

# Sermon Series – Luke 2:22-40

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*Preached on the First Sunday after Christmas, December 30, 2012*

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## **The First Sunday after Christmas**

Old Testament Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-16

Psalm: Psalm 89:1-8

New Testament Reading: Galatians 4:1-7

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22-40

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### **The Christ child brings gifts of obedience, trust, and evangelism into the lives of all the faithful**

For many people in the secular world around us, Christmas ended on December 25<sup>th</sup>. However, for the church Christmas continues. December 25<sup>th</sup> was the first day of Christmas and, if my counting is correct, today is the 5<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. During this time of year we receive many gifts from friends and loved ones. Some gifts we do not really need or desire. For an example of this, simply watch young children on Christmas morning opening their gifts. If they open a package containing clothing, such as a sweater or socks, they usually toss it aside and continue opening until they find that special toy. Yet, we also receive many gifts at Christmas that we are very happy to receive. A young adult may open a package containing headphones and, for them, they are grateful and excited. In many cases, they are thankful for receiving something they not only need or desire, but also could not possibly afford to purchase for themselves. Within the Church, we sometimes forget the special gifts we are given which are the gifts that we truly need. Indeed, gifts that we most certainly could not afford to purchase on our own. These gifts are graciously given to us from Jesus Christ. Of course, we have received the gifts of faith and eternal life, but today's gospel lesson demonstrates phenomenal gifts given to those in the faith. The Christ child brings in

these gifts with His coming - His birth in the manger. Jesus ushers in obedience, trust, and evangelism into the hearts of all those around Him that accept Him through true faith. Perhaps John MacArthur would state the point in this way: In today's Holy Gospel, we find the Christ child bringing gifts of compliance, conviction, and communication into the world to those around Him. These are gifts from Christ to His people.

Today, we find Mary, Joseph, and Jesus coming into Jerusalem and bringing forth this phenomenal gift of obedience or compliance. While I was reading today's Gospel lesson, how many times did I read today "according to the Law" or "according to the custom of the Law"? Mary and Joseph lived their lives according to the Law of the Lord. They followed the Law of the Lord devoutly and today's reading indicates that Mary and Joseph are bringing Jesus into the Temple area to fulfill another custom of the Law. However, before they could enter into any area near the Temple, Mary had to be purified because she was considered to be unclean. When a woman gave birth to a male child it was six weeks that you had to go through purification.<sup>1</sup> The process of purification was for her to remain away from the Temple, and even contact with other people, for six weeks. During this period of purification, anything she touched or came in contact with would be considered unclean. Now that she has waited the period of time for purification, Mary brings her child to the Temple. In her bringing her child to the Temple, Mary and Joseph have actually fulfilled three (3) very specific laws that are in place within the Jewish culture. The first, which is somewhat hidden within today's text, is the law of circumcision and naming. Jesus has now been circumcised and named, all on the eighth day. Another, which I recently mentioned, is the law of purification. Mary

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 12

stayed away and now she is bringing Jesus into the temple area at the point where she is considered to be clean and, in the process, she is presenting Jesus. Presentation would be the third law that is prescribed in the Old Testament. Presentation is the offering of the first born male to God. The first fruits of everything, whether that be the first grains or the first animal, was all given to the Lord. The Lord received the first and the very best because everything that has been given to us came initially from Him. It is important that we do not forget that these gifts come out of our obedience. These gifts are given to us by Christ and we are blessed by them. As I look back at Norman Rockwell paintings or read about people living fifty or one-hundred years ago, I am humbled by the thanks they constantly gave to God for all they had received. Within Martin Luther's writings, Luther advised praying and giving thanks for God when you wake up and before you go to bed. People always prayed before each and every meal and thanked the Father for the food provided this day – our daily bread. Today, we live in a day when abundance is all around us. We have everything we could possibly ever need and certainly the many things we do not need, but want. We forget to give thanks to God. He is blessing us. He is giving to His people out of His good nature and we should remember to praise His name. In today's text, Mary and Joseph are giving thanks to God and are following the prescriptions of the law of the Lord. They are bringing Jesus into the temple area because, in their eyes, they consider themselves to be blessed. As I was mentioning earlier, sometimes we get all the things that we want, but do not necessarily need. If you walk into any store you will undoubtedly encounter spoiled people. They receive so much of what they want that they no longer consider it a blessing. In fact, they almost consider the satisfaction of their desires to be a right.

This is not the case, however. Although we are people of the New Testament, heirs of eternal life through Jesus Christ, we are still bound by the moral laws of the Old Testament. These laws were put into place to point out our sin and to cause us to fall on our knees and give God the glory. Please understand me, faith alone in Christ alone brings us into eternal life with Jesus Christ, but Christ still commands us to follow His laws and commands.<sup>2</sup> These laws were put in place because they are good commands and not burdensome. The sacrificial laws and ceremonial laws are no longer binding because Christ abrogated them with His death and resurrection, but the moral laws still stand. In other words, we no longer sacrifice goats, sheep, turtle doves, or pigeons at the Temple. Those laws have ceased. But the moral laws put in place in the Old Testament are still in effect. There are ways in which we live our life that is pleasing to the Lord and He has given to us the Bible which is His word to us. If we live our lives in any way we choose and satisfy our desires thinking that it is our right, then we are ignoring God's moral laws and, honestly, we are acting like the spoiled child mentioned above. We receive the things we want and we do not give the glory and the blessings back to God. When we remember to follow His commandments and give God the glory for our blessings, we are being obedient.

In our text today, as Mary and Joseph are walking into this temple area, they encounter a very interesting man named Simeon. We are told that Simeon is a righteous and devout man.<sup>3</sup> Simeon has placed a lot of trust and conviction on what he has been told and what the Holy Spirit has shown to him. He has spent much of his time at the Temple and, possibly is some type of a priest. While Simeon is in the Temple area, he

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:3, Matthew 28:20

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:25

is moved by the Holy Spirit to come and approach Mary and Joseph as they are bringing Jesus in to be presented to the Lord. Simeon has a focus in life. He was waiting for the “Consolation of Israel”. What is the “Consolation of Israel”? It is the comfort of the coming Messiah. Simeon has read the prophecies and he knows what has been promised in the Scriptures. Thus, the Holy Spirit moves Simeon to go over to Mary for she holds the child he has been waiting for. Simeon takes Jesus from his parents and into his arms and sings this beautiful song of joy.<sup>4</sup> I have seen the salvation of the Lord, he says. I have witnessed that which has been promised to me by the Holy Spirit. Simeon is completely content with life at this moment and, in essence, he is saying that he could die right now. Everything that is meaningful to him has just been fulfilled. Simeon is holding the salvation of the world in his arms. That which he had been waiting for has arrived. Do you see the trust this man has? Do you feel the conviction in his words? He was convinced that the promise would arrive and now he holds Jesus in his arms. We have been told similar things about a second coming, have we not? Do we have the type of faith that Simeon possessed? Do we know in our hearts that Christ, indeed, will once again return? Christ is coming back. He has been here once. He ascended into heaven and He will return again. I would like to think that we all have that kind of trust. A trust that convinces us that one day the restoration, the beautiful, completeness of heaven itself will be in our midst. We will walk, as the book of Revelation says, we will walk on streets paved with gold.<sup>5</sup> There will be no sun for the light of Christ will be all that is needed.<sup>6</sup> I would like to think that we have a trust and conviction in God’s Word similar to that of Simon. This child will be the cause for the rise

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 2:29-32: Nunc Dimittis

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 21:21

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:23

and fall of many. Jesus is certainly the cause for the rise of many. There is no doubt about that. There are so many of in churches around the world that are praising the name of Jesus Christ this very morning. Unfortunately, there are many who reject Christ as well. There are people who have turned away from this beautiful gift that came in a manger. You must keep your trust in Christ. He will come again. Faith is important. I have a quote here from St. Augustine that I liked concerning faith. St. Augustine writes, "Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore do not seek to understand so that you may believe, but believe so that you may understand." These are important words for us today. Faith is believing in those things that we do not see. Simeon got to hold the Christ child. We get to read about his holding of the child. We get to read about the manger and we get to know in our hearts that it is 100% true. That is what we hold on to. We hold on to the promise of His coming again. It is important to know your faith because it is that faith which will cause understanding.

Finally we come to Anna, the prophetess. Once Anna saw the child, she could not stop talking about Him. She was given the gift of evangelizing to the people around her. It is important to realize that Anna was eighty-four years old. The early church fathers took an interest in her age and thought that eighty-four was a very special number because twelve times seven equals eighty-four. The number twelve represented the twelve tribes of Israel and the number seven is seen as a perfect number. Although modern Americans may examine this logic and question it, we must keep in mind that numbers were important to the Hebrews. The book of Revelation, for instance, uses the numbers twelve and seven in similar representation. Thus, the early church fathers looked upon her age as being symbolically perfect. This woman spent a large portion of her life in the

temple worshipping, praising, fasting, but at this point she came at the exact time as the holy family brought Jesus in to be presented. Once Anna saw the child she went about telling everyone about the child. Can you imagine her excitement? The scriptures tell us that she told all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem about this child. The “redemption of Israel” is very similar to Simeon’s “Consolation of Israel”. She told everyone that had been waiting for the prophet promised in the Old Testament. This is even better than Christmas Day after you have received the gift you most desired. Once you receive it, you call your friends and tell your relatives because you cannot keep this great news to yourself. Perhaps this illustration is easier to understand for adults, remember a time when your son or daughter did something fantastic at school. You could not keep your mouth closed. You immediately called up your friends and relatives to tell them of the excitement you had. Anna had just received the greatest news of all. Anna saw the Messiah! She could not keep her mouth shut! Now, in all seriousness, I ask you - How many of us are like that? We know the Good News of Jesus Christ. We know the wonder and the beauty of the promise that He is coming again. Are we like Anna? This woman ran throughout the Temple area exclaiming the Good News. I recently read an article in the newspaper at Christmastime. I do not recall the authors name at this time, but the writer was writing about Christmastime. In the article, the writer was making a plea to parents who are Christians yet their sons or daughters have become atheists. The writer asked if, as Christians, would we please do a favor to your son or daughter and be quiet and stop telling them they should go to church. The writer asked for the parents to stop telling them that you are praying for them. The writer requested the parents to stop telling them about what they believe

because it only creates an uncomfortable atmosphere and grief within the family at Christmas. You see, that is a real problem with me. Because, like Anna, I cannot keep my mouth shut about the Good News of Jesus Christ. We have the good news in our heart and we cannot keep our mouths shut. We know the gift of Jesus Christ and we have to tell our sons and daughters. As a matter of fact, we are called, as parents, to tell our sons and daughters that the Good News is here. He may not be gift that you wanted or desired, but He stands in front of you right before your very eyes. The gift of Jesus Christ is the gift of life and we cannot stop telling anyone. We must continuously communicate this gift to the world around us.

The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts of compliance, conviction, and communication because of Christ. It is the gift that literally keeps on giving, day after day after day. In the Holy Scriptures, we read about the promises that have been made and we are even more blessed than Simeon and Anna. We are more blessed because we get to read about the promises that have been fulfilled. We know the truth. We know that He is coming again and all who have faith also have this beautiful, wonderful, gift of eternal life. Embrace your compliance and obedience that He has given to you. Embrace the conviction and trust that you have. Embrace your communication and your evangelism methods, whatever they may be. Whether it is like Anna running up and down the street telling everyone or perhaps a little more subdued. Embrace them and give thanks. Everything that He has given us is good. Amen.

# SERMON OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION:

**Homiletical Point:** The Christ child brings gifts of obedience, trust, and evangelism into the lives of all the faithful.

## COMPLIANCE, CONVICTION, COMMUNICATION

1. The faith of the Holy family is demonstrated in their **obedience** to the Law of Moses. (v. 22-24)

Explain: Law of Moses (circumcision and naming, purification, presentation);

Purification: Mary did not need it

Presentation: The firstborn is the Lord's (redemption – buy back)

Illustrate: Spoiled child – Do things even when not required

Apply: You must continue to live pleasing to the God – even though it is not required.

2. While the faith of Simeon demonstrates his absolute **trust** in the words of the prophets and the influence of the Holy Spirit upon his life. (v. 25-35)

Explain: Righteous & Devout (priestly); Consolation (comfort) of Israel;

You Dismiss (Nunc Dimittis); Rising and Falling of many; Sword will pierce your soul

Illustrate: The content of belief is important: Jonathan Whitfield was preaching to coal miners in England. He asked one man, "What do you believe?" "Well, I believe the same as the church." "And what does the church believe?" "Well, they believe the same as me." Seeing he was getting nowhere, Whitfield said, "And what is it that you both believe?" "Well, I suppose the same thing."

Apply: Faith believes without seeing

"Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand." - Augustine

3. In addition, the lips of Anna could not be closed as she **evangelized** to all around her that the redemption of Jerusalem was with Jesus. (v. 36-40)

Explain: Eighty-four (12 x 7); Told all (looking forward to redemption of Jerusalem) about the child;

Illustrate: Telling everyone when something good happens

Apply: Your lips must spread the news of the Christ Child to everyone

4. Finally, the Holy Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ, provides all of these gifts to all the faithful.

Explain: Christ was filled with wisdom; Christ had the grace of God upon Him

Illustrate:

Apply: Compliance, Conviction, and Communication are all gifts given by the Christ Child.

## CONCLUSION: