JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

Luke 2:21–40

Key Verse: 2:32

“…a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

How’s your vision? Are you near-sighted or far-sighted? Some people can’t see things close up; others can’t see in the distance. Some have problems with both. Vision problems can be frustrating and give us headaches. They limit our ability to learn and can leave us scared. Typically as we age, our vision gets worse. But today Luke tells us of two elderly people whose spiritual vision is so clear. What does God want us to see? What difference does it make whether or not we do? And how can we have “spiritual vision”? At the beginning of this new year, may God enlighten and inspire us as we meditate on these words.

Luke has already described the birth of Jesus (2:1–20). But in this passage he describes what happens afterwards. Forty days after his birth his parents take him to the temple in Jerusalem. Luke highlights something important about his parents. He also includes the stories of two more elderly persons, Simeon and Anna, who surprisingly appear at just the right time. What does it all mean?

**First**, “according to the Law of the Lord” (21–24,39). To begin, Luke mentions the child’s circumcision eight days after his birth. He also mentions how his parents call him Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived (2:21; 1:31). It shows how his parents were careful to follow God’s instructions. But it doesn’t stop there. In verses 22–24 Luke mentions “the Law of Moses” (22) and “the Law of the Lord” (23,24). In summarizing the event in verse 39 he mentions “the Law of the Lord” again. There were three main “laws” being followed. The first involved the mother’s purification after giving birth to a son (Lev12). The second was to redeem a firstborn son by making a special offering (Ex13:12–13; 34:20). The third was to present a firstborn to the Lord to be used by him (Ex13:2; 22:29b; Nu8:17). Luke also highlights that they made “the offering of the poor” (Lev12:8). His parents were of humble means but had sincere reverence for God. They took God’s word seriously and obeyed it, even though they were far away from home and were under much stress when the baby was born. What does this mean to us? As believers, the Bible tells us we are not under law but under grace (Ro6:14,15). It clearly says we don’t earn our righteousness by trying to keep the law (Ro3:20; Gal2:16). So Luke isn’t trying to teach people to go to back to meticulous adherence to the law. Instead, he’s addressing a misunderstanding about Jesus among Gentiles. Many were thinking Jesus came to abolish the law, but actually he came to fulfill it (Mt5:17–20). He would fulfill it perfectly through his death on a cross, where he became the atoning sacrifice for our sins (Jn1:29; Ro3:25; 1Jn2:2). Now as those who believe in his grace, we’re called to the obedience of faith (Ro1:5; 16:26). We’re called to keep God’s word by faith, and the Holy Spirit enables us to do so (Ro8:4). This is why we study the whole Bible and strive to live according to its teachings. It not only helps us grow personally but also creates an environment among us in which God can work.

Parents also find a lesson here: to present our children to God. Our natural tendency is to hold onto our children, to protect, nurture and enjoy them. Children indeed are a blessing from God (e.g. Ps127:3–5). But the best thing we can do for them is to present them to God. It means to dedicate them to God and entrust them to his hand, for his blessing, care, protection, and especially for his use.

**Second**, a man named Simeon (25–28). At the beginning of these birth accounts Luke introduced us to two elderly servants of God, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Now at the end he does it again. Read verses 25. We see several things here. Simeon is living in Jerusalem. It seems he’s pretty old (26). And Luke describes him as “righteous and devout.” “Righteous” was the same word he used for Zechariah and Elizabeth. This time he adds the word “devout.” It means to live in reverence for God. In Acts Luke repeats this word eight times, for both Jews and Gentiles (8:2; 10:2,7; 13:43,50; 17:4,17; 22:12). Here he adds that Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” It describes his hope in the promised Messiah, who would be a great comfort to his suffering people Israel. He’s still a great comfort to us today. All Christians are still waiting for his Second Coming as our ultimate comfort, when he will gather us to himself and wipe every tear from our eyes (Isa25:8; Rev21:4). Through the Holy Spirit God had given Simeon a very special promise that he would see the coming of his Christ with his own eyes (26). We’re not sure how long he had to wait, but he’s holding onto this hope by faith. It’s how we should live our lives, holding onto God’s promise that Jesus will come again (2Pe3:9–10,13). We may die before it happens, but we live with this hope to someday see him as he is (1Jn3:2). Luke also emphasizes that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (25a). The Holy Spirit gave him conviction about God’s hope (26). The Holy Spirit was leading his steps daily, and brought him to the temple right at the moment when Joseph and Mary were bringing in the baby Jesus (27). It was his unique experience, but Simeon is also normative for all believers. We’re all called to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit (Gal5:16,25). When we do, God can put us in the right place at the right time and use us for his gracious work. In verse 28 Simeon takes the baby in his arms and blesses God. Through the Holy Spirit he can see who these people are and what God is doing.

**Third**, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (29–32). Read verse 29. In Greek the word for “Lord” is literally “Sovereign Master.” And the word “servant” is literally “bondslave.” Simeon has been waiting for this moment like such a loyal servant. Now he’s ready to “depart in peace,” meaning he’s ready for his life to end. He’s the epitome of contentment. Why is he so peaceful and satisfied?

Read verse 30. It’s the third time Luke refers to Jesus as God’s “salvation” (1:69,77). His name means “the Lord saves.” The angel called him our “Savior” (2:11). And he brings us God’s salvation. Later Luke says that “all flesh will see the salvation of God” (3:6; Isa40:5). In Acts 4:12 Luke says Jesus is our only source of salvation. In this case these words have a specific meaning: Simeon has finally gotten to see with his own eyes the birth of the Lord’s Christ.

But it has a spiritual meaning as well. “My eyes have seen your salvation.” What do our eyes see? What we keep looking at can make us either dark or bright. Mostly we look at ourselves, at people, or at the world. In our lifetime our eyes see so many things, some good, some really evil and traumatic. The more closely we see people and this world, the more we become discouraged. But the Bible says when we believe in Jesus, God opens our eyes (Eph1:18; Rev3:18). We can see his truth that he saves us through Jesus. We can see his great grace, his faithfulness, his presence, his power, his great love and his hope. When we see his salvation in Jesus, we no longer worry about our performance or our failures—we learn to just keep trusting in him and what he promises us.

Simeon’s next words, “…that you have prepared in the sight of all peoples” are also meaningful. In one sense this refers to all God’s revelations about Jesus in the Old Testament, which is so well preserved and available to all people. In other sense it points to Jesus’ public ministry, which was not done in a corner but openly, for all to see (Jn18:20; Ac26:26). God has prepared his salvation in the presence of all peoples. Why? Because he wants all peoples to see it! He doesn’t want it to be a secret! God sent his Son to make his salvation known to all the world. It’s why Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom. It’s why he called apostles and sent them out into the dark and hostile world. It’s why God still calls people. He doesn’t want us to hide in a holy huddle; he wants to send us out to share his salvation with all kinds of people so that they, too, can see it.

Read verse 32. Luke has already said that Jesus is “the sunrise” that “shall visit us from on high,” who gives us “light” (1:78,79) Now through the testimony of Simeon he proclaims it again. Verse 32 is another quote from Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa49:6; cf. Isa60:1–3). From the beginning God planned to send the Christ to be a blessing and light for all the nations (Ge12:3). But over time the Jews came to think of the Messiah as only for them. We have this same tendency to be self-engrossed. Part of seeing God’s salvation is seeing how it’s for those living in darkness. How can we enjoy his light but ignore those in darkness? We can’t!

Later Paul testified how his self-righteousness had made him so blind that he was persecuting Christians, but how God worked powerfully in and through him (Ac26:9–11). The light of the Risen Christ appeared to him and knocked him to the ground (Ac26:13–15). Then God told him, “But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Ac26:16–18). Paul added that he was “not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Ac26:19). We may not have such a dramatic experience, but God still calls us to see the light of his salvation in Jesus and then go out into the dark world and be salt and light (Mt5:13–16). We should let our light shine in our daily lives; then we can draw people to experience God’s light and glorify him.

Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” It means he includes even sinners like us among God’s people by faith (Eph3:3–6). His light changes our dark way of thinking (Eph4:17–19). It also changes our dark lifestyle, and we begin to discern what pleases God (Eph5:8–10). The light of Jesus is also glory to Israel. It was such glory because God used them to bring his salvation to all the world (Ro9:4–5). Simeon goes on to tell the parents that Jesus’ light will cause people to either fall or rise, and it will exposes the thoughts in people’s hearts. We need to let his light shine into our dark hearts to really change us. We all need to soberly reflect on how we’re responding to Jesus. Finally, Simeon mentions how his mother Mary will also suffer because of this.

**Fourth**, the prophetess Anna (36­–38). In this last part Luke adds a second very credible witness to testify to who the baby Jesus is. She’s another elderly person, and this time, a woman. But she’s dedicated her entire life to worshiping, fasting and praying. It seems too extreme, maybe even silly. But God gave her the privilege to see the baby Jesus in person. This time he’s described as “the redemption of Jerusalem.” Luke wants us to see that women and the elderly are not insignificant, but very important people in God’s work and history. No matter how old we are, we can still worship God and pray and share our faith in Jesus, and this is so precious to God.

Read verse 32 again. Praise God who kept all his promises and sent Jesus as a light for revelation to the Gentiles. May God help us to come to him and experience the light of his salvation. May his light inspire us with new spiritual vision and hope. May God also use us as little lights in these dark times to share his salvation with all kinds of people living in darkness.