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

You know the Gospel story. Jesus would be a polarizing figure. You were either with him or against him. There was no middle ground. Sadly, the leaders of Israel did not recognize him as their Messiah. In the days that preceded his death, Jesus wept for his countrymen at the gate of Jerusalem:

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes...because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Luke 19:41-42, 44

Five days later, Jesus was crucified on a hill outside the city. Along with only a few others, Mary stood at the foot of her Son's cross. As Simeon prophesied, her soul was pierced with grief, even as her Son's body was pierced with a lance. On that day, the thoughts from many hearts – both wicked and good - were revealed.

### **Thoughts from Many Hearts May Be Revealed**

Today is Epiphany Sunday, the day in which we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the world. And his revelation requires a response from you. Would you reject him, as the religious leaders of his day did? Or will you embrace him not only as the Savior of the world, but as your Savior as well? Why would you reject Christ? He is the Light of the World that offers you salvation in His name.

There is no middle ground. C.S. Lewis famously said that Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord. You must choose. Simeon's prophecy was right. He is the revealer of the thoughts of every heart. What will you do with Jesus today, on this first Sunday of the New Year?

### **Hymn – to the tune of *Beecher***

On a day when men were counted,  
 God became the Son of Man;  
 That his name in every census  
 Would be entered was his plan.  
 God, the Lord of all Creation,  
 Humble takes a creature's place;  
 He whose from no man has witnessed,  
 Has today a human face.

Where there shone the star of David  
 In the spangled eastern sky,  
 Kings arrived to pay their homage  
 To the Christ, the Lord most high.  
 Yet not all, for lo there soundeth  
 Through the streets a fearful cry,  
 For a king who will not worship  
 Has decreed that Christ must die.

Yet it's Christmas, and we greet Him,  
 Coming even now to save;  
 For the Lord of our salvation  
 Was not captive to the grave.

Out of Egypt came the Savior  
Man's Emmanuel to be,  
Christmas shines with Easter glory,  
Glory of eternity.

Quoted from Kenneth E. Baily, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 61.

Daniel T. Niles

*C.C.A Hymnal* (Kyoto, Japan: Kawakita, 1974) p. 117.

**Segue to the Table**