

In The Fullness of Time

December 27, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Luke:

The Gospel according to Luke is written by Luke, a physician, who became a close friend and traveling companion of Paul, and so would have met and gathered information from other disciples along with his access to other historical accounts, even as he was an eyewitness to the birth and growth of the early church which he records in his sequel – Acts. Being a man of science, Luke did extensive research on Jesus and gathered together the facts which he mentions in the beginning of his Gospel account. This Gospel, along with affirming the divinity of Jesus, affirms his humanity and in relation to this Luke stresses Jesus' relationship with people, especially identifying with and ministering to those who were neglected and rejected in the then Jewish society and Graeco-Roman world—women, children, outcasts, and the poor. The purpose of the writing of this Gospel was to present an accurate account of the life of Christ and to present Christ as the perfect human and Savior and it was written to a person named Theophilus and to all people, especially Gentiles, around AD 60. A key verse of this Gospel is: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' " (19:9,10). Some of the special features of this Gospel are: This is the most comprehensive Gospel. The general vocabulary and diction show that the author was educated. He makes frequent references to illnesses and diagnoses. Luke emphasizes prayer, miracles, and angels; records inspired hymns of praise; and gives a prominent place to women. Most of 9:51—18:35 is not found in any other Gospel.

– Adapted from The Life Application Bible, p. 1782.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Luke 2:22-40 NRSV

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Commentary:

The major motif of this section is that the Law of the Lord was fulfilled at Jesus' birth. This section is held together by repeated references to the Law (vv. 22-24, 27, 39), all of the actions taken by Joseph and Mary fulfill what the Law prescribes, and the transition to their departure from Jerusalem is marked by Luke's report that "they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord" (v. 39). Yet, neither the acts of obedience of Mary and Joseph in the Temple nor the introduction of Simeon and Anna hold the key to the importance of this section. As in Luke's account of the annunciation and birth of Jesus, the real cargo conveyed by these verses is found in what they say about the role of Jesus and his birth in the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. Simeon and Anna, as devout persons, are important because they recognize and prophetically articulate what Jesus' role will be. Although this section involves arcane details of the law regarding purification of the mother after birth, the reader should not miss the point that it conveys the gospel; its primary purpose is to declare who Jesus is and foreshadow what he will do.

The account of Simeon's blessing of the child unfolds in the following manner: the narrator's introduction of Simeon (vv. 25-26), Simeon's meeting with the holy family in the Temple (vv. 27-28), Simeon's blessing of the child (vv. 29-32, traditionally known as the *Nunc Dimittis*), the response of Jesus' parents. Throughout, the aura of piety illuminates the scene: It is set in the Temple, the speaker is guided by the Spirit, the parents of the child have come to fulfill the Law, words of Scripture echo in Simeon's oracle, the scene evokes the account of the blessing of Samuel, and the event marks the fulfillment of the promise that Simeon would see the consolation of Israel and the coming of the Messiah. Simeon's second oracle (vv. 34-35) is directed to Mary and it foreshadows the rejection of Jesus. Not all will receive the salvation that has been prepared, see the light of revelation, or recognize the glory of God in the coming of Jesus. The counterpart of this oracle in Matthew is the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem and the flight of the holy family to Egypt. Anna's blessing, though not recorded, is characterized as praising God (cf. v. 28) and speaking about the child. Since this description corresponds to the content of Simeon's oracles, the reader is left to understand that Anna's prophecy matched his. Similarly, the reference to "all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38; cf. Isa. 52:9) serves as an inclusion, balancing the description of Simeon as one who was "looking forward to the consolation of Israel" at the beginning of the scene. Simeon and Anna, who represent the pious ones, declare that Jesus is the one who will bring salvation for Israel, but not all would receive this salvation. Jesus

himself would be rejected, and many in Israel would reject the gospel, but it was also meant for “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (v. 32).

“Peace” occurs 14 times in Luke, where it is both the goal and the result of God’s redemptive work in Jesus. Simeon and Anna saw God’s salvation not because they happened to live at the right moment in history but because their devotion and the work of the Spirit in them had led them to understand that God’s hand was at work in Jesus’ birth. The Old Testament prophets had looked forward to the time when God would establish peace on earth (Ps. 72:7; Isa. 9:5-6; Zech. 8:12; cf. Luke 10:23-24). “Salvation” is actually an adjective used as a noun and denotes here the means of salvation, or the bringer of salvation. The themes of these verses—salvation for all peoples, a light to the Gentiles, and the glory of the Lord in Israel—echo various passages in Isaiah (40:5; 42:6; 46:13; 49:6; 52:9-10). The words of Isaiah (42:6; 49:6) concerning light for the Gentiles will be cited later in Acts 13:47 and 26:23, which suggests that Luke understands the whole course of events recorded in these two volumes as the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. The announcement occurs in the Temple, just as had the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. The Gospel ends with the disciples in the Temple (24:53), and in the early chapters of Acts the disciples are repeatedly in the Temple. But rather than the Gentiles coming to Jerusalem, those who have seen God’s salvation will go to the nations. The promises were fulfilled, but not quite as Isaiah had envisioned.

The final two verses (vv. 39-40) of this section neatly recapitulate the presentation in the Temple and conclude the birth narrative. Just as Luke’s account of the annunciation, birth, and presentation of Jesus serve to proclaim his identity, so also the conclusion to the birth narrative prepares the reader for Jesus’ ministry.

– Adapted from The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol IX, pp. 68-73

This week we are looking at the event of the presentation of Christ in the Temple which is part of the Nativity narrative of Jesus’ birth and which took place 40 days after he was born. Mary and Joseph in the ordinariness of life and with the struggles of it, especially that of poverty, were still committed to fulfill all that was required by their faith and religion of Judaism—to go to the Temple of Jerusalem with the sacrifice and complete the Levitical ritual.

As Jesus was brought into the Temple courts by Mary and Joseph, they were greeted by the aged Simeon and Anna who represented the faithful remnant among the Jewish people who, all through the long centuries when they received

no word from God after the last prophet Malachi spoke, had kept faith and hope alive as they waited for the moment of coming of the Messiah. Simeon was told by God personally that he would not die until he saw the long-awaited Messiah with his own eyes. Led by the Spirit of God to the child Jesus, he recognized the Incarnate Son of God in this baby and taking him in his arms he burst into song and prayer which traditionally is called the 'Nunc Dimittis' (from the Latin translation of 'You now dismiss') which in some church traditions is sung in evening night hours of worship. Similarly, Anna too was looking for the coming of the Messiah, the redemption of Jerusalem/Israel and led by the Spirit of God she proclaimed to others that this child was the one awaited for.

These two elderly people because of their continued closeness to God, their mature faith, and ripe fruit of holiness were able to see the revelation of the child Jesus as Savior and they were among the first to bear witness that the Messiah is not just the Savior of Israel but of Gentiles too, of all people, of all the world. The Apostle Paul mentions in Galatians that when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as children of God by the giving of the Holy Spirit to all who would believe. The fullness of time is seen only through the eyes of faith, is recognized only by those who believe, who live their lives in close relationship with God through faith in Christ and in his salvation. Simeon and Anna saw God's salvation crystallized in this baby that they held in their arms. This is not natural insight but faith responding to revelation, made possible because their whole life was lived in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Their words reveal the importance of faith and vision and only as people look at Christ as Simeon and Anna did will they recognize him as God's salvation. This is what Simeon pointed out to Mary when he alluded to the fact that not everyone would receive the salvation that comes through Jesus, see the light of revelation, or recognize the glory of God in the coming of Jesus and that he would be rejected by many, either actively or passively.

When we picture the event in the Temple courts that day we may think that all this happened with a lot of fanfare and people's attention. We may have seen pictures or in our minds we may closely picture the scene of Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus and with them Simeon and Anna and people around looking at them and listening. But the reality was that this were just an insignificant event that took place in some corner of the Temple courts that day which was bustling with worshippers and pilgrims, tourists from other places come to see the Temple in the Court of the Gentiles, priests and temple guards, and of course the Roman soldiers who had occupied the Jewish nation by force. When we zoom out to have a larger frame of the picture we can imagine the place and we can also realize how

the majority of the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come to them—to come in a way that they assumed and conceived according to their situation of being a conquered nation under the Romans and many others before; to come as a militaristic figure bringing them vindication and restoring the lost glory of Israel. But how different was God’s way in bringing salvation not just for a single nation and for a particular period of time but for all nations and for all time. Simeon and Anna recognized this even as they shared in the hope and aspirations of the Jewish people in their time in history and which is expressed in their prayer and song of praise and gratitude which is an encouragement and challenge to others. How little they saw—no miracles, no inspired words, no death, no resurrection—yet they saw who the child is, what he would do in the fulfilling of God’s salvation for the world.

We who live in our time and situation today, in the humdrum and everyday routines of ordinary life along with the challenges and troubles faced, could miss experiencing the joy and peace that comes through experiencing the salvation of Christ. Our busy schedules or worries can rob us of our relationship with God in Christ and make us like the crowds in the Temple courts that day but on the other hand our continued devotion and faith can make us like Simeon and Anna and help us recognize the fullness of time that God has brought about each day in the present circumstances of our lives.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

1. Are there things that you are committed to fulfill which are necessary for your faith and spiritual growth through the ordinary situations of your life and the responsibilities and challenges that you face?
2. Do we seek to have eyes of faith to believe like Simeon and Anna in spite of the circumstances that surround you and you find yourself in?
3. What are the things in your life that keep you busy or make you worry and as a result rob you of experiencing the joy and peace of Christ’s salvation?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Luke 2:29-32 NRSV
“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

3. Prayerfully approach God asking to be faithful in doing that which is necessary so as to work with God’s Spirit for our spiritual growth and continued salvation, like Mary and Joseph, and to be led by God’s Spirit and have eyes of faith to believe in God’s ‘fullness of time’ in spite of what we face in life, like Simeon and Anna.