December 25/26, 2021

Jesus is the Light of the World

Foretold: 2021Advent Series

Luke 2:22-40

Pastor Nate Kugel

For many of us, the past 24 to 48 hours have been spent with family, sharing food, and sharing gifts with one another. And if your family is anything like mine, one of the favorite things of my Christmas season happens next, when we start to share stories. These stories are more than just stories to maybe shed a tear or have a little giggle, but they're an opportunity to also maybe get a little bit of reflection. And for me, sometimes I have found clarity in my life, to what I was facing, from the stories that have just simply happened as a family together around Christmas time.

So, gathered together now as a church family, I'd like to start this morning with a story. The year was 1955. Merrill was a 17-year-old young man who grew up in northern Minnesota and found himself one afternoon sitting on one of those large iron black stones that dot the Minnesota countryside up near the Canadian border, pretty much Canada at that point. And as he sat there, he was in a bit of a quandary about his future decisions, particularly about where he was going to go to school or what career he was going to pursue. The thing about Merrill is he was a gifted athlete and basketball player, and with a chance on his school's varsity team that next year, he would have exposure to potential scholarships and coaching opportunities and wherever that dream could potentially lead him.

But the thing about Merrill was, he had had a very questionable health history. At age 2, his parents had already said their goodbyes to him, because a complication that had happened at birth had still kind of been residual, and it seemed it was going to take his life. For him to make a miraculous healing, to then by age 9 be diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis of all things, which would leave him bedridden for months and months at a time, only to have another miraculous healing. And in that healing point, find a love for the game of basketball and find out he was not too bad at it.

Well, as he would continue on, and as he sat there on the rock, there was something that was in his mind that he just couldn't shake. Is there something more to my life than what I can see in my dream that's right in front of me? Is there a greater purpose that God could potentially be calling me to, than just pursuing this dream of basketball?

This morning, as we conclude our Foretold Series together, I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke, Chapter 2. If you hear nothing else this morning, I want you to hear this: that Jesus is the *foretold* Light of the world. Simply put, Jesus is the Light of the world. Luke chapter 2 is where we're going to be, verses 22 through 40. What's just taken place—what Rich just read for us—is that Jesus has been born. He's been born in Bethlehem, and being born in Bethlehem, the shepherds have come, and there has been lots of excitement around His birth. As that has all taken place, Mary has been sitting and listening, finding this internal confirmation of all the angel had told her in chapter 1, that Pastor Bryan walked us through last week. Now they've named him Jesus; they performed circumcision on the eighth day prescribed by the Law of the Lord, which leads us right

into verse 22. And as we read, I'd like to invite you to read with the mind of a journalist this morning, because what Luke is doing is he's putting together distinct pieces of history, pieces of time in order, and he wants us to notice the importance of each thing that's taking place in its time. So, with that, verse 22:

> **And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him** (meaning Jesus) **up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking 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 carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said…** (*NASB 1995, Luke 2:22-28)

And we'll get to what he said here, in just a second. Luke begins what we'll call the post-partum narrative of Jesus' life with two purification and consecration rites that Mary and Joseph are carrying out. The first is the purification of the mom, and this was an important one found in Leviticus 12. This was God's reminder to His people, that everything born of Earth, everything that comes from Earth is broken. It's messy, and it can't be anywhere near a holy and just God. And God Himself is holy, and everything that is ascribed to Him must be purified before it can come into His presence.

And then the second thing we see is this consecration of the firstborn. This was from Exodus 13, which God ascribed to His people and said, "Here's what I want you to do. Now that I have brought you out of the land of Egypt at the expense of the Egyptian firstborns, I want you to give unto Me all of your firstborns, sacramentally, as holy unto Me, and not sacrifice them, but offer them up as an offering to Me, in service unto Me." And as they would do this, it was to remind them that everything that you are, all that I did for you in Egypt, everything that you have, is ultimately from Me. Everything that you are, is ultimately from Me, as your God. And so they would do this.

Now, Luke could have simply just brought us in Luke chapter 2, and said, "One day, Mary and Joseph found themselves in Jerusalem, and they ran into this random guy named Simeon." But he doesn't, because there's an act of obedience that is taking place in Mary and Joseph that he's wanting to circle and he's wanting to highlight. Because, for example, we're sitting here at Lincoln Berean Church, right here in this auditorium. Seven miles from us is about Roca, eight miles from us is Hickman, generally speaking. That is about the same distance it would have been for Mary and Joseph to walk from Bethlehem Ephrathah, that area that Josh walked us through and talked to us about, back from there, all the way to the temple. This would be difficult even for me to walk, and I haven't had any major medical events within the last 40 days, like Mary did.

And you could also think that this was a poor couple. We know that from verse 24: **a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons** was their sacrifice. In Leviticus 12, God had asked His people to sacrifice a goat, which would have been a much more expensive sacrifice, unto Him for the purification of Mary. But, because they couldn't afford that, because God knew that some of His people would not be able to afford that, they were able to sacrifice two young pigeons or a pair of turtledoves. (No partridge in a pear tree, this time.) Just an opportunity for them to obey God. This was a faithful act of obedience to God, this opportunity. They could have taken another day. In light of people like Herod, whose obedience to God was completely secondary to this whole narrative of Jesus' birth, they took the opportunity to say, "We are going to continue to follow God," even though this was a day away from making income for Joseph and his new family. This is going to be something we're going to follow God in. And the sacrament of consecrating Jesus was something that even the Apostle Paul would pick up on when he says of Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, God who took on flesh, the firstborn of all creation."

And this obedience leads them right up to verse 25—this perfect timing as the Spirit is moving in Simeon, right into the temple. Now Simeon is an interesting character. We don't get much information on him. All we get to know is that scholars believe he was probably about 113 years old at this time. Kids, can you imagine that? I can barely count that high, and this guy was 113 years old! We don't know if he was exactly 113, but we know he was pretty close; he was an old guy! But Luke wants us to notice one thing: **that this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was on him**. See, this idea of being righteous and devout was an interesting title, because it was given to people in other portions of Scripture, like Abraham and like Moses and other prophets who followed God. More secularly that term **devout** would have been offered up to people and written of people like Plato, in secular context, of people who are of statement or statement authority.

Alright, so this is who this guy is. People know who Simeon is. When he's walking around the temple, he's not walking around ambiguous, and no one knows who he is. Everyone would know who this guy is. And you can imagine how the birthday parties went every year for him. "So, Simeon, just curious, what's your annual word of wisdom, now that you're this such and such age?" "Well, guys, I tell you this every year. You know God is not going to let me die until I see the Lord's Messiah." To which everyone would have gone, "Okay, that's nice. Let's get the cake out." Anyway, let's move on because they wouldn't have known what to do with it. But they did know this, that this man believed and was motivated by the faith of a promise of God. And that promise put on him, and that faith, is what motivated him and kept him going.

Warren Wiersbe, kind of a late local scholar, would say of Simeon, "He was a man who was led by the Spirit of God, taught by the word of God and obedient to the will of God, and therefore, was privileged to see the salvation of God."[i] I want you to hear this, how important it is for people to see God's salvation, Jesus Christ, before they see death. Again, I want you to think about that for a second, how important it is for people to see God's salvation, Jesus Christ, before they see death. Luke's depiction of Simeon and Mary and Joseph in this first bit of our account together is this: that faithful obedience had to be the foundation for the message and ministry of Jesus. It would attest to something that He would someday say of Himself in front of religious leaders

condemning Him for His lack of supposed religious piety. He would say, “Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” Faithful obedience!

What does the posture of your faith this morning, of my faith this morning, in this Christmas season, say about our faithful obedience? What is our life kind of leaned up against, being propped up by? Is it faithful obedience and faith in God's promises? Or is it something else? We're about to read now what Simeon said in verse 29, and there's going to be some miraculous fireworks. So, let's go here, to verse 29. Simeon continued:

> **“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,**
> **According to Your word;**
> **For my eyes have seen Your salvation,**
> **Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,**
> **A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,**
> **And the glory of Your people Israel.”**
>
> **And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”** (Vs. 29-35)

So, verse 29, again, Simeon saying, “I have seen the promise.” Verse 30: "**For my eyes have seen Your salvation."** Now, during this time, God's people had been praying for salvation for decades and millennia. It was with the Egyptians, then it was with the Canaanites, and then it was with the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and now it was Rome. And they've been praying, “God, please save us; send us a Savior from these temporal kingdoms.” But that's not what Simeon's talking about. Verse 31: **"Which you prepared in the presence of all peoples." (**All peoples!) **"A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel."** This imagery is beautiful.

Kids, if you're drawing right now, this would be a really cool picture to draw, of this *image of our eyes*. They're fascinating things. They work in tandem together, and they give us the opportunity to make clear things that are foggy. Light comes in and we're able to differentiate distances and see how things look, and colors, and all sorts of different things.

And would it be, though, just be coincidence, that this Simeon is quoting exactly the same imagery that Isaiah would use of the Messiah back in Isaiah 9, verses 1 and 2?

But there will be no *more* gloom," Isaiah said, **"for her who is in anguish; in earlier times, He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious."** (That's what Simeon said, in the glory of your people, Israel.) **"...by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles."** (Where would Jesus be raised? We'll come back to that.) **"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them."**

There's no mistaking who Simeon is talking about. Imagine being an eavesdropper with me for a second. You're walking into the temple that day, and there's some guy selling pigeons over here and goats. There are people walking up and down the stairs over here, shouting out prayers, prayers unto God. It's jam-packed in the court of the Gentiles, as people are going in and out. And the Gentile people who are worshiping Yahweh are there as well. And suddenly you look over, and you see that man, "Hey, that's that guy. It's that guy, Simeon! Yeah. Oh, oh, he's holding a baby. Oh, it's probably one of his grandkids. Wait, no, those couldn't…those aren't his kids. They're way too poor to be his kids. Wait, what? He's quoting Isaiah over that baby. That's kind of interesting." *The baby is our salvation? The baby is the salvation for all people, for the Gentiles? For these people too*?" This would have been mind-blowing. And at that very moment, in verse 34, he would lean over to Mary and say, "**Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."**

See this term **rise and fall,** in our English language, is actually very mild. But, in every other part in the New Testament, where this terminology is used, that term **rise** is actually translated *resurrection*. And then conversely, **fall** was actually transcribed as *collapse*d. And so, when you're hearing this, what he's actually saying is, "This baby is going to cause the resurrection and the collapse of many of God's people." See, here's the conundrum for you and for me today, as we listen to Simeon, and for those back then, that we must face. The question becomes, "Can this be legitimate...can this be legitimate? Is He, Jesus…who I will follow? Or is He not?"

And the reality becomes that He is unavoidable—and this sentiment hasn't changed for 2000 years! It's convicting when we start coming to a "Y" in the road, that we have to make a decision on. Because now, 2000 years later, if you go with your family to an outing, or you're with other sides of the family, or your job or whatever, the two subjects you're not supposed to bring up, less someone go, "Okay, this is awkward," and walk away, are probably religion and politics. Why? Because when you bring them up, these subjects draw a line in the sand—what you believe to be right and what you believe to be wrong. And if somebody disagrees with you, then they're on the wrong end. People don't like to feel that way. We don't like the fact that we're squeezed into a "Y" in the road. But that's the very thing who Jesus was; it's the very thing He is. And, ultimately, when Simeon would finish by saying, **"…and a sword will pierce, even your own soul,"** to warn Mary that one day, she would stand on a hillside, look up on a cross, and watch her Son be pierced in the side and bear the weight of all of our world's brokenness. And ultimately give His life, as the ultimate sacrifice, to make everything right once again.

See, what this is trying to communicate—this whole part of what Luke is trying to say—is that all of time was building towards this Jesus, God's appointed Redeemer. But here's how this becomes the great news for you and me today. Let's meet our last character, and finish out here in verse 36:

> **And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had performed**

everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Vs. 36-40)

See, unlike Simeon, we actually get a lot of detail about Anna. We're told about her dad—who her dad is and the significance of who he would have been. We know what tribe of Israel that she's ultimately from, **this tribe of Asher,** which was kind of in the northwest corner of Israel along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Scholars believe that she probably lived, if she was a prophetess living night and day in the temple, she probably lived in the charity housing that would have been right outside the temple. Or, pending kind of her notoriety, she could have actually lived in the temple. And as she lived there, she gathered around and found this community of people looking for the constellation of Jerusalem, this epicenter of what would be God's kingdom.

And as she overhears Simeon speaking to Mary and Joseph, praise and hope come leaping from her mouth. She knows there's something stirring within her, that everything she's heard, that this must be true. And now everyone needs to know about it. Everyone's got to hear this news! This woman—84 years old; she's a widow—she's been a widow for a long time, because she was married for 7 years and then has been a widow all the way up to 84. Socially, this would have put her very low in the common social order. But yet she is chosen by God to be the message of God's light—one of the first messengers of God's light of His Son coming to earth—and that this message wouldn't just be for a couple people. It had to be for everyone. It had to be for absolutely everyone!

Isaiah would prophesize the same thing as well of Jesus, of the Messiah to come. Isaiah says in verse 6 of chapter 49:

He says, "It is too small a thing, that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

And as Luke closes his account, Mary and Joseph would eventually return to residing up north near the land of Asher, in Nazareth, a place of terrible destruction during Isaiah's day, as every nation upon nation would use it as a warpath for their war horses back and forth. It's right here, nestled amongst the Samaritans and the Assyrians, that His Son, the Savior, would be raised. See, whether the economic classes of Simeon and Mary and Joseph, or whether the social classes of Simeon to Anna, no matter where they came from, God's Son, the Redeemer, had come for them. God's Son, the Light of the world, this Light of the world, is the salvation for all people. This is the greatest news that the world has ever known.

But I can't help but think, "What does this message, this greatest news, have to do with you?" Obviously, it's for you. But what are you going to do with it? What are you going to do with it on Monday and Tuesday when you have to go back to work? Or when you go see the rest of your family that you didn't get to see already for the rest of the holidays? What does this message of God's Redeemer mean when you have to go back to school, kids, in January? What will you do with this message of hope?

We left Merrill sitting up on that big iron rock. And as he slid down, he walked across the field to the farmhouse, opened the door, and told his parents the most shocking news. “I'm going to a Bible college.” And it wasn't even a Baptist Bible college, which, to them, would have made them even a little happier. See, no one knows where that dream in basketball would have taken him. Quite frankly, no one cares, not even Merrill. You see, by the age of 74, when he was given his final terminal diagnosis, he would lean over to me at one point and tell me, "Nate, I don't regret following God and that purpose for anything; I don't regret it at all. It was the greatest choice I ever made."

He would go on to be a pastor from that moment and serve in churches all across America, minister to thousands of people here and across the world. But ultimately, as I just alluded to, I got to consider myself as one of those people who he ministered to. See, because he wasn't just my pastor, he was also my grandfather. And little moments that we got to spend together, as we would work together on things, he would slowly start to share this message of salvation, this message that needs to reach the ends of the earth—who Simeon prophesied, and Anna proclaimed—and it would slowly make its way into my heart. And all it took from him was time spent…time spent in faithful obedience!

Most of you listening here today will not go into some sort of public ministry or formal ministry in a church. That's not what this story was to imply, because, honestly, the call by God and the mission of the world is way larger than what can be contained within these walls. But I do want to ask you this. “Does that message of hope have a hold in your life decisions today, regardless of your career or family or maybe the friends you hang out with?” “Kids, do they know who inspires you, where that faithful obedience is lying?” It could be because you've never actually come to the point where you've given your life to God. You have come to that “Y” in the road, and you've either made the opposite choice, or you've come to that “Y” in the road, and you've punted on that opportunity. You've never actually given your life, accepted the fact that this was the Son of God, come to save the world, and then said, “I believe, and I'm giving my life over to You.” If that's you today, then I cannot think of a better way to start this year. What a great way to go about 2022 and start off saying, “I am going to direct my life after what God is calling me to, the purpose that He has laid for me.”

For the rest of us who have made that decision, I have a challenge for you that was given to me, and I actually got to practice this last week with the lady who gave me a haircut. I'm calling it the "Holiday Triple “S” Challenge." And just this week, step one is to get in a conversation with somebody. Just have a simple one-on-one conversation. And as you do, talk about fun things like the weather, the lack of air in your tires due to the cold weather, or whatever seems to come up. Kind of have what we're going to call *Surface* conversations.

And then kind of ask a more *Serious* question, “Hey, how has this year been for you? What is something that you've gone through this year that's just been something that you've learned a lot from?” And just listen. Wait for them to speak and let them finish. And then, as we're going from *Surface* to *Serious*, the last one is *Spiritual*. Just take one sentence at the end and just say, “You know what? I went through something like that. And you know what? There was this verse in the Bible that meant something really major to me during a time like that.” Or, “You know, I went

through something similar," or, "I had something happen to me like that, and you know what? My church community came around me at such a unique time and it was so ministering to me. It was exactly what I needed during that time."

This doesn't have to be profound. But here's the deal. I'm convinced that small moments, small moments of pause with people, like the Spirit instigated with Simeon that day, to come into the temple, and Anna would eventually proclaim, will be our best way for showing our light to this city…and ultimately, to the world. Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we come before You. We come to the "Y" in the road. Somebody in here is on a "Y" in the road, Lord, and I pray that as they look upon You, they look on the hope of the greatest news, the thing, that message that will make this whole world right again. Lord, I pray that they choose to follow You. Lord, we're going to embark on some conversations this week, that are going to be fun with family or coworkers, whoever it may be. Go with us, give us ears to listen. And, Lord, just give us that little opening to be able to share how You have ministered to our lives. Go with us this week; empower us by Your Spirit. In Your name, Lord Jesus, Amen.

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(Heather, reading a book she brought on stage to read to the kids this service):
Good morning. Kids, this is a story for you. I am going to read the story of the shepherds from Luke 2.

That same night, in the middle of the other stars, suddenly a bright new star appeared. Of all the stars in the dark vaulted heavens, this one shone clearer. It blazed in the night and made the other stars look pale beside it. God put it there when his baby son was born to be like a spotlight, shining on Him, lighting up the darkness, showing the people the way to Him. You see, God was like a new dad. He couldn't keep the good news to himself. He'd been waiting all these long years for this moment. And now he wanted to tell everybody, so He pulled out all the stops. He'd sent an angel to tell Mary the good news. He put a special star in the sky to show where His boy was. And now He was going to send a big choir of angels to sing His happy song to the world. He's here! He's come! Go and see Him, my little boy.

Now, where would you send your splendid choir? To a big concert hall maybe? Or a palace perhaps? God sent His to a little hillside outside a little town in the middle of the night. He sent all those angels to sing for a raggedy old bunch of shepherds watching their sheep outside Bethlehem. In those days remember, people used to laugh at shepherds and say that they were smelly and call them other rude names, which I can't possibly mention here. You see, people thought shepherds were nobodies, just scruffy old riffraff. But God must have thought shepherds were really important because they were the ones He chose to tell the good news to first.

That night, some shepherds were out in the open fields warming themselves by campfire, when suddenly the sheep darted. They were frightened by something. The olive trees rustled. What was it? A wing beat. They turned around. Standing in front of them was a huge warrior of light blazing in the darkness. "Don't be afraid of me," the bright shining man said, "I haven't come to hurt you. I've come to bring you happy news for everybody everywhere. Today in David's town in Bethlehem, God's Son has been born, you can go and see Him. He's sleeping in a manger."

Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud. Except it wasn't the cloud. It was angels, troops and troops of angels, armed with light, and they were singing a beautiful song. Glory to God! To God be fame and honor and all of our hurray's! Then as quickly as they appeared, the angels left. The shepherds stamped out their fire, left their sheep, race down the grassy hill through the gates of Bethlehem, down the narrow-cobbled streets, through a courtyard, down some steps, passed an inn, round a corner, through a hedge, until at last they reached a tumble down stable.

They caught their breath. And then they quietly tiptoed inside. They knelt on the dirt floor. They had heard about this promise child and now He was actually here. Heaven's Son, the maker of the stars, a baby sleeping in his mom's arms. This baby would be like that bright star shining in the sky that night. A light to light up the whole world chasing away darkness, helping people to see. And the darker the night got, the brighter the star would shine.[ii]

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[i] Warren Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary (David C Cook, 2004).

[ii] Taken from The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones and illustrated by Jago. Text Copyright © 2007 by Sally Lloyd-Jones. Illustration Copyright © 2007 by Jago Silver. Used by permission of Zondervan.www.zondervan.com.