Simeon and Anna Hold the Baby Jesus

1. Read Luke 2:25-37. I'm sure Simeon wondered what the Messiah would look like. Would He ride into town on a white stallion, leading an army? Would He come in a brilliant burst of light and peals of thunder? Like all of Gods' people, who had throughout the ages watched and wondered how and when God would send the Messiah, Simeon was blessed to have been told by the Holy Spirit that it would happen in his lifetime.

   And then, just like that, Luke records how it happened. Probably like any other day. Mary and Joseph—no doubt, in every respect, looking like any other ordinary couple—enter the temple grounds. And Simeon just knows on the spot that this is it; this is the big day he's been waiting for. But just consider how was this gifted wrapped? In swaddling clothes! Just a baby!

   This gift that God presents at Christmas is, indeed, a strange package. In fact, you might say that the wrapping itself is the gift—God became flesh. We call it the *Incarnation*. What does this mean?

   Well, if you took Spanish in High School, you might have an idea; or even if you just happen to love Mexican food. Either way, you probably know the difference between *chili con queso* as opposed to *chili con carne* – *queso* means cheese, *carne* means meat. That's Spanish, but Latin is similar. In Latin, *"in-carn-ation"* means *wrapped in meat* or *wrapped in flesh*.

   But despite the strangeness and mystery, Simeon sings. Our liturgy labels it the "Nunc Dimittis" which is the first words in Latin—"Now let depart". His song paints a lyrical image of a servant who has been instructed by his master to stay at his post until a certain visitor arrives—even into the long, wee hours of the night. Simeon is that servant and he's spent his life watching and waiting as instructed by the Holy Spirit. Now he is sleepy, happy to see his task completed. He asks, "Can I go to sleep/depart in peace?"

   How does Simeon's recognition of the Messiah in such an ordinary package challenge our expectations of how God works in our lives today?

   We sing Simeon's song usually right after Holy Communion—after we've held in our hands, like Simeon did, the very body of our Lord wrapped not in swaddling clothes, but in bread and wine. This is God's presence in our lives. Assuring us that if we have Jesus, we have everything we truly need.

   This doesn't mean that God doesn't care about all the other problems and concerns we have in a sinful, broken world. He does! And He invites us to bring everything to Him in prayer. He also assures us that He is working for our good in all things (Romans 8:28). But we know His true purpose for our lives is found in Christ. This gives us a peace that can chase away fear. Even if the worst thing comes our way—death—with Jesus, we need not be afraid.

❷ Both Simeon and Anna remind us that peace in this world doesn't come through _____ pacificism nor appeasement, just as surely as it doesn't come through human might or strength. Peace comes only through Christ.

This also was the purpose of the Angel's song to the Shepherds. It the years that led up to WWII, appeasement didn't prevent Hitler from perpetrating his atrocities. Pacificism doesn't stop evil or the suffering of others—it certainly doesn't show love for our neighbor, who might just need us to defend them. In war or in times of relative peace, we need Jesus, who gives us the true peace of knowing that despite how irreparable this world is because of sin and death, we have peace in knowing that God is now in part and one day in full, going to set all things right in Christ.

❸ In a powerful moment, we see Simeon prophesying to Mary and Joseph as they bring their offering of two turtle doves for sacrifice. This offering reveals their poverty, as the typical offering would be a lamb. It's striking to think that Mary, the mother of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, couldn't afford a lamb herself.

As they present this humble offering, Simeon speaks directly to Mary, foretelling that a sword will pierce her soul. This poignant statement foreshadows the deep suffering she will experience because of her child. I wonder if in that moment she recalled Gabriel's greeting: "Blessed are you among women." How could Mary be blessed if she would experience heart-piercing suffering? This paradox encourages us to reflect on our own lives:

How do we understand God's blessings when we face challenges and pain? What might this reveal about our faith and the deeper purposes behind our struggles?

Read Romans 828-29.

A brief excursus reconciling the timeline of events surrounding the birth of Jesus as presented in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew.

Read Luke 2:39-40. Those who argue there's a contradiction in the accounts of Christ's birth often reference Luke 2:39. In contrast, Matthew 2:21–23 indicates that Joseph and his family didn't return to Nazareth until after their time in Egypt. Critics suggest that Luke's narrative, which does not mention the flight to Egypt, implies that Jesus was taken directly to Nazareth from the temple, while Matthew, who omits the temple events, suggests a return from Egypt.

However, it's crucial to understand that silence does not equate to denial. Just because Luke does not include the flight to Egypt does not mean it did not occur. He does not assert that Joseph and Mary skipped Egypt; he simply does not discuss it. Similarly, Matthew does not mention the shepherds present at Jesus' birth—should we then assume no shepherds visited? It's also important to note that neither Gospel claims to be a comprehensive account of every event surrounding the birth of Christ.

The core question is whether Luke's account allows sufficient time for the trip to Egypt. It does! There were 32 days—roughly a month—between Jesus' circumcision and the visit to the temple, which means the flight to Egypt would have been after the presentation at the temple. This assumes that Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem following Jesus' birth and had accommodations—the "house" mentioned in

Matthew 2:11. Luke does not imply that the holy family returned to Nazareth immediately after the visit to the temple, and there's no need to inject that notion into the verse; one could equally use the word "eventually." The reality is that Luke does not provide a specific timeframe, simply indicating that after visiting the temple, Joseph and Mary settled in Nazareth. This settling could have occurred days, months, or even a year or more later. By incorporating the flight to Egypt into the timeline of Luke 2:39, we can establish a more logical chronology of events.

A. After their visit to the temple, Joseph and Mary went back to Bethlehem. During the month following Jesus' birth, Joseph may have initially sought temporary work in the area, which could have turned into a more permanent position. It's also likely that he was considering relocating his new family to Bethlehem, believing it would be beneficial for the Son of David to be raised in the City of David.

B. Simeon and Anna spread the news in Jerusalem of having held the Messiah in their arms. (Luke 2:25ff).

C. Some time later, the magi arrive in Jerusalem and validate the gossip circulating that the Messiah has been born (Matthew 2:1–2). Herod then sends the magi on to Bethlehem, where they discover the young Jesus (Matthew 2:3–11).

D. The magi return home a different way, and Joseph is warned in a dream to flee to Egypt (Matthew 2:12–13).

E. After some time, Herod realizes that the magi have ignored his orders, prompting him to issue a heinous decree for the slaughter of all male infants two years old and younger in the vicinity of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16). The mention of "two years" suggests that Jesus may already have reached that age.

F. Herod dies in 4 BC.

G. Joseph brings his family back from Egypt (Matthew 2:19–21), but out of fear of Herod's son, Joseph changes his plan to settle in Bethlehem and instead moves back to Galilee (Matthew 2:22–23).

The Only Record of Jesus as a Child

❹ It's funny how about all the things we would really love to know about Jesus, the Gospels seem to be silent. Perhaps the most telling is the curiosity we have about what Jesus' life was like for the first 30 years before he started his public ministry. But the Gospels record nothing of these years. The only exception is Luke, who tells us of a brief episode when Jesus was "lost" in Jerusalem at the age of 12. Read Luke 2:41-52.

It's obvious, that Luke isn't recording this to satisfy our curiosity. There are a number of interesting details that speak to a greater purpose than mere curiosity about Jesus' adolescence. First notice that once again we are "in the temple." Lukes Gospel begins with the temple, the infancy narrative of our Lord, twice features the temple, and the Gospel of Luke ends with the temple (Luke 24:52). What could be the significance of this? Jesus is the new temple. He is the Prescence of God. And Jerusalem is the place of Jesus' destiny. There Salvation comes to all Mankind—consider all the old testament passages that pointed to Jerusalem and Zion as the place were salvation would come from, e.g. Isaiah 59:20.

Also, consider the other story in Luke where a child being "lost" features prominently as a metaphor. Read Luke 15:32. In this story, "lost" doesn't just mean absent or missing, it means _____ dead. To be found means _____ alive.

- How long is Jesus "lost" in Luke 2:41-52? 3 days

- What does this time frame automatically make us think of? The time between Jesus' death and resurrection.

When Mary and Joseph question the boy Jesus, He asks them, "why were you looking for me." And when He explains why He's in the Temple, we are told His parents do not fully understand what He is talking about. But Mary treasures up all these things in her heart. Meaning she remembered them. Compare this to Luke 24:5-8. The angel asks the women why they are looking for Jesus. And the women remember His words.

While all these allusions are subtle, they certainly show us that Luke intends more than to just satisfy our idle curiosity. Who would have ever thought that this story of an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, with a son who stayed behind at the temple, with parents who were seeking to find the son who had been lost and with the parents finally finding him on the third day would anticipate the resurrection of the Lord?

In Jesus' answer to Mary there is another trigger word. It is "I must be" or I have to be" (NIV) or "It is necessary" (Greek). When Luke uses this phrasing, he is normally pointing out that Jesus had to die. For example, read Luke 9:22. Thus, here, at the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus' first words, which "happen" to be at the Passover in Jerusalem, speak of His person and work: He is the Son of God, who must be in Jerusalem, where he will accomplish His Father's business. How true this will ring later in the account of our Lord's Passion and Death.

Of course, Jesus' parents don't really understand what He is saying and doing. But that's typical. In the Gospel Luke, every time Jesus says something about Himself as the Messiah, who must suffer and die. No one knows understands what He is talking about. For examples, see Luke 9:22, 44-45 and 18:31-34.

But the allusions to Christ's greater destiny aren't yet complete in this short section. We see a foreshadowing of Jesus' submission at Gethsemane to the Father: "not My will, but Yours be done," Luke 22:42), and here, even as a boy, Luke reports that Jesus was an example of quiet obedience and submission to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51).

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