

Celebrating the Presentation of our Lord – Luke 2:22-40 Feb.2nd 2014

This world is longing for peace.

Those of you who work in the Armed Services know this so personally. Conflict starts to calm down in one area of the world, only to erupt in another, and then break out once more in the original spot .

But that's not the only example of suffering from peace-deprivation. Closer to home, we long for peace from the bad news which plasters the face of the newspapers and iphones we carry: deadly shootings, family conflicts, etc.

Take things to an even more personal level, and search yourself. Do you ever wrestle to find peace from guilt, as you rest your head on your pillow at night, over what something you did the last day, week, the past year?

Luke's presentation of Jesus holds out to us some awesome encouragement and peace from God. "Lord, work in our hearts today and give us peace by the power of your living Word. "

Enter the scene with me this day, which is recorded here in Luke ch.2 (vs.22 and following). Follow Mary and Joseph, holding Jesus in their arms, as they enter the temple.

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 Lord 23 (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."

They are carrying out two separate commands of the Lord. The first one involved Mary: Whenever an Israelite woman gave birth, she was commanded to give an offering for purification. In the case of sons, this purification for a mother was to take place 40 days after the birth.

Now, where we want to especially focus our attention is the 2nd command they are carrying out: Joseph and Mary are here to present Jesus to the Lord. This act is saturated with history. It goes all the way back to the Lord's rescue of His people out Egypt. We talked about that event a couple Sundays ago. Kids, do you remember... When the Lord rescued the Israelites out of Egypt, there was 1 person in each Israelite family whose life was spared/saved by the Lord. Who was that? The 1st born son.

Because of that act, the Lord said from that point forward: you are to give every 1st born son to me, for a life of service. Later, the Lord instructed: take the Levites to serve ~ ministers of that time ~ in place of the firstborn of each Israelite family, and have every non-Levite family give an offering of 5 shekels of silver at the presentation of their 1st born sons at the temple.

Now, pause and consider this through the eyes of an Old Testament Israelite. This event drips with reminders of God's grace. Every time a 1st born son was presented, the wonderful works of the Lord were

replayed, so that generation after generation would not forget: The Lord made us his people – the Lord brought us out of our slavery – the Lord saved our lives – the Lord is faithful to all his promises.

And now... Jesus is presented in the Temple.

Take a closer look at Jesus this day. See how our Almighty God made himself so vulnerable. Here is God the Son, a baby ~ not even 6 weeks old! He is completely helpless and dependent. He has subjected himself to the care of human parents, who are sinful like you and me. He has humbled himself – that is, emptied himself. He has made himself a servant, laying aside his glory and power as God, in order to be the perfect child, the perfect teenager, the perfect adult. He covers believers with his perfection and gives us peace.

Now Simeon steps into the temple court...

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." 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Nothing is mentioned about his job, his status in life ~ all that matters nothing on the pages of history, and it doesn't appear to mean much to Simeon either. God allows us to see the longing of Simeon's heart: He is waiting for the comfort God promised to His people. God had assured him that he would not die before he saw his Savior – the Savior promised ever since sin first was brought into this world. Now the day has come at last! The Holy Spirit directs him to Jesus.

See Simeon's face lined with emotion as he joyfully speeds towards an obscure couple holding a child. The God-inspired Word he shares stands forever in human history.

He prays. . . I can now leave this world – this world so wounded by sin – I can live in it and leave it in peace! For my eyes have actually seen the Savior for all people!

Up to this point, Joseph and Mary had only heard words of joy, of peace, of glory, of "Savior" regarding this child - from angels & from shepherds.

But listen closely. Simeon's joyful tone has changed. He's now speaking specifically to Mary. It is as if we hear the whole history of Christ upon earth pass in rapid succession. He speaks of opposition, of pain, of

heart-rending sadness. This is the first time Joseph and Mary hear such details about the future of this baby.

And the backdrop for this dramatic prophecy was the place of the sacrifices: the temple. So fitting for the Sacrifice who would allow himself to be placed upon the crude, coarse altar of the cross. So amazing ~ for Him to open himself up to the complete vulnerability of being the target of Hell itself ~ whose horrors believers will never have to experience. So fitting ~ for the blood of this Sacrifice would stop the need of the Temple's blood sacrifices once and for all. Once for all time Jesus would give – he would be – the Sacrifice to serve all people ~ to save the world from their sins. To confirm Him the Prince of Peace, and make Him the Everlasting Peace of all who hope in Him.

At the end of Simeon's prophecy, an astonishing woman steps forward.

36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

We are told quite a bit about Anna. Her father's name is mentioned. Was this because she was from a well-known family? That she was a prophetess simply means: she knew and shared God's Word. This fits with how she spent all her time in the temple, that would be in the court of women in her case. Luke especially notes: she was practically living at church! And this had been going on for practically her whole life! She was literally "dwelling in the courts of the Lord."

Notice how she lived out her days in the temple, rather than a synagogue. Though God's Word continued to be read and proclaimed in local synagogues throughout Judea and Galilee, so much of what we read in Rabbinic teachings from the time carried the self-righteous error we hear so often from the Pharisees.

Anna spent all these long years in the temple, with its rich/tangible reminders in worship that repeated God's truth of salvation by grace, by the shedding of a substitute's blood... Ah, listen to the most important, noteworthy description connected with Anna: she was looking – longing – for the redemption / ransom promised for God's people.

There is no more appropriate place for her than the temple then: the whole sacrificial system pointed ahead... the worshipers waiting with longing... for the great Ransomer, who would pay the price to release us from our sin and hell. He would come as surely as the Lord's name meant faithfulness. And now he – the Ransomer – had arrived! She couldn't help but share the news with fellow believers who were yearning along with her for the Messiah to be born.

We can take a lot away from our observations of Simeon and Anna. What was the highlight of their life? Seeing their Savior! Why? They were very aware of their own sin, they knew that nothing they could do

would remove it or make up for it. They clung to God's promises of a Savior and waited for him with such longing. And now the joy and peace that flooded their hearts, when they had seen him with their own eyes, was tremendous.

We, too, are very aware of our sin. We've been brought by God to realize we can't cover up our very real flaws, failures before him. It is essential for us to be: humble, honest and open with our God. We confess we are "poor in spirit." We "mourn" over our sin. We admit all we've done wrong – we've sinned against God, and along with that we see how we have added to the conflict in the lives of those around us by our sins. We cling to God's promise. Trusting in Jesus, we have confidence to approach our Lord. We ask for His mercy, knowing that in Jesus He forgives us.

We're safe in the arms of the Almighty God who loved us enough to become fragile for our sake – and to bring our salvation. Our God has presented us with the same things Simeon saw and with the same things Anna heard. This truth of God floods our hearts with the peace which Simeon spoke of.

Hold on tightly to that! Rejoice in your Savior, along with Simeon and Anna. Carry with you the assurance that you can live and die in peace, if you have this one thing: Jesus – Hope in Him. Be ready to share the peace and hope you have. In this peace-deprived world, you'll have plenty of opportunities. May the Lord grant us hearts filled with peace, and eager to serve him, our Prince of Peace. Amen.