

**December 18**  
**The Love of Jesus and the Joy it Brings**  
**Luke Knight**

**Open**

- What are you longing for?
- Christmas is often a time of great longing. Sometimes our longing is deep and runs through our very core of our being.

**Reading** – Luke 2.25-32, 36-38

- Today's passage is about longing. But not just longing, the fulfillment of deep longing.
- So far in Luke's story Jesus has been born, Mary, Joseph and the Child continue to reside in Bethlehem, and this episode occurs just over a week after Jesus' birth.

**Luke 2. 25** 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. **26** 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. **27** 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, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

**29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

according to your word;  
**30** for my eyes have seen your salvation  
**31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
**32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

**36** 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, **37** and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** 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.

**Exposition - Luke 2.22-32, 36-38**

Ordinary folk

- Simeon and Anna enter the stage of the Christmas story at the very end, but they are crucial characters.
- We know nothing about them. In fact this is the only place they appear or in Luke’s Gospel or the rest of the New Testament. They’re devout people, but other than that, they’re nobodies.
- This shouldn’t surprise us of course. Luke’s story thus far has only been concerned with regular folks like us getting caught up in what God is doing. He tells us that Jesus was born in the time of Caesar Augustus, so as to ground Jesus’ life in history, but in his opening chapters we find no one else of much “importance” at all.

- We've met Zachariah and Elizabeth.
  - An old priest as his wife whom most assumed were cursed on account of their childless marriage.
  - God ushers these ordinary people into the story to become the parents of John, the prophet who precedes Jesus. Later Jesus would say that Zachariah and Elizabeth's boy was the greatest man ever born.
- We've met Mary.
  - A penniless preteen, pledged to be married to Joseph. And *she* is to be Jesus' mother!
  - Jesus isn't carried in the womb of a queen or a noblewoman, but a nobody.
  - And Luke tells us, and history tells us that from then on all people have called her blessed. Mary still gets pictured on the cover of magazines. "The most powerful woman in the world." (National Geographic, Dec 2015).
- We've met the shepherds.
  - Nomadic, sticky fingered folks. Outsiders in society.
  - When Jesus is born God doesn't invite the clean or safe to the baby shower. He invites the shepherds, who might have made off with the silverware. Luke's whole Gospel is about Jesus rubbing elbows with all kinds of ordinary people.
  - And he isn't made unclean by dirty people, he makes dirty people clean. He takes outsiders and makes them insiders.
- And now we meet Simeon and Anna. More regular people.

- Luke defines and links them by one characteristic: they have waited and longed for this moment for a very long time.
- They have waited for the consolation, or comfort of Israel, or the redemption, salvation of Israel.
- Simeon, in his song which is full of joy, sings this, which is what we'll concentrate on today:

**29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;

**30** for my eyes have seen your salvation

**31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

**32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel."

## **Simeon's Song**

### **What might we notice in the song?**

- First, as we have seen for Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and the shepherd's stories, Jesus arrival is a deeply personal experience for him.
  - It is cosmic, it is global, it is spectacular. The words they use are universal. Words like "fulfillment", "generation after generation", "thrones", "salvation", "redemption", "House of David", "all people".
  - But the universality of Jesus' arrival doesn't make these characters' experiences any less intimate. Simeon has been

waiting for what God promised *him* personally, then he gets to physically hold the promise in his arms.

- For anyone who has waited for a baby, you know what it's like to finally hold that child in your arms. Imagine Simeon (we assume he's older as he seems keen to die!), who has been waiting years for some kind of fulfillment of hope - to finally see and touch what he longed for.
- What does this mean? Well, it means that Jesus' arrival, isn't just big picture. Experiencing Jesus and being brought into God's story is something that we experience personally, face to face, if you like.
- So that means that believing the Gospel and becoming a Christian isn't about following a set of rules, or adopting a particular philosophy. It means meeting your Maker.
- And the image of Simeon holding Jesus declares is that our Maker is desperate to meet us, to live with us, to heal us, to bring us salvation and life.
- That's what the incarnation means. It means God's not far off, he's drawn near so he can be *known*.
  - This is why we eat and drink and celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate because this is good news! God didn't stand on a cloud and toss us a book about himself and all the rules we had to follow. No – he arrived in the midst of human history and we held him! What does that say about what he's like?

- So when God chose to enter the world and change the course of history, he also fully intended on changing your course too. Not just the global story, but your story.
- Next you'll notice Simeon sings that Salvation is here "In the presence of all peoples"
  - Jesus' arrival means that God doesn't play favorites! He doesn't favor one nation, one gender, one class of people.
  - Simeon is saying that God has plunked his salvation right the middle of us all.
  - Many people think God isn't interested in them, or he dislikes them. If you think that, you've seriously misunderstood Jesus and the Gospel.
  - Christmas says that God has not forgotten you and has searched you out, coming a long way to find you.
  - And Luke is telling us through Simeon's song that he really does mean "all people".
    - The people in Langley's homeless shelter. The people in Vancouver's high-rises, the people in Aleppo, and the people in Jordanian refugee camps.
  - So, Christmas means that God has not forgotten the downtrodden and despised, but has identified and associated with them. That's what the shepherds are all about. Christmas says that God has regarded the disregarded, and so should we.

- That's why it's good to be generous and inclusive at Christmas, because that's the whole point of Jesus' arrival.
  - "Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with eyes turned down, and never raise them to the blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me!" (Dickens, A Christmas Carol)
- Simeon also says that the child he holds is "a light of revelation to the Gentiles"
  - Now this is an interesting phrase. Let's first point out that this is another way of saying "all people".
  - The "light of revelation" part, however, is a little mysterious. But it is familiar language. We find it both in Psalm 98, Isaiah 52.

## **Psalm 98**

**2** The Lord has made known his salvation;

he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

**3** He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness

to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen

the salvation of our God.

## **Isaiah 52**

**9** Break forth together into singing,  
you waste places of Jerusalem,  
for the Lord has comforted his people;  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

**10** 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.

- So what does that mean? Well, think about how the theme of light permeates our culture at Christmas time. On trees, houses, candles. Christmas is about illumination and clarity in a dark season of the year.
- We celebrate light, because of these very passages.
- We do this because Jesus later calls himself “the light of the world”, meaning that Jesus’ illuminates God’s nature, he clarifies God’s character. Jesus sheds light on who God is. So when we look at Jesus, we know what God’s like.
- And what is God like? How does he operate? Well Simeon says he comes to save. He comes to comfort, to restore.
- And he does so with what? In Isaiah’s words “his holy arm”. Now for ancient people this phrase denotes strength, the bearing of a strong arm. The “strong arm” of an emperor might be something ancient people fear, a symbol of domination and power.



- But what is Luke telling us about God's holy or strong arm and how he works to bring about salvation? Via Simoen's song, as he holds this baby, we're being told that God's holy and strong arm is Jesus. Jesus is the way in which God will bring the world back to himself. Not by exerting his muscle and might over us, but by being born and held in our arms. By serving, and allowing other arms to pin him down and crucify him.
  - So Jesus is God's light because he shows how God really operates. Not by dominating or controlling us, but by being himself dominated, thusly demonstrating his love for us.
  - Jesus didn't ride in on a chariot, he rode in a womb!
  - So Jesus' birth points to his death. The manger and cross say the same thing. They show us just how uncomfortable and inconvenienced God is willing to be for us, how far he is willing to go. They show us what the strength of God is. His strength is his loving, humble nature.
- Lastly Simeon says that this child is "the glory to your people Israel"
    - So let's consider this first, where is all this taking place? The temple. And in the Old Testament, where does God's glory supposed to reside? In the Temple.
    - When it comes to the Exodus and Israel's story, God's glory is his reputation – a reputation that he spares and saves when he might otherwise crush and punish.

- So what is Luke trying to get at here? He's saying that Jesus is where God's glory resides, Jesus will now house and demonstrate God's glory, God's reputation.
- Now this is particularly important for Christians in the room, because if Jesus is God's reputation embodied, and later in the story says "I am sending you my Spirit". What does that mean for us? That means we are carrying God's glory, God's loving reputation must be demonstrated through us. And that's exactly why Jesus says in John, "They will know you are my disciples by your love..." (John 13.15)
- This season is about illumination and clarity. By loving others like God loves us we bring illumination and clarity to God's nature. But we need the fullness of God's Spirit in order to do that. Not possible otherwise. So if you're going to light anything this year, illuminate a tree, or a house, but also concentrate on illuminating and clarify God's character by how you treat others everywhere you go.

### **In closing**

- Consider all the Christmas films that get made every year. What are they largely concerned with? Why are we obsessed with stories about reconciliation and salvation? Why do we keep telling ourselves these stories over and over again? It is because we long for reconciliation. And ultimately we long for reunion with our God. Just like Simeon we long to see God and his good work in our world.

- How do we meet God? Well, we can take note of Simeon's song. And when we pay close attention we notice that reconciliation and salvation isn't something God does. Salvation is someone God is. Therefore the big question isn't "what are you longing for?" but "who are you longing for?"
- Big Joy is a theme in Luke's Gospel, and it's the experience of many of his characters throughout the story.
- Joy isn't something you can just muster up. Joy is something you experience. It's an internal feeling produced by an external encounter. In other words, joy has a source. And Luke tells us that encounter, that experience, that source is Jesus. Don't bother chasing the feeling, meet the person.
- Let's take note of Simeon's first words, "Lord, now..."
- That "now" is timely. When can you experience this reunion, this reconciliation with a loving God? Right now. You don't have to wait, you don't have to clean yourself up first. You can be yourself, just an ordinary person. God is interested in you and wants to embrace you.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What does Jesus' arrival say to you about what God is like?
- Who are the "all people" around you today?
- What are some simple ways you might clarify or illuminate God's character this Christmas?