

# First Sunday After Christmas, Year B

## The Time Has Come!

First Sunday After Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

*22When 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"), 24and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

*25Now 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. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27Guided 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, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,*

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

*30for my eyes have seen your salvation,*

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

*32a light for revelation to the Gentiles*

*and for glory to your people Israel."*

*33And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34Then 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 <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

<sup>36</sup>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, <sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>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.

<sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

<sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## DIAGNOSIS: Always Looking

*Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Looking Forward to the Consolation of Israel (v. 25)*

Aged Anna and Simeon along with Mary and Joseph were just following the rules. Anna and Simeon, who are in the autumn years of their lives, were longing to have their hopes and dreams fulfilled: “looking forward to the consolation of Israel,” the arrival of the long-awaited messiah in Jerusalem at the temple. Where else would God-fearing, Law-abiding Jews do that? That was also true for Mary and Joseph. They sought to follow the Law and take their newborn son to the temple for a proper dedication. While the amazing circumstances of Jesus birth must have shaken them, they still seek look to respect their tradition.

They are no different from us. Our restless hearts long for satisfaction, consolation, and fulfillment. We want our hopes

realized and our fears calmed. So, we turn to the various manifestations of the Law, i.e., the customs, patterns, and traditions of life that we hope will assure us that we have arrived. Or at least that we have done what was expected of us—like Anna, Simeon, Mary, and Joseph. Their searches converge at the Temple where all those who observe the Torah go to fulfill the Law.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Inner Thoughts Revealed (v. 35)***

Simeon's startling announcement makes clear that, whatever God is about to do in Jesus, Jesus will disturb the status quo. Jesus will create opposition and hostility. He will expose what really goes on in our human hearts as we try to hide behind the customs and traditions of the Law. Simeon warns Mary that Jesus will be like a sword piercing her heart and will reveal her most inner-thoughts that are similar to ours as we seek to satisfy our longing to be "right." Pious Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, all seek shelter in doing "what was customary under the law" (v. 27). However, their pious searches were about to be shattered.

How much of our piety and following the rules is a cover-up for the anxiety, distrust, and unfaith lurking in our hearts and inner thoughts? This little child will one day wield a sword that will cut open that façade and reveal the darkness lurking inside.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Destined for the Falling of Many (v. 34)***

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon declares that Jesus will bring a reckoning. There will be no neutral ground on which we can procrastinate or prevaricate. There can be no safety in doing "what was customary under the Law." Jesus will cause a "division

of the house.” We either will believe or disbelieve his decisive presence, because “this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many” (v. 34). For those who believe like Simeon and Anna, they will “rise.” There will be “peace” (v. 29), “salvation” (v. 30), “light” and “glory” (v. 32). But for those who do not, who disbelieve, who reject the promise and offer of this child, there is only a “falling.” For them there is no “redemption of Jerusalem” (v. 38); there is no peace, salvation, or light. They are condemned to continue their search for answers, meaning, and hope, and never be satisfied. That also includes all of us. None of us is without sin. The sword of the Law cuts all of us to the heart and reveals the plight from which none of us can escape.

## **PROGNOSIS: At Last, Arrival**



***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): A Revealing Light (v. 30)***

Yet, even in the face of this evidence, Simeon announces that the God who has long promised to not only save his people Israel but also bring “light to the Gentiles,” has arrived! God has finally answered the questions raised by our troubled hearts, but in an unlikely way: through a child born to an obscure family, sent to an obscure place, living in an obscure time. God delivers Simeon and Anna, and us along with them, to the peace for which we’ve been searching: Jesus.

In the simple act of faithfully performing their duties and presenting Jesus in the Temple, Mary and Joseph revealed that Jesus was the one “born under the law to redeem those who are under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5). In his humanity, Jesus joined all of us who are “destined for falling” (v. 34) under the law. Stuck in humanity’s relentless pursuit of peace and consolation, he joined himself to the fate of those who choose to go it alone deserve. But that is not the end of Jesus’ story. Simeon’s prophetic words also foresaw a day when Jesus would cause “for the rising of many”—not only in Israel but everyone else too, even the Gentiles! In Christ’s own rising, God frees us up for a life we could never realize on our own.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation (v. 30)***

Simeon and Anna saw this when Simeon first held the child in his hands. That revelation turned on the light for them. For them, this “seeing” was “believing.” The security that the Law had promised, but never delivered, at last was theirs. The consolation for which they had searched endlessly, they had finally found. The peace for which they yearned had arrived. In Jesus, the words spoken by St. Augustine were also fulfilled:

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Simeon and Anna and Augustine’s “salvation” is ours also. Our restless hearts finally find their rest in Christ.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Praising God and Speaking Redemption (v. 38)***

With lives so changed, Anna and Simeon could not keep their mouths shut. There was only one way they could respond to such good news. They “began to praise God and speak about the child” (v. 38). They became witnesses along with all the other peoples, the people of Israel and the Gentiles (vv. 29-30). For all who long for “redemption,” hoping for someone or something to set them free from the relentless demands and unending criticism, something or someone to liberate them from their unsatisfied and disconsolate lives, we are invited to join Simeon and Anna to declare that the time has come!

“For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel!”