



Luke 2:22-39

“Divine Appointments” (7th in a series on Luke’s Gospel)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IC'5: LUKE 2:22-39 "DIVINE APPOINTMENTS"

Obey Augustus & Obey Moses: Lawful, Pious Home

1) vv.22-24 TRIP TO JERUSALEM: 2 CEREMONIES, 1) PURIFICATION, 2) PRESENTATION.

- 22 a And when the time came for their purification **ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF MOSES**, a) Purification
b **THEY BROUGHT HIM UP TO JERUSALEM** to present him *to the Lord*, b) Presentation
After 40 Days Home, Redeem Firstborn: Belongs To God
23 b' as it is written in the *law of the Lord*, Lord(4x), Law(3x): Cited 2x
"Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy *to the Lord*" b') Ex. 13:2, 12, 15; Num. 18:15-16
24 a' and to offer a sacrifice, according to what is said in the *law of the Lord*, Law Moves To Jerusalem, //m. Berakoth 8
"a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons." (Offering for the modest, 1:52, Lev. 5:11) a') Lev. 5:11, 12:8

Obedience To Law = Assumption Of Life, 2:21 Circumcised

2) vv.25-32 SIMEON THE PROPHET (Male).

The Best Respond To Jesus' Birth

Temple = Center Of Jewish Life, Here He Is Recognized!

a) vv.25-26 Pious Characterization: The Best Of Judaism, 1:38.

Reliable Spokesman

- 25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, Name, Not Priest But Layman
and this man was righteous and devout, God-Fearing, 1:6 // Zechariah, Acts 10:2 (Cornelius)
looking for the consolation of Israel, Is. 40:1, 49:13, 51:3, 61:2, 66:13, 2 Baruch 44:7, Characterization
and the *Holy Spirit* was (rested) upon him. Charismatic/Prophetic Role
26 And it had been *revealed* to him by the *Holy Spirit* Special Revelation: Personal Promise
that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Messiah). Content: Messiah
Holy Spirit: 1) Rested, 2) Revealed, 3) Guided, 4) Inspired Speech

b) vv.27-32 Enters Temple And Blesses God: Now Ready To Die, Prophecy Fulfilled.

- 27 And *inspired* by the *Holy Spirit* he came into **the temple**; Courts (Women? Gentiles?) 4:1, Guidance
and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, Perfect Timing = Divine Appointment
to do for him according to the custom of the *law*, Their Obedience Put Them In The Right Place!
28 he took him up in his arms and **blessed God** and said, Called *Theodochos*, In Obedience, Revelation Comes
God Keeps A Personal Promise, Fulfills Mal. 3:1-2
29 1a "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, Salvation Now! 1:8, 2:11, *Nunc Dimittis*: **Hymn-Prophecy**
b according to thy word;/ v.26 Promise, //Jub. 45:3-4, Form = Praise + Motive + Expansion
30 2a for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, (Is. 40:5), LXX, Joyful Praise, *Sees Jesus As God's Salvation Now*
31 b which thou has prepared in the presence of **all peoples** (Is. 52:9-10),/ Public/Universal Mission Of Salvation
32 3a a light for revelation to the Gentiles (Is. 49:6), All Peoples = Gentile Ignorance, Long Jewish Humiliation
b and for glory to thy people Israel."/ Theocentric Prayer, 2nd Person, (God-Centered)
Highly Trinitarian, Missional Passage

3) vv.33-35 THE MINISTRY OF JESUS: PROPHECY TO MARY: DIVISION.

- 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; 1:63, 2:18, Response To Prophecy
34 and Simeon **blessed them** and said to Mary his mother, Power Of A Spoken Blessing
1st Ominous Word = How World Will React: Division
a "Behold, this child *is set* for the fall and rising of many in Israel, Is. 8:14-15, Destiny: **Prophecy**
b and for a sign that is spoken against, 4:28-30 Nazareth, Messiah Rejected, Is. 51:17-23
35 a' And you, your soul shall be pierced through by a sword, Aside? Image Of Judgment, Tests All, 2:49
b' so that the inmost thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Pain, Show True Colors
Mt. 10:34, Penetration, Preparation For Pain/Suffering

2') vv.36-38 ANNA THE PROPHETESS: The Best Of Judaism (Female).

Women//Men (13x)

Female Prophets: Ex. 15:20, Jud. 4:4,2 Kgs. 22:14, Neh. 6:14, Is. 8:3, Rev. 2:20

a) vv.36-37 Pious Characterization: Ideals Of Fidelity And Devotion.

//Acts 2:17-18

- 36 And there was a prophetess, (H)Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, Name/Lineage
she was of a great age, Patriarchal: Father/Husband, Dual Witness (Dt. 19:15)
having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, Characterization
37 and as a widow till she was eighty-four. Vague syntax, 14+7+84 = 105 (//Judith)
She did not depart from **the temple**, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. Ascetic, Judith 8:4-8
1:53, Psalm 130:5-8, Multiple Prophecies Of Future Greatness

b) v.38 Enters Temples And Thanks God, Public Preaching By A Prophetess.

- 38 And coming up at that very hour she **gave thanks to God**, Vertical: Praise To God (1)
and spoke to **all** who were **looking for the redemption of Israel (Is. 40:2)**. 23:51, Horizontal: Preaching (2)
Simeon Addresses Mary, Anna All The Faithful

1) v.39 TRIP FROM JERUSALEM: THE UNREDEEMED FIRST-BORN (Still belongs to God!).

- 39 And when they had performed everything Law+Spirit+Prophecy+Gospel Go Together! Attention To Detail
ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF THE LORD, Law And Prophecy Are Not Opposed
THEY RETURNED TO GALILEE, TO THEIR OWN CITY, NAZARETH. 2:4, Ends Infancy Story, 1 Sam. 2:20

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 2:22-39

The workings of divine providence through the Holy Spirit are thick around the infant Jesus. Convergences abound. Some in the East say, “When the student is ready, the teacher appears.” Surely our God is able to send prophets and resources just in time. As Jesus’ parents are faithful *according to the law of the Lord*, God sends prophets to give words that preview the deep significance of Jesus’ person and work. Faithfulness and duty are the doorways to fresh encounters with God.

Note the bracket in v.22 // v.39 where references to *the law of Moses* // *the law of the Lord* and travel reports are repeated. The thought unit is a 5:1 concentric pattern (five parts: 1-2ab-**3**-2’ab-1’ and a single center. At the pivot in 3. vv.33-35 a dual prophecy is given: 1) about Jesus and the opposition he will arouse, and 2) the pain and judgment that will visit Mary. On either side are encounters with Simeon (vv.25-32) and Anna (vv.36-80). They are each marked as pious (vv.25-26 // vv.36-37), then deliver inspired words (vv.27-32 // v.38). Luke often pairs males and females as equal participants in God’s work. Parallel phrases include *looking for the consolation of Israel* (v.25b) // *looking for the redemption of Israel* (v.38b), *blessed God* (v.28) // *gave thanks to God* (v.38a). Jesus is the continental divide of Jewish history and a fresh offer to all the world to come home to the true God. Life is offered, but assent is not compelled or coerced. A faithful life of obedience is an option, as with Jesus’ family.

The first paragraph, 1. vv.22-24, combines two rituals. Ritual 1 is the *purification* of a mother forty days after birth. While introduced first in v.22a, the citation supporting this act is given last in v.24, “a pair of turtles doves and two young pigeons,” the offering of a family that cannot afford a lamb. Having come through a time of *status change* (i.e. pregnancy) involving life and blood, Mary is now restored to ritual purity and community worship. Ritual 2, the presentation and redemption of a first-born son and its scriptural support are given in vv.22b-23. The pattern is thus a-b (purification and presentation), then their biblical validation in reverse order (b’-a’). It’s just the way they wrote! Jesus’ was from a modest, faithful family who took pains to keep holy tradition. They obey Caesar in the census, thus they are not political revolutionaries, and here they obey Moses as faithful Jews. Notice that *the law of Moses/Lord* is mentioned three times and *Lord* four times in vv.22-24. The law and their life is God-focused!

Luke is the theologian of the Spirit and religious experience. Simeon is a mystic who lived in holiness (*righteous and devout*) and *looked for the consolation of Israel*. His faith is personal and corporate. He lived under the covering of the Spirit open to divine revelation, which now meant going to the temple at the time indicated. God - his friend- gave a promise he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Upon arrival, Simeon knows which is the promised child, takes him up and exclaims to God that he is now ready to die. His words are laced with quotes from Isaiah. This child means salvation for *all peoples*, and in a noticeable reversal, Gentile precedes Jew in v.32! A world mission is forecast! As Mary and Joseph marvel, Simeon blesses and alerts them how controversial Jesus will become. People will stumble over him, speak against him, and have their hearts revealed. Jesus reveals God and also the divided hearts of all. Mary herself will not be spared this sifting and judgment (previewed in 2:40-52).

In parallel to Simeon, Anna appears in vv.36-38. Her lineage and longevity are briefly reviewed. While the syntax is difficult, her years add to 105, as in Judith 8:4-8 (O.T. Apocrypha). Her long intensity of prayer and fasting indicate she knows things are not right in Israel. She too sees Jesus and preaches him to all who share her passion for God to visit his declined people. In the midst of faithfulness, God speaks. Moments of intense insight are often followed by long stretches of ordinary, faithful living. This is the message of v.39. Luke has whetted our appetite for more of the Jesus story! How clever. How skillful.

LUKE 1:1-4:15

"THE PRE-PUBLIC AND EARLY CAREERS OF JOHN AND JESUS IN PARALLEL"

I. 1:1-4 RHETORICAL PREFACE OF AN ANCIENT BIOS: LAYERS OF TRADITION.

II. THE PARALLEL STORIES OF CONCEPTION, BIRTH, EARLY SERVICE.

A. 1:5-25 Annunciation To Zechariah

1. vv.5-7 Time, Characters, Lineage, Status

2. vv.8-23 Annunciation By Gabriel

a. vv.8-10 Zechariah's Service/ People Outside

b. vv.11-20 Appearance, Message, Sign

1. v.11 Angel appears

2. v.12 Fearful response

3. v.14 Angelic message (4 phrases)

4. vv.14-17 Gabriel's song proclaims

John's significance

5. v.18 Zechariah's objection

6. v.19 Angel's response/authority

v.20 "And behold," sign of dumbness

7. v.23 Departure

a' vv.21-23 People outside/ Zechariah's service

A' 1:26-38 Annunciation To Mary

1. vv.26-27 Time, Characters, Lineage, Status

2. vv.28-37 Annunciation By Gabriel

a. (No Parallel)

b. vv.28-37 Appearance, Message, Sign

1. v.28 Angel appears

2. v.29 Fearful response

3. vv.30-31 Angelic message (4 phrases)

4. vv.32-33 Gabriel's song proclaims

Jesus' significance

5. v.34 Mary's objection

6. v.35 Angel's response/ Spirit's authority

vv.36-37, "And behold," sign of Elizabeth

7. v.38 Departure

a' v.38 Promise fulfilled, Mary's response

B. 1:39-56 Visitation Of Mary & Elizabeth.

1. vv.39-40 Mary's Arrival And Greeting

2. vv.41-45 John's Response, Elizabeth's Song To Mary

2' vv.46-55 Mary's Song To God In Two Stanzas

1' v.56 Mary's Stay And Departure

C. 1:57-80 Birth And Destiny Of John

John As Prophet (1:16-17, 1:76, 3:1-6)

1. (cf. 1:5 *Herod*)

John at home

2. v.57 Birth of John

3. v.58 Neighbors, Kinfolk Rejoice

4. vv.59-66 Circumcision, Naming of John

5. vv.67-79 Priestly prophecy concerning John
at his presentation

6. v.80a Growth of John

v.80b John in the wilderness

D. 3:1-22 Beginning Of John's Ministry

1. 3:2b John as "Son of Zechariah"

2. 3:2b John in the "wilderness"

3. 3:8 Abraham reference

3. 3:7-18 Preaches Is. "good news"

4. 3:19-20 John rejected by Herod
unacceptable prophet

C' 2:1-52 Birth And Destiny Of Jesus

Jesus As Messiah/Son (1:21-33, 1:69; 1:35, 2:49)

1. vv.1-5 Historical Dating: *Caesar, Quirinius*

Holy family to Bethlehem

2. vv.6-7 Birth of Jesus

3. vv.8-20 Angels appear to shepherds
who go and rejoice with Mary

4. v.21 Circumcision, Naming of Jesus

5. vv.22-39 Priestly Prophecy Concerning Jesus
at his presentation

6. v.40 Growth of Jesus

vv.41-51 Jesus in the temple

v.52 Growth of Jesus

D' 3:23-4:15 Beginning Of Jesus' Ministry

1. 3:23-38 Jesus as "son of Joseph," "son of God"

2. 4:1-15 Jesus in the "wilderness," "if you are Son"

3. 3:34 Abraham reference

3. 4:16-30 Preaches Is., "good news," "Joseph's son"

4. 4:28-29 Jesus rejected by Nazareth
unacceptable prophet

DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

“And inspired by the Holy Spirit he came to temple....”

Simon follows *a holy hunch* given by the Holy Spirit.

LUKE 2 : 27

Dr. Paul Brand was for years an outstanding missionary surgeon. Before he died Dr. Brand moved to a new retirement home. When asked to speak at the dedication, he said this:

“I remember well when I was at my physical peak. I was 27 and just finished medical school. A group of friends and I were mountain climbing; we could climb for hours. For some people, when they cross the physical peak, for them life is over.

I remember well my mental peak, too. I was 57 and performing groundbreaking hand surgery. All my medical training was coming together. When some cross this peak of excellence, for them life is over.

I'm now over 80 and approaching my spiritual peak. All I have sought to become has the opportunity to come together. When I cross that peak, life will not be over; it will have just begun.”¹

We live in a culture that glorifies youth and does all it can to avoid signs of aging: Botox, nip-and-tuck, lipo-suction, collagen injections. Our deep cultural bias is to ignore the old and to prefer novelty to wisdom. What is new and younger is thought better; the old is to be discarded. Eastern cultures- Judaism among them- more often honor the old and defer to their judgment. Not us! We rarely seek out our elders for their prayers and hard-won wisdom. We crave what is trendy and fashionable, therefore we are terminally shallow and morally underdeveloped.

As my generation of boomers moves through the decade of our fifties and

¹ Edited with paraphrase from PreachingToday.com search under Luke 2:22-39.

beyond there will be a surge of age-defying therapies brought to bear. We have the money, and we have the fears. We don't want to grow old, but mostly we don't want to look old. Women will opt for surgery and wind up looking like Joan Rivers, able to blink their over-sized lips. Viagra inspired men will trade the wives of their youth for trophy brides to display at cocktail parties. Some will turn or return to alcohol or weed to numb the pain. Many will grow depressed and sample the therapy smorgasbord for a technique to fix their immature souls. All are symptoms something is wrong, and that something cannot be cured by a new dose of style because what's wrong is not on the outside of the self.

I have a question for my generation: It is easy to tend the outside of the self; who will tend the inside? Style is easy; it can be purchased with money and a dose of sweat, but what about substance? There are no face lifts for the soul and no tummy tucks for a flabby spirit that has lived on inspirational junk food and other's prayers. No surgeries to implant Scripture in our minds and deepen our ability to receive and give God's love. No quick fix for lack of depth and virtues built up over time as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. You are today becoming what you will be tomorrow, and the day after that, till you come to the end of your days. And what kind of person will you have become? The only answer that satisfies is the spiritual one, not in the airy sense of invisible unreality but *Spiritual* with a *Capital S*, meaning God the Spirit, and the work the Spirit does to make us like Jesus. That is where life is found, not in an endless round of self-improvements or distracting entertainments but in knowing the one who loves you too much to leave you as he finds you.

It is never too late to say Yes to God's call, to a process of transformation led by the Holy Spirit into the path of Jesus Christ. Part of our modern problem is the artificial way we've marked out age 65 as some sort of fixed transition point. You climb the mountain, and then you are *over the hill*. I am convinced from close observation that many retire too early or that they have no goals except not to have to show up for work every day. Because they have not been on a genuine spiritual journey across their lives, retirement years are often filled with boredom, trivialities, sometimes even depression and despair because meaning is absent and cannot be manufactured in the old ways. Work is gone; children are busy; perhaps you moved away from friends. And if church attendance was a social convention instead of a connecting point with the Living God, that too is often lost. What now? But it is possible, as Dr. Brand testifies, to move with God through the stages of life towards something rich and satisfying. His closing words are full of hope and realism, "I'm now over 80, and I've realized I'm approaching another peak- my spiritual peak. All

I have sought to become has the opportunity to come together. When I cross that peak, life will not be over; it will have just begun.”

Here Saints Simeon and Anna are our models. Their best days were near the end of life, when through a lifetime of preparation they were given sensitivity to God’s Spirit and enabled to pick Jesus out of a crowd in the temple courtyards. Not because Jesus had a light over his head, a sort of holy glow, but because the light was *in them*. This was why they could *see* what others could not see and *say* what others could not say. Simeon was *righteous and devout and looking for the consolation of Israel*; Anna had a depth of communion with God through prayer and fasting that was a mystery to others. Others walked by the holy family that day with no awareness whatever. But these two, the best of Judaism, spotted them and acted boldly. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were one more modest, working family from redneck Galilee come to Jerusalem for religious duties. But Simeon and Anna were allowed to see an outline of what was ahead. They blessed God and warned the holy family through prophecy. You don’t get to that point eating spiritual junk food.

Should God allow it, I want to be a wise, old man, able to hear from God and speak in a ways far beyond my current capacity. I want to be like Simeon on whom the Spirit rested, and to who the Spirit revealed secrets and made promises, a man inspired to take up new adventures with God. I want to be an old mystic and charismatic, just like Simeon. I want also to be like Anna, who may have been as old as a hundred and five and still had a hot heart for God.² Even at this age she wanted more and gave herself with zeal to the disciplines of prayer and fasting. When she spotted Jesus she gave thanks and preached *to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel*. Luke has here provided us with two models of godly character, spiritual discernment, and the spiritual gifts of prophecy and preaching, a man and a woman, so that no one will be left out or exempt from the challenge.

We need more of these kinds of men and women because they show us what good work God can do over a lifetime. And if we are not producing them, we need to ask why. What happens to a person in their eighth or ninth or tenth decade of walking with God? What riches are deposited in them for the good of the church and the encouragement of younger generations? And how do we tap such treasures before

² For literary parallels with the story of Judith from the Old Testament Apocrypha, see Herman Hendrickx, *The Gospel For The Third World, Volume One, Luke 1:1-2:52* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1996), 237.

they are lost? It was God the Father who arranged by the Spirit for the family of Jesus to have these encounters in the temple. Two teenagers were encountered in divine appointments by two old saints who prophesied to and about them in an act of intergenerational grace. God knows our need for encouragement and new light. My experience is that it comes at just the right time: a note, a call, a resource, a dream, a revelation, a word of encouragement. God is not stingy in such matters, and if it was needed by Joseph and Mary, how much more by us!

THE HOLY FAMILY (vv.21, 22-24)

On the eighth day after birth, Jesus was circumcised. As a Jewish male he bore a scar at the site of paternity, a visible sign of God's covenant. Scriptures were read, prayers said, the child bled and cried. *Jeshua ben Joseph*, Jesus- son of Joseph. As they left, a cousin may have placed a hand on Joseph's shoulder, "May he be as fine a craftsman as his father, and may his be the generation to see the Messiah!"

Luke takes pains to demonstrate that Joseph and Mary were pious Jews who obeyed the law of God. Five times we hear the refrain that what they did was *according to the law of Moses or according to the custom of the law*.³ When choosing a vehicle to shape the life of the Savior, God chose a pious, working-class Jewish home. Jesus took in Israel's faith and practice with his mother's milk. Dr. Lewis Smedes shares this homey testimony:

"May I share with you some reasons why I believe? All good reasons, none of them the really real reason.... I believe because I was brought up in a believing family. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had been born in the depths of Manchuria of a Chinese family.... I do know that I was led to believe in the love of God as soon as I learned I should eat my oatmeal. We did a lot of believing in our house. We didn't have much else to do, as a matter of fact. Other kids sang, 'Jesus loves me this I know 'cause the Bible tells me so.' I sang, 'Jesus loves me this I know, 'cause my ma told me so.' Smedes concludes, 'Families are God's primary missionary society.'⁴

³ 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39.

⁴ James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 194.

When I instruct parents before the baptism of their children I emphasize that they, not the pastor and not the Sunday School teacher and not the youth leader, are the primary educators of their children. I do not enjoy watching the parents squirm and fidget as they assess their own spiritual maturity, but I refuse to rescue them from those moments of introspection. The vows clearly say, "Will *you* nurture this child in Christ's holy church, that by *your teaching and example* they may be guided to accept Gods' grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?"⁵ Teaching *and* example, just like Joseph and Mary. When young families make a commitment to live the faith before their children, they are setting into motion spiritual forces which will effect generations yet unborn. You are even now setting up a legacy, and the question is: What kind? Will it echo down the generations as a curse or a blessing? Consider this story from the eighteenth century:

"Max Jukes lived in New York. He did not believe in Christ. He refused to take his children to church, even when they asked. He has had 1,026 descendants; 300 were sent to prison for an average of thirteen years; 190 were public prostitutes; 680 were admitted alcoholics. His family, thus far, has cost the state in excess of \$420,000. They made no contribution to society.

Jonathan Edwards lived in the same state at the same time. He loved the Lord and saw that his children were in church every Sunday, as he served the Lord to the best of his ability. He has had 929 descendants, and of these 430 were ministers; 86 became university professors; 13 became university presidents; 75 authored good books; 7 were elected to the United States Congress. One was Vice-President. His family never cost the state one cent but has contributed immeasurably to the life of this land today."⁶

When you are tempted not to pray before a meal, not to haul yourself out of bed on Sunday morning, not to read the Bible daily, not to live a morally serious life, not to repent when God reveals sin, remind yourself of the story of Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards. Two or three generations down stream, how would you like to be remembered as the man or woman that began a marvelous spiritual lineage? Faith in Christ is not just for us to go to heaven when we die; it is for our children's children's

⁵ "The Baptismal Covenant I," *The U.M. Hymnal*, 1989, 34.

⁶ Hewett, *Illustrations*, 195.

children to have a faith worthy following. Our habits become their heritage. How often I hear things like, “My father was a drunk.... My mother had four husbands.... We never went to church as a child.” And we wonder why some have such a hard time getting their lives on track. It is because the momentum of their family’s history is in the wrong direction! To reverse that direction takes great spiritual energy, but I can see a new light come in their eyes when I suggest, “How would you like to start a new heritage with Jesus Christ? It can begin today! Let us help you.”

Mary and Joseph could not possibly have known all that Jesus would be and do. But it was their piety and faithfulness to their religious duties that shaped the life of the Savior. If such a heritage was necessary for the sinless Son of God, how much more for the squirming little heathens we bring home from the hospital?

It cost time, money and effort for Mary and Joseph to obey the law of Moses. Forty days after the birth we find them trekking back to Jerusalem for the performance of two additional ceremonies outlined in verses 22 through 24: 1) the ritual purification of Mary after childbirth and 2) the redemption of their firstborn.

Can you imagine traveling eighty or more miles on foot- or perhaps on a donkey- with a six week old baby, when you've only just returned a month and a half earlier? They were committed to God and to the traditions of Israel. *Duty* was not a dirty word for the holy family. Such was the faith of this tough young couple. Time away from work; income stopped; expenses for the road. Obedience was not easy, but we see them carrying out this commitment together. What a powerful image. A young man and woman beginning their married life with a new baby and a fierce commitment to live the faith together, even if inconvenient and costly.

The normal offering for purification was a lamb, but a pair of turtle doves or pigeons was allowed for a family with less resources. Jesus didn't wear designer clothes to his presentation in the temple. His dad was blue-collar and his mother a peasant girl. They didn't need a special *word from the Lord* to go to Jerusalem. It was a Scriptural requirement; they were a Jewish family, so they went. And while they were there doing their duty there were two momentous divine appointments. That's how it is in the Christian life: do your duty; be where you are supposed to be, and God will sometimes surprise you! Neglect your duties, and God will seem far away. Come to worship weekly unless you are sick or out of town, and if you have guests, either bring them or leave them to sleep in. Don't let their slack ways or unbelief keep you from your duties. Set an example they will mark. God is under no

obligation to guide you apart from obedience. Our obeying does not earn grace; it does, however, give us space to receive it.

SIMEON THE PROPHET (vv.25-35)

The Christian doctrine of providence is rooted in the conviction that God- as the Lord of history- is able to bring about divine purposes in cooperation with our exercise of freedom. But rather than providence (which sounds a bit stuffy), I prefer the concept of *divine appointments*, the idea that God need not control the minutiae of our lives because God manages the key intersections of those who seek his will. If with the flick of a single switch a mighty train can be moved onto a new track and in a different direction with no loss of speed, how much more can God guide the intersections of our lives? When I prayerfully attend to my daily duties, God crosses my path and lets me see a little of what he's doing. I laugh a lot!

It was such a *divine appointment* that occurred when the Holy Family arrived and went into the temple courtyard with their birds for the sacrifice and presentation of their firstborn. Unknown to them, the Spirit was also directing two other memorable characters, Simeon and Anna, to meet them there. God has the ability to bring the right people across your path at the right time if you are committed ahead of time to walking in his ways. First obedience, then revelation. First obedience, then guidance. First faith, then sight. That is the pattern. Keep your church vows. Give. Pray. Read the Scriptures. Confess your sins. Receive communion. Come to Sunday School. Live ethically. Work for justice. Show mercy to the poor, speak often of the power and love of Jesus Christ, pay attention to the nudges and inner movements of the Spirit, and the Living God will bring resources across your path that will astound you. Keep showing up. Go through a door of obedience, and a door of opportunity soon follows. It's not a bad way to live. A young couple, infant in arms, and two old saints converge simultaneously in the temple courtyard amidst the noise and smells of the daily round of sacrifice. It was a divine appointment.

Four times in verses 25 through 27 Luke underscores that Simeon was intimately in touch with the Holy Spirit:

- 1) He was Spirit-filled on a continual basis: verse 25b, "and the Holy Spirit *rested upon him.*" The Spirit was his constant companion.
 - 2) Simeon knew the voice of the Holy Spirit through the spiritual gift of the
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word of knowledge: verse 26, "and it had been *revealed to him* by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Simeon heard the living voice of God and received a personal promise, "You will see the Messiah before you die."

- 3) He was as led to arrive at the right moment, verse 27: "...and *inspired by* the Holy Spirit he came into the temple." And then,
- 4) Simeon delivered a prophetic word of warning to Mary about her son's fate: verse 34b, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel." Simeon spoke boldly at the right time and shows us four aspects of the Spirit work: constant relationship, special revelation, practical guidance, and timely prophecy. Simeon was one of God's secret agents. And when he died, it was in this great peace.

Here is a wondrous thing: an old man who knows God and lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. Simeon is saturated in Scripture; when he prays it is in phrases from the prophet Isaiah. Simeon was a charismatic in the sense that he experienced the voice and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the larger context of biblical revelation. God still has Simeons in the church; the ministry of prophecy is being restored in our day, and how we need it. Pointed words that come from God!

This leads to a principle. When we obey what we know of God's written word found in the Bible, and when we are obedient to the duties of our faith, we can expect God at times to guide us through a divine surprises: a prophecy, dream, a divine appointment, or other spiritual gift. Mary and Joseph were carrying out what was expected of a good Jewish family. In the context of their obedience, God encountered them through an old prophet. We have no right to expect special guidance if we are not tending to the general guidance found in Scripture. If there is little sense of God's immediate presence or power here at Main Street, it may be God is calling us first to study and obey the Scriptures and tend to our religious duties- *prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness*, as church membership vows require. Then it may be that God will grant us an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and fresh light from above.

Have you ever had the experience of hearing someone pray and it drew you into the presence of God? The turf on which you stood became holy ground. Simeon walks up to the young parents and extends his arms. Face to face with the child Messiah, he praises God out of the sheer joy that God had granted his final promise,

"I'm ready to die no; in my arms I hold your salvation, for Jew and Gentile alike."

Long before Jesus gave the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples, Simeon saw that through this child God would enfold the ends of the earth. The fact that we are here today- as Gentiles, as outsiders- is a fulfillment of Simeon's death-bed prayer. Jesus is *for all people*, which is why the spiritual renaissance I pray and work for here at Main Street will require a big commitment to evangelism and missions. How can God bless us unless we're pledged ahead of time to missions around the corner and across the world? Everyone must come to terms with Jesus Christ, and either fall on one side or the other. "Behold, this child is set for the *fall and rising* of many in Israel," said Simeon. It ought to be hard for people to go to hell from Greenwood because we- and other churches- are here as outposts of the kingdom of God! And if you are not sharing your faith with others, I ask, Do you have a faith worth sharing? If not, come to me and I will help you find one, either the one you lost along the way or the one you never found in the first place!

Luke notes in verse 33 that Joseph and Mary marveled at what happened in the temple court. It's that way with divine appointments. Another dimension of reality broke into the habits of religious life. Something happened not in the bulletin!

Simeon then carried out the rest of his assignment. He pronounced a blessing on the couple and delivered a personal word to Mary. There is major pain ahead. She will know confusion as Jesus establishes a new family based on obedience to the Word of God rather than the ties of blood: verse 35, "And you, Mary, your soul shall be pierced through by a sword, so that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

For all the ties between mother and son, Mary also found her heart sifted and its layers of unbelief revealed. Jesus is the continental divide of the cosmos- visible and invisible, and each person must go through having their heart revealed and motives weighed. God pulls all the stinking crud to the surface. Mary was not exempt from the cost of discipleship. She will know what all disciples know, that in Jesus the very worst of our inmost thoughts are brought into the light. Jesus is her son, but not under her control. His relationship with the heavenly Father has priority over all ties of blood and kinship. Mary is not a co-redeemer of any sort. Her suffering is not redemptive as his is. It is not that Jesus suffers on the cross and she suffers inwardly from the piercing of the sword. She is the exemplar of what must happen to all because all, including his mother, stand on the same side of the line.

ANNA THE EVANGELIST (vv.36-38)

Luke is careful to balance the *charismatic ministry* of Simeon with the *evangelistic ministry* of old Anna. Luke delights to show men and women as full partners.⁷ Like her prophetic partner, Anna represents the best of Israel. As a widow she was free for God in a way she never could have been as a married woman. God honored her with a divine appointment with the Savior: verse 38, "And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel."

Anna preached in the temple courtyard! Luke is clear; men *and* women can hear from God and exercise public ministry. And by presenting two seniors, Luke is saying something about long-term faithfulness. Don't quit at fifty-five or sixty-two or sixty-five. The greatest events of your life may yet be ahead. Perhaps the death of your spouse is an opening to a new call from God! It was for Anna, and it led to eight decades of extraordinary intimacy with God. Tim Stafford writes:

"People in America have a spiritual disease based on a mistaken view of life. According to it, life is lived on a big bell curve. You go up, up, up, to the age of, say, 50. And then you go down, down, down, until you die. [In contrast] Scripture teaches that life is meant to be up, all the way to heaven. There is a goal, and the goal determines the process we must go through to get there."⁸

Because of advances in medicine, many of us will grow older than our parents: eighty, ninety, even a hundred or beyond. Will we just be using up space and oxygen, or will we be serving God with the same zest as Simeon and Anna: hearing from God, carrying out assignments, blessing young families, preaching Christ?

When you retire from your regular job, consider accepting a call from God to full-time ministry, because you don't ever have to retire from that, ever! God is a life-long employer. Go gladly to your grave like Spirit-filled Simeon, "I'm ready to die now, Lord." Learn like Anna, through the disciplines of prayer and fasting, to know the heart of God. God willing, I'm never going to quit, and neither should you. It is a sin against God and the church to let your brain, body, spirit, and energy waste

⁷ There are 13 such pairings in Luke and Acts.

⁸ *Christianity Today*, Sept. 16, 1991.

away in retirement. If God can use Anna at a hundred and five and Simeon just before death, God can use you. It's never too late to walk closely with God. Don't vegetate; activate! Don't retreat into retirement; advance into a new calling. Change the rhythm of your life and ask God for a new assignment. Let us form a new Protestant order, *The Order of Anna and Simeon* for retired persons, widows and widowers, who will give themselves to serve Christ in local and foreign missions.

When Sir Winston returned to No. 10 Downing Street for the second time in 1951, there was criticism about his age. A year later a reporter cornered the 78-year-old Prime Minister and asked if he was going to retire soon. Churchill growled, "Not until I'm a great deal worse and the Empire a great deal better."⁹ I'd love to see that style of sanctified toughness among the members of this church. There is no retirement from Christian discipleship in and through the church. Press on!

CONCLUSION

I love the way Luke ends this post-Christmas episode. No more angels, no more prophets popping in and out, no more divine surprises, just Mary and Joseph-obedient Jewish parents- headed out of Jerusalem back to Nazareth and the daily joys and trials of being husband and wife, mother and father, loving their son, having other children, faithful to synagogue and friends, and waiting faithfully for the prophecies to come to pass: verse 39, "And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth."

For twelve years we hear nothing. So ordinary. "Son, this is a chisel, and this is a mallet. While I show you how to use them, let me tell you about the things that happened before you could ever remember. You were only six weeks old. In the temple court we ran into an old man Simeon and an even older woman Anna. They said some extraordinary things.... Jeshua, you have a destiny in God."

"Yes, father."

There are sacred duties for you to attend to in 2013. Will you do them and take the risk of a fresh meeting with the Living God? Will you offer yourself this new year?

⁹ From James C. Humes, *Churchill: Speaker of the Century*, 1980.

STUDY AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS

vv.22-24

1. What do you understand to be your faith and church duties? Review your member vows.
2. How is the holy family a model for faithfulness?
3. What does it say about the young family that they could not afford a lamb?
4. What did Jesus learn by being part of a faithful Jewish family that did their duties.

vv.25-32

6. What works of the Holy Spirit do you note in Simeon's life?
7. Have you ever had a hunch or a leading that turned out to be God? How did you know?
8. Could it be that God at times makes personal promises that do not apply to others?
9. How are you at obeying the *nudges* of the Spirit with quick obedience?
10. Read vv.29-30 out loud. Are you are die? If not, why not? How is salvation for all?

vv.33-35

11. What prophetic word is said about Jesus in v.34b? About Mary in v.35?

vv.36-38

12. Does it help to think of Anna as a kind of Old Testament nun?
13. What do you make of Anna preaching in the temple courtyard? Why women preachers?

v.39

14. When did the family head home? How are you doing with your faithfulness?
15. Why was obedience to Jewish law and custom the practice of Jesus' home?

COMMON PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND PARDON

Based on Luke 2:22-39

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
who invaded the world in the person of Jesus,
you weave together the events of our lives with wisdom.
Open our eyes to the messengers you send our way,
especially the ones who are odd and interrupt our plans.
Restore to us the conviction that life is a holy adventure of faith.
Speak to us out of Holy Scripture,
that we may obey your commands and find life that is life indeed.
Forgive us for ignoring the messages you send us every day.
Pardon our resistance and break into our hard hearts with new life.
Restore to this church the full array of the Spirit's generous gifts,
that we may be a people full of divine surprises,
and that the world may be drawn to our great Savior, Jesus Christ,
in whose name we make our prayer.
We wait upon your gracious and holy presence, Lord.
Amen. (Silence is kept for confession. Pardon is announced.)**
