

**Rob Mathis**  
**12.29.24**  
**Service/Sermon**  
**Rose Hill Church**

Our passage today is from Luke 2:22-40 from the New International Version; Before we get started let's pray first;

**Prayer:**

I want to preface this message this morning by pointing out that it is so important to remember that each of us is on a singular journey of faith, and to note that wherever you find yourself today, that is fine. God loves you immensely and wants us all to be encouragers one to another in this journey of faith. Some here know a great deal about Christian faith and the Bible, and some feel as if they are novices and know little. No matter. You are absolutely welcome here and we encourage you to listen and ponder and seek out God's truth for your life. With that said, let's note that the first four books in the New Testament are called "The Gospels", which in ancient Greek the word used was euongelion or "Good News". In Old English the wording was "God Spell", meaning good or true story.

These four Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; The books of Matthew and Luke include differing stories that are the “set up” if you will to the life and times of Jesus Christ. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus on his earthly father Joseph’s side, goes into His birth, the visit of the kings from the east (magi), and the family’s escape to Egypt due to Herod’s threats of murder. Luke begins with a very detailed story of John the Baptist’s origins; this is the one called to prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry; Luke then goes into Mary and Joseph’s travels to Bethlehem for Jesus’ birth and does not include information about the holy family fleeing to Egypt. Luke does, interestingly enough, include the genealogy of Jesus from likely the lineage of Mary, His mother. Listen as I read to you from Luke Chapter 2, verses 22-24;

**Vs 22-24 <sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took Him (Jesus) 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>[b]</sup>),<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”.**

The correct wording for these purification rites is “their purification rites”; for His mother, Mary, and also for Jesus; so that Jesus Himself, the sinless One, was heaped into the mix of “becoming sin on our behalf” (from 2 Corinthians 5:21) He was thus, as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologian John Calvin said, “numbered with the transgressors, even from birth”, a reference to Isaiah 53:12. This process of sacrifice and purification was to bring mother and child “back into the fold” of God’s community. It was not a suggestion, it was mandatory...and meant to keep members of families connected to the greater faith community.

Let us note in looking at Joseph and Mary bringing Jesus to the Temple; they were poor people, not able to pay for a lamb without spot or wrinkle. The law allowed for them to sacrifice two doves or pigeons instead. This suggests that this part of Jesus’ early life occurred before the wise men came from the east as described in Matthew 2:1-12. And, to be sure, Mary and Joseph would not have gone into Jerusalem for

these Temple rites if they had already been warned by the Angel of the Lord to flee Herod's wrath by traveling to Egypt; and they certainly would not have scrimped on their sacrifices and only offered a couple of birds, if they had already received the gold, frankincense and myrrh from the wise men (Matthew 2:11). Just something to think about, as in order to fully understand the Gospels we must remember that each focused on different aspects of Jesus' life.

**So, let's unpack these ancient legal requirements:**

**First, these rites Luke is talking about are laid out in Leviticus Chapter 12. Leviticus is one of the first five books of The Law, called the Pentateuch, said to have been written by Moses sometime around 1400 BC; so between 3400-3500 years ago.**

In Leviticus 12 The Law says to circumcise boys on the 8<sup>th</sup> day; Joseph probably performed the circumcision of Jesus himself; Then, there are 33 days for purification. Following this, the parents are to go to the Temple, meet with the priest; and must make a burnt offering and a separate sin offering.

Keep in mind that they had traveled from Nazareth, their original home, to Bethlehem, “the City of David”, on command of the Roman government, to register for the census; Bethlehem was the ancestral home not only for Joseph but also for Mary; and the baby Jesus was born there in Bethlehem; they likely stayed in Bethlehem with relatives after Jesus’ birth, with Joseph probably finding work locally; then they would have traveled to Jerusalem, about a 10K (6.2 mile) walk, for Jesus’s dedication in the Temple. And it is just as likely that this couple and their baby went back to Bethlehem afterwards and continued to reside there.

**The circumcision and purification ceremonies were necessary as a reminder that we are all born in sin, as Psalm 51:5 says. In God’s reality, Jesus COULD have been excused from such ceremonies, because He was not born in sin. Yet, we see Him even as a baby, identifying with humanity, sinners one and all, as He also later did at His baptism and on the cross.**

Let's move on to verses 25-29:

**<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<sup>[d]</sup> your servant in peace.**

Simeon is a very interesting fellow indeed; he was both righteous, living a Godly life amongst his people, and devout, meaning devoted to living faithfully before God. Simeon knew God. He walked with God. He listened to God. He knew of God's plans, and that His God was bringing something magnificent beyond words, the salvation and deliverance of all humankind!

Keep these things in mind; Because Simeon was so devout and lived in Jerusalem, he would have been spending a fair bit of time in the most holy of places for Jews; the Temple and its environs. He likely would have heard the news about John the Baptist's birth, and of how God had worked a miracle for this priest and his wife. The shepherds who were told by angels of the Savior's birth nearby would have spread their witness all around Jerusalem, for these shepherds were caring for the lambs that would be sacrificed at the Temple. But also, it says that Simeon was "moved by the Holy Spirit" to go into the Temple courts, where he would have found Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus.

**Let me interject a question for each of us; how many of us, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with more technology available at our fingertips than any other generation in the history of the world; how many of us are stopping to listen for Jesus Christ? Listening for His purposes in our lives? Listening for what He is about in the world?** But here is this sincere believer, who is ready...waiting expectantly...for God's move of the Spirit. And so...

Simeon takes Jesus up in his arms and is praising The God of all Gods for this Savior Who has come into the world.

Think of what that must have been like for these young parents; they walk in, and keep in mind, Simeon is not, as far as we know, anyone official; not a priest, just some guy off the street. Yet he takes their baby into his arms...how different this is than what will happen to the other boys living around the environs of Bethlehem, in the not-too-distant future, probably within a couple of years; the actions of Herod the Great, one of the most wicked men ever. The Herod who caused the Angel of the Lord to direct Joseph to take his young family and flee to Egypt in the night. That Herod, who sent his murderous marauders to slaughter all the boys in the area two years of age or younger. Think of that difference. One man with a heart of love, kindness, and reverence for God, and one with a heart so dark he would kill any perceived threat to his kingdom, even a sinless baby!

**In verse 25** the passage is talking about “The consolation of Israel”: **Let’s look at the Old Testament passage, Isaiah 40:1-2, to see what this “Consolation of Israel” means;**



**"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for." This is the consolation of Israel.**

Isaiah indicated that this would be the work of the Messiah, the promised deliverer of God's people. What a wonderful prophecy about the coming of Jesus, one of many; written somewhere around 700 years before this baby was born.

So this Simeon was, in a sense, a "Watchman on the wall"; He had been watching for and waiting for and praying for and expecting the long-awaited Messiah. As if he had been watching in the night, like a watchman...and now, with the daylight, here was God's answer; and the watchman could rest. **It makes me ask the question; how is God asking us to be watchmen? How is He leading us to pray for others? To be waiting expectantly for what Jesus Christ is doing in our world today.** Something to keep in mind.

**30-32 My eyes have seen your salvation (in this baby boy, Jesus) which has been prepared "in the sight of all nations; 32 a**

**light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”**

Boom! This is a huge moment here! A Jewish prophet walking closely with God is foretelling that this little itty-bitty baby is not only the expected Jewish Messiah, but this Jesus is for ALL people, Israel, and the Gentiles. For Muslims and Hindus and Native Americans and people of African descent... This is absolutely revolutionary and totally unexpected by the people of Israel.

**33-35 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.”**

33 Mary and Joseph are stunned with this news; it is way beyond their understanding, but there is no indication they do not believe Simeon’s prophecy, or that they do not fully embrace it!

In fact, there is every indication that many years later, when the Apostle John took Mary into his home and cared for her until her death, probably in Ephesus; there is every indication and much church tradition, saying that Luke, the writer of this Gospel, had a close relationship with Mary and she very likely provided a great deal of historical context and knowledge to Luke for the writing of his Gospel. This view is bolstered by the fact that Luke provides Mary's genealogy as a means to illustrate Jesus' Davidic sonship, as I mentioned earlier.

34-35 Simeon's description of Jesus one day causing the falling and rising of many in Israel speaks to the magnitude of the impact the Incarnate Christ will have on the Nation of Israel.

**The sign that is mentioned, means literally, "A target", as in a range target that people shoot at; He, Jesus, was definitely a target for great evil from His birth to His death.**

The allusion to the thoughts of many hearts revealed seems to be illustrative of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers in the church age.

I want to stop here on verse 35, “A sword will pierce your own soul too”; keep in mind that Simeon at this point is speaking directly to Mary when he says this. We could probably spend an entire month of Sundays studying just this passage. We who have read the Gospels know that Mary will, indeed, suffer greatly, and have her soul pierced as she watches her beloved Son hanging on the cross.

**36-38 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.<sup>[e]</sup> 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.**

36 Anna the prophetess; the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher; the age of marriage was usually between 14 and 19 for girls in Palestine at that time; so Anna married, likely very young, and she lived for 7 years with her husband, who then died; leaving her a widow with the likely

translation being for 84 years; making her possibly 100 to 105 years of age!

**Luke tells us that Anna dedicated her life to God; she worshipped night and day, fasting and praying and seeking God. And she was ready, at possibly as old as 105 years of age, to give thanks to God, underscore what the angels had told the parents and what Simeon had just said; and in a sense confirmed the redemption of Israel.**

**<sup>39-40</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.**

39-40 And finally we have some discussion about Jesus' childhood, as He "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, with the Grace of God on Him."

Only Luke mentions Jesus' childhood like this.

Now, let's note; Luke tells us that after Joseph and Mary had fulfilled the requirements of the Law of the Lord they returned to Galilee;

As I covered early on, there is every indication that the parents would have left Jerusalem and headed back to Bethlehem, not to Nazareth, after His dedication and the purification rites. I suspect that they had originally chosen to stay, live and work in Bethlehem because back in Nazareth their town still struggled with her pregnancy. It just likely made more sense to live in Bethlehem, amongst some of his extended family. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that when the Magi, kings from the east, arrive in Jerusalem to seek out the One who will be king, Herod the Great sends these Magi to find the child, with plans to kill Him. When the Magi arrive in Bethlehem, they do not, as we often see depicted, find Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in a cowshed but rather Matthew uses the word, “house”. And when Herod orders the death of all the boys in the area, he speaks of 2 years of age and younger. So, later, when the Angel of the Lord tells Joseph it is safe to return to Israel, Joseph then takes his family back to Nazareth, for safety’s sake.

**So, in review;**

Joseph and Mary are devout people of God, willing to be as obedient as they could be; they raised their first-born son to be a devout God-

follower as well. We do later see them take Jesus to the Temple when He is 12. **So we know He was raised under the Law, as Scripture says, to redeem God's people from the Law, as is written in Galatians 4:4-5.**

**Our takeaways from this passage are simple and yet profound; God is calling all people to Himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit, done by Jesus Christ on the Cross. This salvation is purposed to be for all people everywhere in all times, from all nations, tongues, and tribes, as we see in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 7:9-10;**

Folks, just imagine what God has been preparing from before time began. A place of peace, of safety, of unimaginable light and love for all who give their lives to Jesus Christ. Let us today embrace the incredible stories of faith and persistence found in these pages; and as we approach this new year, 2025, let us challenge one another to become a people of prayer; a people who seek God with all their heart.

**In fact, how about if we do something different in 2025? What if we make 2025 the year when we become more faithful? A year where we really press in to know God Almighty? Like Simeon and**

**Anna and Mary and Joseph? They were simple people, really, yet faithful. How about if we purpose to develop diligence in praying for our families, for our friends, even for our enemies and for the world? Let us take the examples Luke gives us here of simple people that God used magnificently, simply because they showed up, stayed in the game...and walked out their faith, no matter how difficult it was.**

**Let us pray.**