



The Joy of Christmas
Luke 2:22-38
December 12, 2021

Main Idea: Our joy at Christmas is rooted in the expectation of our coming King. He has come and is coming again.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: LUKE 2:22-38

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Write down the main characters and what you learn about them in this text? (Notice key words or phrases that describe them.)
2. Is there anything surprising to you in this text? Or what ideas do you see here that you have never heard before?
3. What questions do you have about the text?
4. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this text? What is the role of Jesus the Son in this text? What is the role of God the Father in this text?

Explain – What does this mean?

Let's look closer at Simeon

Look at verses 25-27. There are two key words/phrases in these verses. One is a person of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit) and the other is "waiting for the consolation of Israel."?

1. This is the sixth time the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Luke (1:15, 1:35-twice, 1:41, 1:67). Given that God has been silent for 400 years up to this point, the Spirit's moving in God's people signifies something important, which leads to "the consolation of Israel" that Simeon talks about. Look up Isaiah 61:1-62:3 and Isaiah 40:5 and compare it to Simeon's joy in his song of thanksgiving in verses 29-32. Why does this bring him joy?

Let's look closer at Anna

1. Like Simeon, Anna sees Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy. Unlike Simeon, Anna does not see Jesus' arrival as the final piece of the puzzle of her life. Simeon says "now I can depart in peace." Anna goes and tells all who are waiting along with her that the Messiah has come. Look at Isaiah 40:1-11, how does this explain what Anna might be proclaiming in verse 38?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Every character in this text (Mary, Simeon, and Anna) saw God work while they were going about their ordinary life. Mary and Joseph were going to the temple to obey the Torah. Simeon was waiting faithfully for the Messiah to arrive. Anna was practicing spiritual disciplines in the temple. As you think about the ordinary ways you serve or obey God every day, how have you seen God move in your life?
2. Both Simeon and Anna waited a long time for this fulfillment to be realized. Yet they remained faithful to the end. Is there a hard faithfulness in your life that you are called to that is going on much

longer than you wanted or expected? How does God's promise of a future restoration of all things encourage you today?

Respond – What's my next step?

1. Look back at verses 30-32. This is the source of Simeon's joy. He has seen God keep his word. Anna could not help but speak about how she witnessed God keeping his word. How have you seen God's salvation? Make a list of the ways you have seen him save and reveal. Then spend time praising him for the ways he still works.

Commentary¹

Author: Luke, a Gentile Christian

Luke's Audience

Both volumes are addressed to Theophilus (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-4). We know nothing else about this individual. To determine Theophilus's concerns we must look carefully at the text. We do know he needed reassurance. The amount of material about persevering in the Christian life suggests that he is already a Christian rather than a person considering coming to Christ. In fact, the whole emphasis on Gentile inclusion, which continues through Acts, suggests that Theophilus is a Gentile who finds himself in an originally Jewish movement. But curiously and disturbingly, that Jewish movement is under intense pressure from Jews. He may be asking a very basic question, Do I really belong here? He is probably wondering whether this new community really is of God. Luke offers assurance by outlining God's plan and explaining why this community suffers. For Luke, Jesus is God's agent, and Gentiles are

¹ Entire commentary section taken from Luke IVP New Testament Commentary Series by Darrell L. Bock

included in God's work. The result is a Gospel that highlights the beauty of racial diversity in God's plan, a theme not unlike that of Ephesians.

Luke 2:22-38 Commentary by Darrell L. Bock

The Witness of a Man and Woman at the Temple (2:22–40) The testimony to Jesus continues as both a prophet and a prophetess reveal God's plan. By showing how each gender among the people of God testifies to what God is doing through this child, Luke is saying that all should rejoice at his coming. And culturally it is no accident that both Simeon and Anna are advanced in years. Here is the testimony of two with a full résumé of life experience.

Anna's and Simeon's prophecies share a note of hope and expectation, along with declarations that in this child God's promise is moving into realization. Luke also reveals Jesus' superiority to John in this passage, for the testimony about John stops with his circumcision but the praise of Jesus extends long past the eighth day of life. Here two old and wise prophets of Jewish piety speak not only for the nation but for all humankind, as Simeon's prophecy mentions Jesus' relationship to the Gentiles (for the first time in the book). This passage also provides the first hint that all will not go well. Mary will experience the pain of seeing her son rejected by a divided Israel.

The Purification of Jesus (2:22–24)* Jesus' parents are law-abiding Jews. They show up at the temple to perform sacrifices associated with the wife's purification after birth (Lev 12:2–4, 6). Such a ceremony occurs forty days after the child's arrival. At the same time the firstborn child is to be set aside to the Lord (Ex 13:2, 12, 16; 34:19; Num 18:15–16). Jesus' parents bring the child along, though that is not necessary. They offer a pair of doves or two young pigeons. This offering recalls Leviticus 12:8, though the wording is closer to the Greek Old Testament version of Leviticus 5:11. Since this offering is the one usually made by the poor, Jesus is identified with the very people he reached out to save (1:52; 4:18–19; 6:20; 7:22–23; Greeven 1968:69). But Joseph and Mary do not live in abject poverty, since Joseph is a carpenter by trade (Mk 6:3; Plummer 1922:65). This could be the offering of someone from a "middle-class" background as well. Regardless of their precise social status, Luke is making it clear that Jesus' parents are not spiritual renegades, but Jews who are sensitive and faithful to the Mosaic law—a point reinforced in Luke 2:40–52, when they will make their customary annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. All the persons surrounding Jesus at his birth have a heritage of devotion to God. The testimony to Jesus stands on the shoulders of a series of highly respectable figures.

Simeon's Prophecy (2:25–35)* The Spirit leads an old man to the temple to greet Jesus. He is righteous and devout (compare Mt 10:41; 19:17; 23:29, 35; 2

Pet 2:7–8), yet another witness to Jesus who possesses a vibrant walk with God. Such piety includes having an eye on the hope of God's redemption. Luke expresses this hope in national terms appropriate for this first-century saint: Simeon has been waiting for the consolation of Israel. He longs for the nation's deliverance, just as Zechariah had (1:68–75; Is 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2; 2 Baruch 44:7). In fact, later rabbis will call the Messiah Menahem, or Comforter (Schmitz and Stählin 1967:793; y. Berakot 2:3). It was such deliverance that Simeon expected.

The Spirit of God directs this scene, because he had revealed to Simeon that death would not come until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Promise, fulfillment and God's direction stand behind the prophecy of this old saint.

Simeon's remarks are set within a hymn known as the *Nunc Dimittis*, from the Latin of the hymn's opening phrase. The prophecy itself is a statement of mature faith. Simeon can die in peace as you have promised and be taken by God, his Sovereign Lord (*despota* or Master), because my eyes have seen your salvation. There is a significant equation in this remark. To see Jesus is to see God's salvation. They are inseparable. There is joy, even in the face of death, when one has seen the source of life. Simeon's job as a sentinel for Messiah is done. The Lord can take him home. Simeon pictures a faithful servant who is at home in God's purpose and plan, even when his time is up.

God's work is for all people (*laōn*). As in 2:10, the reference to the people ultimately is broad, encompassing both Jew and Gentile, as verse 32 makes clear. In fact, Jesus is light (*phōs*), an image that recalls the description of the Davidic son as the dayspring or bright morning star in 1:78–79. But Jesus serves as light in two distinct ways. For Gentiles he is a revelation. This term refers to his opening up the way of salvation to the nations in a way unknown before his coming. But for Israel, God's people, Jesus is glory—that is, his activity represents the realization of promises made by God and thus shows Israel's special place in his heart (Is 46:13). The remarks in this verse recall Isaiah 60:1–3, which in turn recall imagery surrounding the promised Servant of the Lord. Though the church today associates the Servant figure with the suffering of Jesus, Luke prefers here to highlight those aspects of the Servant's work that mean hope and vindication.

Once again, the parents marveled at the prophecy. Luke's reader is to identify with their response and sense of wonder.

But Simeon is not done. There is a note of foreboding he must leave with Mary. Jesus will be the cause of division: This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. The imagery of this verse comes from Isaiah 8:14–15 and 28:13–16. These Old Testament texts are frequently alluded

to in the New Testament (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6–8; Lk 20:17–18, also at Qumran, 1QH 2:8–10; 14:11). Jesus will divide the nation in two. Some will respond and others will oppose. That means that he will be a sign that will be spoken against. People will contend against and about Jesus. The road to promise-fulfillment is not smooth. To identify with Jesus will bring pain, because many will reject him.

This rejection explains Simeon's reference to a sword piercing through Mary's soul. She will feel a mother's pain as she watches her son go his own way and suffer rejection, but the sword also reflects the pain anyone who identifies with Jesus feels as the world rejects what Jesus has to offer. Simeon's remark to Mary is an aside, but an important one, since it shows that identifying with Jesus has painful personal consequences.

The division Jesus brings reveals the thoughts of many hearts. Jesus is God's litmus test for where a person is. Do I sense a need to depend on God and come to him to walk in light, or do I not? My response to Jesus is the test, and the answer comes from my heart. Each person's response to him reveals where he or she is before God, just as one day Jesus will reveal where everyone's heart is (Acts 10:42–43).

Anna's Prophecy (2:36–38)* Though no details of Anna's prophecy are given, this section completes the cycle of male and female witnesses. Again, Anna's piety is underlined by references to her old age, her faithful widowhood and her regular ministry at the temple. She is full of thanksgiving at the arrival of the child who will complete God's promise, and she speaks about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. Her teaching would have been heard by all who frequented the temple. Her hope, like Simeon's, looks to the completion of what God is starting.



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Sunday School teacher to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

Can you think of a time in your life when God broke through during ordinary faithfulness?

OR

Can you think of a time in your life when God delayed in showing you his goodness for longer than you expected him to?

READ ENTIRE TEXT: LUKE 2:22-38

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Is there anything surprising to you in this text? Or what ideas do you see here that you have never heard before? **(This is an opportunity to highlight what stood out to your group during the sermon. Or during the reading of the text in the group time.)**
2. Look at the four main characters in this text: Mary and Joseph, Simeon, and Anna. What do you notice about each of them? **(This can be popcorn discussion. You could have your group draw out one thing they notice about each character.)**

Explain – What does this mean?

Let's break down each character.

1. Joseph and Mary: **Ask your group to look up Leviticus 12:6-8.** Based on what Joseph and Mary brought for Mary's purification, what do you think this means about their station in life?

2. Simeon: Luke's overall emphasis is that Jesus Christ "came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The joy that Simeon feels is not only isolated to his personal prayer being answered as noted in his song in verses 29-32. How do you see Luke's overall message coming through in these verses?

3. Anna: This woman came from one of the smaller tribes of the nation of Israel, **but have your group look again at what she says in verse 38 (you could have someone read this verse out loud.)** What are Anna's expectations of this Messiah she is waiting for? Connecting this expectation with the smallness of her tribal origins and her suffering as a widow, what does this tell us about the type of people to whom Christ comes?

Apply – How do I live this out?

1. Christmas is filled with so much joy, but it is also filled with so much pain. Simeon saw his prayer answered in his lifetime, but only after years of waiting while doing the same ordinary thing every day. Mary gave birth to the Messiah, but also carried the weight of Simeon's prophesy (verses 34-35) her entire life. Anna was obedient in spiritual disciplines, but she also lived as a widow for the majority of her life. **The reality is our joy is often laced with so much pain. Spend some time as a group leader thinking about your own life or the life of someone you know.**

THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO ADD AN ILLUSTRATION OR APPLICATION POINT THAT FITS WITH YOUR CLASS DYNAMIC. IT COULD BE SOMETHING RELATED TO WAITING ON GOD'S PROMISES OR FINDING JOY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING OR SEEING CHRIST WORK IN THE MIDST OF POVERTY AND LOWLINESS.

PARTICULARLY RELATED TO CHRISTMAS, THIS ILLUSTRATION CAN SPEAK TO HOW GOD BRINGS JOY AT CHRISTMAS EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THESE DIFFICULTIES.

2. Christ has already come, but we live in what theologians call “the already, but not yet” space in God’s grand story of salvation. We have promises that things will be made right, but we still live in the midst of so much that is yet to be realized. In many ways, we are not that dissimilar from Simeon and Anna. We are waiting on the promised Messiah to return, and while we wait we grow older and sometimes suffer significant losses. Yet, they show us joy is possible. How? By hoping in the same Christ to do what he said he would do. Let’s look at some of those promises. **Have someone in your group look up these verses and then ask this question about all of them: “How do these promises provide joy for you right now, regardless of what you’re going through—maybe even especially because of what you’re going through.”**

- JAMES 5:7-11
- PETER 1:3-9
- 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18
- REVELATION 21:1-7

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Look back at verses 30-32. This is the source of Simeon’s joy. He has seen God keep his word. Anna could not help but speak about how she witnessed God keeping his word. How have you seen God’s salvation? How have you seen him keep his word to you? Make a list of the ways you have seen him save and reveal. Then spend time praising him for the ways he still works. **This could be a space for group prayer time in praise.**

Additional Resources:

Sermon: [The Nunc Dimittis \(Luke 2:21-28\) by R. Kent Hughes](#)

Additional Scripture Reading: Psalm 34 (this is a psalm of praise for God's character and deliverance, similar to Simeon's prayer), Isaiah 61, Isaiah 66:12-13, Isaiah 40:1

Book: [The Advent of the Lamb of God by Russ Ramsey](#) (this is a narrative retelling of the Christmas accounts. Chapter 24 deals with Simeon in particular.)

Song: [Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,

Raise us to Thy glorious throne.
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