

Luke-2 HannahAnna 21-12-19a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're going to depart from our usual coverage in the Gospel of Matthew to do a Christmas special. I always like Christmas specials.

I learn something every time we have one. And this one is no exception. We're going to be in Luke chapter 2. We'll take a moment here to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and then we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful. I am certainly grateful that you sustain us by your grace. You enable us and empower us far beyond anything that we could accomplish, be or fathom in our human strength.

We're so grateful for the fullness of your word, the truth that's been communicated to us throughout the scriptures, the presence and power of your Holy Spirit, all of these things, our privileges and our opportunities because of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to this earth in human form, who lived our life, who even now sits at your right hand, interceding and representing us. And we are so blessed and humbled by the care and the love that you have expressed toward us. We pray that as we look at this portion of the story of the coming of your son, the Lord Jesus, to this earth, that your Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us all to be encouraged and motivated by the wonderful truths of your word to shine as lights in our generation and to be ever more fully prepared for service and function in this life and in the one to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Luke chapter two.

There are six people who are centrally involved in the story of the birth of the Lord Jesus. There are six stories that are more or less central. I think it is significant that the coming of the Lord Jesus is not presented as a glorious tableau or a shining epiphany where there's a sort of a crèche or a manger scene.

We like to have those. I enjoy seeing them every year and making sure they're correct. We've got one right now where there's wise men in the stable, but you can't have everything.

I just use that as an opportunity to refresh my mind on what happened when. But the story of the coming of the Lord Jesus to this earth, the infancy narratives, the scholars like to say, are delivered to us in terms of the people who are involved. So when you begin the story in the gospel of Luke, for example, you have the first two individuals introduced, which gives us Zachariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist.

And already there is interest and unique features. You remember the conversation that Zachariah has with Gabriel in the holy place, and he ends up being struck dumb. And it gives him plenty of time to think so that when he finally gives out with his prophetic utterance, when

his speech is restored, it takes up the better part of a page.

And Elizabeth, who, like Sarah, is elderly and beyond the age of bearing children, and yet she does anyway. You have Mary and the conversation she has with Gabriel. You have Joseph and his instructions and exhortations that come largely through dreams.

And that's your first four people, Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, and the final two are Simeon and Anna. And this is what we find in Luke chapter two, picking up the story in verse 21, after the birth of the Lord Jesus, after the shepherds have seen him, the shepherds return in verse 20 of Luke two, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them. Heard and seen as it was told them.

That little detail isn't often covered in your Christmas stories, but these shepherds and as much as we've learned about them in the past, notice it wasn't just that they saw and heard the angels or they saw and heard Mary and Joseph and the Christ child, but they celebrated and they glorified God because these things fulfilled what was told them. They received the word of God through angelic messengers and they got an immediate fulfillment. So much of the things that we are promised in scripture and can expect based on the truths of scripture are not immediate.

We can have immediate comfort. We can have immediate encouragement. Uh, we can be stabilized in, in a stormy moment, but much of what we expect is future.

And I looked this past week at, uh, someone claiming that our, um, biblical eschatology, our expectations based on prophecy are misguided and that we, uh, are expecting something in the future that's already here. We're waiting to become something that we already are. We're looking for a King who's already, already reigning.

We're waiting for a kingdom that has already been, uh, instantiated, initiated. And of course, um, this itself is, uh, reflects a serious misunderstanding, but many of our eschatological, our prophetic expectations are future, but these shepherds got the word at night while they were watching their flocks and they got the immediate fulfillment. Everything the angels told them was true and they found it out right away.

This is a great, uh, time of celebration for them because it's everything. It starts with the angelic visitation and message, and it ends with seeing the physical implementation of what the angel told them. So they left glorifying God for all the things that they heard and saw as it was told them, they celebrated it as the fulfillment of God's word.

And in verse 21, when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, Yeshua, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb, Yeshua savior. Now, when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who

opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, Shimon, Simon.

This man was just a devout waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the spirit into the temple.

We've noted before the threefold mention of the Holy spirit on an old Testament saint. Why? Because he was a righteous man and God blessed him with that unusual presence, that unusual guidance. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him, according to the custom of the law, Simeon took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel.

Interestingly, Gentiles mentioned first Joseph and his mother marveled at those things, which were spoken of him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to marry his mother. Behold, this notice child is in italics.

This is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign, which will be spoken against. Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul. Also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Now we come to what we're going to focus on this morning in verse 36. Now there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Faneuil of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity.

This woman was a widow of about 84 years who did not depart from the temple, but served with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. I think as, as many times as we look at this presentation scene, there are things that it, uh, is easy to miss partly because we're not a Jewish and not steeped in the law.

But, um, if you will notice that the coming of the Lord Jesus into this world was surrounded by old Testament truth, old Testament practice, old Testament sacrifice, old Testament service by Zachariah, old Testament faithfulness in coming to the temple, uh, in verse 22, the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses were completed. Verse 23, as it is written in the law of the Lord, notice law of Moses and law of the Lord are synonymous. The law of Moses is the law of the Lord and to offer a sacrifice.

Verse 24, according to what is said in the law of the Lord law of Moses, once law of the Lord, twice for those who want to adopt a dismissive or secondary view of the old Testament scriptures, you don't have Jesus. If you don't have the law, you cannot understand the Lord

Jesus. If you do not understand the old Testament scriptures.

So when the day and another, um, misunderstanding we can clear up here, I saw this on a very popular Christian hosts website. He's got TV programs and all kinds of things, but he said, uh, that all of this we just read took place on the eighth day when Jesus was circumcised, which is not true. Uh, the circumcision took place in verse, um, 21 and he, and at that point he was given his name, but in verse 22, the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses were completed.

This is 40 days later, according to the law. So there is a, uh, respect and adherence to the exact nature of the law. There were things that had to take place.

And I want to read you a little bit of the incomparable information we get from Alfred Edersheim. I can't think of a man who has given us more wonderful insight and background into what this scene must have looked like. And it is worth reviewing.

He begins this section of the life and times of Jesus, the Messiah. Um, this is book two from the manger in Bethlehem to the baptism in Jordan, in Jerusalem, when Herod reigned and chapter seven, the purification of the virgin and presentation in the temple. Um, he begins by making a very interesting point, which is that it seems odd that Mary ponders things in her heart and treasures things up in her heart.

And it seems to be thinking about it and not confident and relaxed and all knowing as these pieces of information are delivered to her first by Gabriel. And then, uh, from these, uh, prophetic announcements at the temple and, uh, subsequent guidance that, that her husband Joseph receives. Um, and Edersheim picks that up and says, strange that she should have quoted pondered in her heart, the shepherd's account stranger that afterward she should have wondered at his lingering in the temple among Israel's teachers at the age of 12 strangest that at the very first of his miracles, a mother's fond pride should have so harshly broken in upon the divine melody of his work by striking a keynote so different from that to which his life had been set.

Remember, this is the wedding feast at Cana where, uh, she and Jesus don't seem to be on the same page at the beginning, uh, that afterward in the height of his activity, loving fears, if not doubts should have prompted her to interrupt what evidently she had as yet not comprehended in the fullness of its meaning. This is Marian and the brothers coming to Jesus and wanting to take him home because they think he's in danger. Might we not rather have expected that the virgin mother from the inception of this child's life would have understood that he was truly the son of God.

The question like so many others requires only to be clearly stated to find its emphatic answer. Had it been so his history, his human life of which every step is of such importance to mankind would not have been possible. If you grasp what he's saying there, if Mary had fully understood the significance of Jesus from the start, she could not have provided him a normal human

upbringing.

And I find this to be a fascinating point apart from all thoughts of the deeper necessity, both as regards his mission and all the salvation of the world of a true human development of gradual consciousness and personal life. Christ could not in any true sense had been subject to his parents. If they had fully understood that he was divine, nor could he in that case have been watched as he grew in wisdom and favor with God and men, such knowledge would have broken the bond of his humanity to ours by severing that which bound him as a child to his mother.

We could not have become his brethren had he not been truly the Virgin's son. The mystery of the incarnation would have been needless and fruitless had his humanity not been subject to all its right and ordinary conditions. I think this is really a perceptive and wise observation because Jesus was fully human.

He developed the way we develop and his connection to us is established from birth onward. And Mary and Joseph were able to raise him as a normal child because he wasn't turning clay into pigeons and cursing his friends and doing miraculous things that a lot of apocryphal literature tries to assign to him. He was normal as a baby.

He cried and needed to be changed. He needed to be fed. He learned to walk.

He learned to talk. He was trained up from an early age to understand the scriptures. He was taught.

He learned obedience through the things that he suffered, as it tells us. And this necessitated Mary, his mother in particular during the childhood years, not being so dazzled by his divinity that she could not do her job. And the application of this that I would suggest, we learn and grow throughout our lives.

Hopefully spiritually, we are constantly learning and growing. And there are phases of our life where we do not yet know and understand things that we come to know and understand later. And God weaves this into his plan and purpose for us.

Growth is a sign of life. And we don't fault a young sapling for not being a full grown tree. We don't fault a duckling for not being a duck or a chick from not being a full grown hen.

It is okay, in other words, as a specific point of application, we should be content with such things as we have. We press, we ask, we seek, we knock, but there are things that are hidden from us in the present time for good reason. And sometimes we get excited or we are troubled by not knowing something, not fully understanding something.

And to reference some of our recent studies, there are believers who encounter questions or challenges or difficulties in scripture, apparent contradictions, seeming harsh aspects of God and his plan and his instructions to his people at various times in history. And people become

so troubled by this that they question their entire faith. They uproot the complete foundation and don't recognize this principle.

We don't always have to know everything. God brings us along. There's a song that said God leads his dear children along.

And that's what he does. We go through the valley of the shadow from time to time and God is with us. He doesn't say, lift us up by the hair of the head and transport us beyond the valley and say, well, I just saved you a lot of sorrow.

I just saved you a lot of difficulty to understand that God's plan unfolds. It unfolds in scripture. It unfolds in our understanding.

We learn and grow and come to new appreciations and fresh insights about the word of God that we've learned in the past. But you can see it in the life of the Lord's mother, Mary. She had to ponder these things in her heart.

She had to store it up and think about some of it later. She didn't understand everything right away. And it should be a comfort to us that God ensures that we have today's daily bread.

Give us this day, today's bread. I'll trust you tomorrow for tomorrow's bread. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof and sufficient unto the day is the wisdom and the instruction in truth, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for that day.

Just because we can't answer every question, we can't nail down every detail, isn't something that should stop us from doing what we do with our roots sunk deep in the soil to produce the fruit of faith, the fruit of the spirit with what we have. We don't always have opportunities we wish we had. We don't always have strength and ability that we wish we had.

We don't always have the wisdom that we wish we had, but God has already woven that into his plan. And all we have to do is be faithful with what we do know, with what we can do, with how we can obey and trust to be pleasing in God's sight and to reflect his glory. Mary did it.

We can certainly do it. So they are at the temple doing two things. And these two things were often combined because there was a period of about 40 days for both of them.

One is the purification of a woman who has given birth to a child. And in this case, it is a firstborn child. So the circumcision took place on the eighth day.

Then comes the time of purification. So Edersheim says for this twofold purpose, the Holy family went up to the temple when the prescribed days were completed. The ceremony at the redemption of a firstborn son was no doubt more simple than that at present in use.

You know, there's quite a bit of a traditional celebration that goes on in Jewish communities today, but it was pretty simple. It consisted of the formal presentation of the child to the priest accompanied by two short benedictions. The one for the law of redemption money was paid

most solemn as in such a place and remembering its symbolic significance as the expression of God's claim over each family in Israel, must this right have been.

So remember the firstborn had to be redeemed and redemption money was paid on this 40th or 41st day. As regards the right at the purification of the mother, the scantiness of information has led to serious misstatements. Any comparison with our modern churching of women is inapplicable.

I don't know what that is, but it sounds scary. I'm glad we don't do it. This was the offering of a sin offering for the Levitical defilement symbolically attached to the beginning of life and a burnt offering that marked the restoration of communion with God.

As already stated, the sacrifice for purification might be brought in the absence of the mother, but the service simply consisted of the statutory sacrifice. This was in ecclesiastical language termed an offering, Oleh the Yored. You might want to write this down.

It's Oleh, O-L-E-H. Remember the O-E, I always tell you the O-E infixes makes a Hebrew noun, a gerund. So Allah means to go up.

So this means going up, Oleh from Allah. Oleh, Oleh, I'm sorry, O-L-E-H. The V-E and then Yored, Y-O-R-E-D.

Once again, O-E, that's like putting I-N-G on a English, and this is descending. Yared is to descend, so Yored, that which is descending. So this is ascending and descending.

Just bear that in mind. I ask you to make a note of it because it's coming back. It's coming back in a moment.

So that's what this sacrifice was called. The sin offering was in all cases, a turtle dove or young pigeon. The more wealthy could bring a lamb for the burnt offering.

The poor could substitute a turtle dove or young pigeon. So the procedure was that the neck of the sin offering was to be broken, but the head not wholly severed. Some of the blood should be sprinkled at the southwestern angle of the altar, which ran around the line that ran around the middle of the altar, and the rest should be poured out at the base of the altar.

The whole of the flesh belonged to the priests and had to be eaten within the enclosure of the sanctuary. The burnt offering for a turtle dove or young pigeon was more intricate. The substitution of this for a young lamb was expressly designated the poor, the offering for the poor.

Rightly so, since a lamb would probably cost in Edersheim's day, three shillings. The average value of a pair of turtle doves for both the sin and burnt offering was about eight pence. So if you can work out pence and shillings, you can get a proportion.

I didn't work that out in American money, but substantially less. The temple price of meat and

drink offerings was fixed once a month. Special officials instructed the intending offerers and provided them with what was needed.

There was also a special superintendent of turtle doves and pigeons. There was a priest who did nothing but look at the birds. That might be a good job to have, a job for the birds.

Required for certain purifications and the holder of that office is mentioned with praise in the Mishnah. Much indeed depended on his uprightness, for at any rate, as regard to those who brought the poor's offering, the purchasers of pigeons or turtle doves would, as a rule, have to deal with him. In the court of the women, there were 13 trumpet-shaped chests for monetary contributions called trumpets.

Into the third of these, they who brought the poor's offering, like Mary, were to drop the price of the sacrifices which were needed for their purification. As we infer, the superintending priest must have been stationed here to inform the offerer of the price of turtle doves and to see that all was in order. The offerer of the poor's offering would not deal directly with the sacrificing priest.

At a certain time in the day, this third chest was opened, the third of these trumpets was opened, and half its contents were applied to burnt and other half to sin offerings. Thus sacrifices were provided for a corresponding number of those who were to be purified without either shaming the poor, needlessly disclosing the character of impurity, or causing unnecessary bustle and work. So we can now, in imagination, follow Mary in the temple.

Her child had been given up to the Lord and received back from Him. She had entered the court of the women, probably by the gate of the women, on the north side, and deposited the price of her sacrifices in trumpet number three, which was close to the raised dais or gallery where the women worshipped, apart from the men. Now the sound of the instruments which announced throughout the vast temple buildings that incense was about to be kindled on the golden altar, summoned those who were to be purified.

The chief of the ministrant lay representatives of Israel on duty, the station men, arranged those who presented themselves before the Lord as offerers of special sacrifices within the wickets on either side of the great Nicaner gate, at the top of the fifteen steps which led up from the court of the women to that of Israel, the court of Israel. It was as if they were to be brought nearest to the sanctuary, as if theirs were to be specially the prayers that rose in the clouds of incense from the golden altar, as if for them specially the sacrifices were laid on the altar of burnt offering, as if theirs was a larger share of the benediction which spoken by the lips of the priests seemed like Jehovah's answer to the prayers of the people, theirs especially the expression of joy symbolized in the drink offering, and the hymn of praise whose trishagion filled the temple, holy, holy, holy. From where they stood they could see it all, share in it, rejoice in it, and now the general service was over, and only those remained who brought some special sacrifices, or who lingered near them that had such, or whose loved abode was ever in the temple.

The purification service with such unspoken prayer and praise as would be the outcome of a grateful heart was soon ended, and they who had shared in it were Levitically clean. Now all stain was removed, and as the law put it, they might again partake of sacred offerings. This is what has just happened when Simeon and Anna encounter Mary and Joseph and the child.

These things have been completed. The child has been redeemed, presented to the Lord, and brought back. Fascinating to dwell on the idea that the Redeemer had to first be redeemed.

But there are so many symmetries in this story, and I want to take a quick look at Simeon and a fuller look at Anna when we come back from the break. But the richness of redemption is what we're going to close with in our first session here. The infant Christ child has just been redeemed as a firstborn son of his mother, and he himself is going to be for the redemption of many in Israel.

This is what is looked for. Simeon in verse 25 was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Anna in verse 38 is looking for redemption in Jerusalem.

Consolation and redemption are why these individuals lingered after the formal sacrifices were complete, after the purification had taken place at the top of those 15 steps. It's like people who linger after church because they just enjoy the fellowship and spending time with believers of like mind. That's why these people were still there after the formalities were complete.

But redemption is something that has come under attack. We saw this in our Wednesday study that the redeeming and atoning work of Jesus Christ is being devalued, and people who claim the cross are turning into enemies of the cross. And I just want to focus on why that is.

We do not want to be snared or caused to stumble as some have by failing to realize the importance of redemption in God's word. But if you take away the Old Testament, you're going to miss a lot of it. Isaiah chapter 52, verse 9. Be joyful, rejoice together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people.

He has redeemed Jerusalem. Consolation and redemption hand in hand. Isaiah 52, 9. Be joyful, rejoice together, you ruins of Jerusalem.

The Lord has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. Isaiah 62, 12.

And they will be called the holy people, the Lord's redeemed, and you will be called cared for, a city not deserted. Consolation and redemption. Isaiah 62, 12.

Jeremiah 31, 11. For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and redeemed him from the power of one stronger than he. Ransomed and redeemed from an inescapable power.

That's Jeremiah 31, 11. Hosea 13, 14. I will ransom them from the power of Sheol.

I will redeem them from death. Ransom and redeem. Zechariah chapter 10, verse 8. I will whistle and gather them because I have redeemed them.

Isaiah 9, 6, and 7. For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named wonderful counselor, mighty God, eternal father, prince of peace. The dominion will be vast and its prosperity will never end.

He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of armies will accomplish this. That's the CSB translation.

I like having the ideas strike my ear a bit fresh. As a final note there in Isaiah 9, 6, those four names, wonderful counselor, mighty God, eternal father, and prince of peace. You notice there is a chiasm there in the sense that wonderful counselor, who is he counseling? It's us, right? Wonderful counselor is Christ's contact with us.

Mighty God is his full deity in heaven. The word is with God, the word is God. Eternal father, similarly, one focuses on his power, the other focuses on his unending existence and care for children.

He's not the eternal God, he's the mighty God. He is the eternal father. That means eternal children.

Can't be a father if you have no children, right? Eternal father, prince of peace, and prince of peace comes back down to his reign on the earth. The throne of David and his kingdom establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness. So it starts on earth with wonderful counsel, goes into heaven where there is power and eternal love.

The eternal father, the father who dwells in the heavens, and then prince of peace. That kingdom will be a kingdom of peace, swords into plowshares, and so on. But it's a beautiful arc.

It's like Jacob's ladder. It starts on the earth, it goes up into heaven, and the message of the gospel is ascending and descending on that ladder. That arch ascends into heaven and comes back to earth, just as the Lord Jesus himself does.

We have one more observation that I will close with on that regard. You remember Simeon in verse 34 says, Behold, this child is destined for what? The falling and rising of many. What was the offering called? The Ola Vajored, the ascending and descending.

And you get the idea that Zachariah, as old as he is, is using a bit of a divinely inspired wordplay here. This whole experience is going to be for the rising and falling of many, just as this rising and falling sacrifice, the rising of incense and sacrificial offering to God, and the descending of God's redemption, his restitution, his reconciliation, his sanctification of his people who are faithful and obedient. Rising and falling.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we have some fascinating things to see about Anna. And since we have some people by that name nearby, it's going to be doubly fun having her here in the room.

So let's pause here and take our break.