

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

“The Power of His Name”

Yesterday was of course New Year's Day, Happy New Year - it was also the eighth day after Jesus' birth. On the eighth day – Jesus was circumcised – He was offered to God. Verse 21 says this, “*On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.*” By Jewish Law - on the eighth day, something special happened - for the day of circumcision was also the day when the male child was officially named.

The Gospel teaches us about these two people who testify to what God was doing through this child. Simeon and Anna were older people with a full résumé of life experience. Anna's and Simeon's prophecies share a note of hope filled with absolute expectation, that in this child - God's promise was coming to fruition. Here two old and very wise prophets of Jewish holiness spoke for the nation of Israel but also for all humanity, as Simeon's prophecy mentions Jesus' relationship would be not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. However, with all of the good news there is also a hint that all will not go well. Simeon warns that Mary will experience the pain of seeing her Son rejected by a divided Israel.

This ceremony and circumcision of a young Hebrew child always took place eight days after birth. Mary and Joseph were devout Jews who as we learned took their Son to Jerusalem when He was 12 years old for His Bar Mitzvah, they observed the letter of the law. Remember the account of the parents leaving their Son behind, not realizing they had left Him. It was a family gathering and they probably thought that He was with other parts of the family. They would obediently on the 8th day, name the boy Jesus, as they were told by the Angel Gabriel and in obedience to the Law they brought a thank offering of “*a pair of doves or two young pigeons.*” (Luke 2:24)

God was never without a witness, even amidst all of the corruption of the Temple. You only have to look at Simeon and Anna whose eyes, ears, and hearts were open toward God. Apparently Simeon was not a great preacher or an inspired singer. God likes to use people in the raw – they don't have to be polished – but they have to be passionate. Simeon was probably a man who took to the background, not seeking the spotlight. He was an unknown man who lived somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. It was apparent that he had a close relationship with the Holy Spirit. As the Gospel says, “*The Holy Spirit was upon him.*” (Luke 2:25)

Simeon recognized that Israel was in great danger. He knew that in his lifetime he would see the Messiah, the anointed One. As the Gospel says, in Luke 2:26, “*It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*” As I have taught many times – the word Christ is ‘Christos’ in Greek which means anointed one or Messiah. We do not know how he would recognize the Messiah, the Christ – but He knew in his spirit that the Messiah would be made known to him. As a matter of fact, he probably never even worried about it. He just trusted in the Lord. That morning the Holy Spirit compelled him to go to the Temple. He was just in time to be in time! I believe that his song is absolutely beyond

description. If you pray Morning Prayer – the Song of Simeon is right there – taken right out of Luke’s Gospel. *“Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*” (Luke 2:28-35)

Can you imagine how surprised Mary and Joseph were? They were probably very surprised that a stranger should be so familiar with facts involving their Son. We know that the shepherds knew of Jesus’ presence and they knew because the angels had told them. I preached that on Christmas Eve, that the angels had not only told them that a child had been born, but He was wrapped in the same cloth that all of the sacrificial lambs were wrapped in and placed in the stone manger, the same one that the sacrificial lambs were placed in, and they knew beyond a shadow of a doubt and had gone and visited Him in the stable. How could this man have known? Such great detail was, of course, given him by the Holy Spirit. The Messiah, whom Mary and Joseph knew was their Son, would bring blessing to the Jews, but this stranger, a man in the temple, spoke of *“a light of Revelation to the Gentiles.”* This was a whole new idea. When Jesus read from the scroll from Isaiah 61, at the synagogue in Nazareth, and also referring to Isaiah 49 – Isaiah spoke quite a lot about being a light to the Gentiles – for the whole world. Both Joseph and Mary must have been surprised by Simeon’s message. Could it be that Simeon was familiar with Isaiah 8:14? *“Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem”* Could he have known that all of Isaiah pointed to their Son, Jesus? He spoke of the fall and rise of many – was this the death and rebirth of many in Jesus Christ – and their resurrection with Him on the final day? This man was speaking quite a bit of heavy stuff to them!

As Simeon had foretold, *“and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”* This baby was only eight days old – and she was being told that something was coming. Mary, the Mother of Jesus would stand at the foot of the cross and see her tortured Son die.

Anna, an elderly lady from the tribe of Asher, who was certainly one of the most virtuous women in all of Israel. Luke spells out that she had been married seven years when her husband died and after that she was given a room to live in the Temple, set apart for her. If she married at the age of fifteen, which was pretty usual, and after being married for seven years, she was then a widow for eighty-four years, then her age at the time of Christ’s coming to the Temple would have been one hundred and six. This goes right along with the scriptural statement, *“she was very old.”* Scripture always gets it right.

Second Sunday of Christmas – January 2, 2022, Year C

When Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to the Temple, I think it is wonderful that God used a man and a woman to really announce the greatness of this event. I believe that we need to recognize how very important it is to be proclaiming Christ is for every Christian. I also think that it is important to remember that in the first century the testimony of a woman was seen as also insignificant. But – I want to suggest to you how important it is that in God's plan the first people to learn that Jesus had risen from the dead was women! The importance of women is really tremendous; and God uses and respects women. He doesn't hold them in contempt, but instead He raises them up. In first century Jerusalem, women were expected to just learn and be in silence. Aren't we glad how times have changed!

The Bible tells us that after the time of Jesus' circumcision, Mary and Joseph then returned to Bethlehem. Uncertainty laid ahead of them, as they would be visited by the Magi from the east, and then Herod would plot to kill all male children two years of age and under. Joseph would be visited by an angel who warned him, and they would flee to Egypt. When Herod died the angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt, with the message recorded in Matthew 2:20, "*Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.*" Prophecy after prophecy guided Mary and Joseph in the life of their blessed Son, Jesus.

That day in the Temple, Mary and Joseph would officially name their Son Jesus, as the angel had told them. That very special and powerful Name, as we see in on later Scriptures:

- Romans 10:13 "*for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*"
- The Apostles cried out to God in prayer after being released by the Sanhedrin: (Acts 4:30) "*Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*"
- Peter and John were on their way into the Temple and saw a beggar who was crippled. (Acts 3:6) "*Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*" The people who witnessed this amazing miracle were astonished – so Peter told them: (Acts 3:16) "*By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.*"

The Temple Leaders told the apostles that they were forbidden to use that Name – and we are here today because they didn't obey that order. They continued to preach and to heal and to tell people about Jesus. You can see that the obedience that takes place in the heart of a believer – and we see that with each other.

We can see the obedience of Mary and Joseph, as they did just as God had asked them, naming, and presenting Jesus at the Temple, listening to the prophecies of angels, and Anna and Simeon, and then protecting Him from all harm. God walked with them and guided them so

that as verse 40 of today's Holy Gospel tells us "*the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*" We pray that He will guide us and fill us with wisdom as well, to help others to follow Him.