

## Unwrapped Presents (Christ Revealed!)

### Luke 2:21-40 (NIV)

<sup>21</sup> On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. <sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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 on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: <sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." <sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." <sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Hopefully, by today, you've all had the opportunity to unwrap your presents. There were maybe some surprises. Almost certainly there are gifts that you have been treasuring since you got them, even showing them off to people. Hopefully you don't do this to brag, but more so because this gift has brought you such great joy that you can't help but tell other people and show them.

Our Gospel reading for today picks up immediately where we left off on Christmas Eve. After following the angel's announcement, the shepherds had the gift of Christ unwrapped and revealed as they saw the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Then, when Jesus is 8 days old, we are told that Mary & Joseph had him circumcised, according to God's command passed down through the ages all the way from Abraham some 2,000 years ago. As was customary, this was the day they officially, legally named him "Jesus" – "the name the angel had given him before he was conceived" (verse 21), a name that means "he saves." Finally, here is the offspring of Abraham who is the blessing to all nations – Jesus, the one who saves. By circumcising and naming him Jesus, Mary & Joseph show that they believe that God is fulfilling his promises right before them. God unwrapped and revealed the gift of the Messiah to them.

Then, as good, God-pleasing parents, they took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to complete their purification rites after childbirth - according to God's Word - and they consecrated Jesus to God and bought him back, redeemed him, with their offering of 2 doves or 2 pigeons – again, in keeping with God's Word. Luke writes down these details to unwrap God's Christmas gift for us, a baby born in perfection who was already keeping God's law for us, even shedding his blood for us.

While Mary, Joseph, & Jesus are at the temple fulfilling God's Word, there is another man there named Simeon. He's a special man because "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." (verse 26) He was not there by coincidence. No, the Holy Spirit moved him to go into the temple courts that day. The Holy Spirit revealed baby Jesus to him as his Lord and Savior, the Messiah. Simeon scoops up the unwrapped and revealed present of Jesus into his arms and praises God! "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (verses 29-32) Here he is! This is the one I have been waiting for! This is the one who will save us all – Israelites and Gentiles alike. Simeon had to show off this marvelous unwrapped gift of God.

His praises did not go unnoticed. There was another person there named Anna – an Israelite from the tribe of Asher, a prophetess, an old widow. She is one of those people you can't help but admire. She had been a widow for so long – decades upon decades – and had used that time to worship the Lord and tell others about him. "She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying." (verse 37) She saw the gift of Jesus unwrapped and revealed by Simeon to her and she "gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." (verse 38) She fulfilled her role as prophetess by telling all those people at the temple courts that Jesus, the Messiah, had come. Here he is! God has unwrapped and

revealed this present to us! He has come to redeem us, to buy us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Check out this present from God!

Over this past week, we have been unwrapping God's presents to us, a present passed down through the millennia with the promises given to Adam & Eve, to Abraham, to David, and then finally unwrapped when Jesus was born to Mary & Joseph. We got to see that through the children's program last Sunday. We got to see it again on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day how God came down from heaven, was clothed in human flesh, and was born in Bethlehem. For Mary & Joseph, for the shepherds, for Simeon, for Anna, this was the first time the gift of God was unwrapped for them! They now saw in the flesh the offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent's head, the offspring of Abraham through whom all people on earth will be blessed, the descendent of King David who would rule over all nations forever. Their joy over this unwrapped gift of God is infectious even as we read their words some 2000 years after they were spoken. Simeon and Anna had to show off the unwrapped gift of the revealed Christ to anyone who would listen. They couldn't hold the joy in or hold it to themselves. Can we?

Another Christmas has come and gone. We unwrapped this gift of the Christ Child again, but he's always been an unwrapped present for us. Have we grown too accustomed to this gift? Have we stopped showing the gift of the unwrapped and revealed Christ to others? Are we a bit dismissive of him - "You know, I got one of those last year"? Are we showing off this gift of Jesus past Christmas, or are we keeping it to ourselves because people will think that we are annoyingly bragging about our gift from God?

Simeon said to 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." (verses 34-35a) What's in your heart? Is the joy of the unwrapped and revealed Jesus as our Savior bubbling from your heart and over your lips, that you can't help but talk about this great gift of Jesus and how he is your salvation, as Simeon did? Do you constantly give thanks to God for this unwrapped gift of Jesus and speak about him to all who are needing and looking for redemption - a buying back from sin, death, and the devil?

Luke recorded these words so that his audience - a man named Theophilus - would know the certainty of the things taught him about Jesus. He was guided by the Holy Spirit to do so, much like Simeon was when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that this baby boy that Mary & Joseph were carrying was his Messiah, his salvation. These words have been preserved for us so that we would have that same certainty and joy - to see God fulfilling his Word, to see Jesus even as a baby keeping God's laws for us, actively being our Savior.

There's another reason why the Holy Spirit had Luke record these words and preserve them for us to read and to hear some 2,000 years later: so that we could rejoice and give thanks to God just like Simeon and Anna did. I've been a Lutheran all my life - baptized within a month of my birth, raised up in the church, went to Lutheran schools, became a Lutheran pastor. There is not a time in my life that I can remember not having the unwrapped and revealed Jesus as my Savior. He's always been God's unwrapped present to me. But when you hear Simeon and Anna in God's Word, you remember again the greatness of this unwrapped gift of Jesus, like seeing it for the first time as they did. Then we remember that the greatest Christmas gift ever, which is from God and is God himself come down for us to be our Savior, is our light in a world of darkness, the light who takes away my spiritual darkness. The Holy Spirit recorded this for us so that our joy in the unwrapped gift of Christ is renewed all over again.

If you feel a little complacent about your joy over the unwrapped and revealed gift of Christ, listen to Simeon's words again. "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (verses 29-32) God, you have revealed peace and salvation for the whole world in this child. You can take me know. I can die happy because you have unwrapped this gift of Christ for me. He buys me back from sin, death, and the devil; he is my redemption. If that's not enough to spark the joy all over again of God's unwrapped gift of himself to us, then consider coming to the next Bible Information Class. There you often get to see that joy in people as they have this gift from God unwrapped before them again and again. Do what you did this past Christmas and invite people to come with you to church and Bible study to have our glorious Savior unwrapped and revealed for them.

Brothers and sisters, we have the unwrapped gift of Jesus. This child, already as a baby, was keeping God's Word for us, shed his blood for us when he was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. "The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him." (verse 40) He grew up keeping God's law for you and me. He grew up to shed more blood for us, to pay for our sins. This is Jesus, the one who saves. God gave himself as his present to us. He unwrapped that present and revealed him as the Savior of all nations. Rejoice in the present of the Christ child unwrapped and revealed still to us today. Amen.