

Title: Thank God for Christ's Sacrificial Work for Us
Date: 12/1/24
Subject: Thanking God for Christ's work
Scripture: Luke 2:25-38

This morning we're going to look at part of the broader Christmas narrative in the Bible. It comes six weeks after Jesus was born. This aspect is usually looked after Christmas, if at all. However, I'm moving it up to the beginning of the Advent season. We'll look at two characters who are often overlooked because the focus is on the night of Christ's birth, the manger, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. They show up when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord according to the instructions given by God through Moses.

Read Luke 2:25 - 35

Simeon

Some writers have identified him as the Simeon who became president of the Sanhedrin in A.D. 13. This would make him the son of the Hillel, one of the most influential rabbis in history, and the father of Gamaliel, besides being the teacher of Paul, wisely counseled his fellow religious leaders about what to do with the apostles who were proclaiming Jesus: "For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38, 39).

There's a flaw in this theory. The Mishnah, which saved the sayings, works and expositions of the Law by leading rabbis, doesn't mention Simeon. The thought is he could have been scrubbed from the records because he believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Others say Luke leaves the impression Simeon was of an advanced age, and since he had mentioned Gamaliel and his position, he would have done the same for Simeon.

The best understanding is Simeon was an ordinary guy... as the name was common.

The important part about Simeon is what he was doing and why he was doing it. Let's begin with the "why."

Simeon was righteous and devout. The Berean Study Bible: "The description of Simeon as "righteous and devout" highlights his moral and spiritual integrity. "Righteous"...refers to his adherence to God's laws and his just character. "Devout"...suggests a deep reverence for God and a careful observance of religious duties. Together, these terms paint a picture of a man who is deeply committed to his faith, living in a way that is pleasing to God."

Simeon sought to know God better and to follow him.

This led Simeon to wait for the consolation of Israel. In terms of what we saw last week in Romans 8, he was patiently groaning, groaning patiently, for consolation of Israel.

Consolation comes from the word used for the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be the *Parakletos*—the Encourager, the Helper, the Consoler, the Comforter.

Gene Cunningham of Basic Training Bible Ministries says, “*Parakaleo* is one of the oldest and richest words in the Greek language. The compound—*para*, “alongside,” and *kaleo*, “to call,” conjured up at least five vivid pictures to the Greeks. It was used to mean: 1. To rekindle a flame - someone gently, patiently blowing on dying embers to bring a fire to life again. 2. To call forth comfort - the cries of a frightened child in the night calling for the comfort and reassurance of his father. 3. To call a physician - someone who was injured calling for a physician to set his broken bone or bind his wound. 4. To stabilize the troops - the military officer who, in the heat of battle, could calmly encourage, exhort, and steady the frightened soldiers in his ranks. 5. To plead one’s case - the counsel for the defense, making an appeal for his client before a judge.

The Jews of Jesus’ time and those who lived prior to his coming would use the word consolation as another title for the Messiah. They probably still do to this day. The Messiah would be the one who would come alongside to bring encouragement, solace, comfort, deliverance, restoration and exemption.

Ancient Jews would use consolation in their daily prayers as they looked forward to the advent of the Messiah: “May I see the consolation of Israel.” They also used it to give more weight and force to their words and oaths: “By the consolation of Israel, or the coming Messiah, I swear...”

Since it was a common prayer, we might think that more people would be like Simeon and be able to recognize the Messiah when he came. They didn't. Maybe it was a case of just going through the routine, saying words, but not really anticipating something, or anything to happen.

Simeon recognized Jesus as the consolation, Messiah. This child, barely a month old, cradled in his parents’ arms, was the one who would bring about God's promises.

Reread Vv. 29-32

Simeon’s song reveals a second word which needs to be explored. Salvation. Simeon said the Lord could now dismiss him in peace because he had seen the Lord’s salvation. The dismissal Simon had in mind was he was ready to die. He refers to the Lord’s promise that he wouldn't die before he’d seen the Lord's Christ.

Most people assume Simeon had more than a few years under his belt. That's not necessarily the case as younger people can be eagerly waiting for God to work, in this case for the consolation. God said Simeon would see the Lord's Christ before he died...no matter what age he was at the time. Simeon said he was ready, at peace, and possessed a tranquil spirit.

Simeon told the sovereign Lord, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” In other words, “I have seen the Savior.” Simeon had seen the one whom he believed would deliver people from their sins.

A few months prior to Jesus’ birth, a man named Zechariah reached a similar conclusion. It was after his son John was born. Zechariah had been unable to speak because he didn't believe the words of the angel Gabriel that his wife Elizabeth, who was well along in years and no way would be able to have a child, would become pregnant and he would become a father.

Eight days after John was born, people approached Zechariah for the name of the boy. When he wrote “his name is John,” his mouth was immediately opened, his tongue was loosed and he began to praise God. His song spoke of the role his son would have in announcing the Messiah: “for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

John, better known as John the Baptist, prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. The Messiah would bring about salvation and grant forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

The good news of salvation is for Jews and non-Jews. Zechariah said it would shine on those living in darkness in the shadow of death, on all who were lost and separated from God. Simeon said God's salvation, the Messiah, was prepared in the sight of all people and would be a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to people Israel. Gentiles would be enlightened to be able to see Jesus as the Christ/Messiah. Jews would receive glory, be in an honored position. The Lord had chosen them as his people in the Old Testament. The Messiah was born a Jew and lived among them – proclaiming the Good News from God to them first. His first followers, the apostles, were Jews. The first ones to take the Good News to others were the Jews. All this and more was to their glory...but the people group as a whole didn't take advantage of it. Instead, they rejected Christ.

The word salvation appears 114 times in the Bible. Probably not too surprising since God's purpose was to bring salvation to people. What might surprise you is that 74 of the usages are in the Old Testament, with 66 of them coming in Psalms and Isaiah.

We tend to think of salvation as something that is talked about after Christ's mission to save humanity was completed. Or maybe after his birth as the angel of the Lord told the shepherds: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

However, salvation from God was anticipated in the Old Testament. King David wrote: “Oh that salvation would come” (Ps 14:7), “Salvation of the righteous is from the Lord” (Ps 37:39), “My soul finds rest in God alone, salvation comes from him” (Ps 62:1), “The Lord is my light and salvation” (Ps 27:1).

The book of Isaiah records God speaking about himself: “For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior” (43:3, 11), “There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; There is none but me” (45:21).

Even the wrong way prophet Jonah gets in on the act as he prays to the Lord his God from inside the fish: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord” (2:8, 9).

People like Zechariah and Simeon would have been familiar with the words of God from Psalms and Isaiah, very familiar. They would have held tightly to the promises and anticipated the coming of the Messiah. Zechariah's song begins: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and redeemed his

people” (Luke 1:68). He declared the Messiah had come...even though, at that point, he was still in Mary's womb.

Simeon saw the child and exclaimed: “Sovereign Lord... my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29, 30). Both men gave their thanks and praise to God.

There's one more person we need to talk about.

Read Luke 2:36-38.

Anna was 84. Her husband died after seven years of marriage. She was at a point in her life where she spent her time at the temple to worship, fast and pray. When it states that she never left the temple, it means she was there whenever the doors were open. She was "constant" and "regular." It's also possible she stayed in one of the many rooms used for various purposes in the temple complex.

She came up to Mary, Joseph and Jesus at the very moment Simeon was blessing them. She was next in line to see Jesus. It wasn't merely that she thought the child was cute and adorable and she wanted to pinch his cheeks. I'm sure Jesus cute, adorable and had cheeks people wanted to pinch and not just thought so by his parents. Anna didn't simply want to congratulate the couple, or ask if she could hold the baby. She may have.

The reason for including her in the biblical record is she too recognized that this child was not just different, not just special, not just extraordinary, not just unique, but all those things and so much more -- he was the one and only promised Messiah.

Anna gave thanks to God. She spoke it in front of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and Simeon.

The second thing the woman did was spread the good news about the Christ child “to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Zechariah used the R word: redeemed. It's a counterpart to the word salvation as shown by this description.

Berean Study Bible: “The term "redemption" is rich with theological significance. The Greek word "lutrosis" refers to a ransom or liberation, often used in the context of freeing slaves or prisoners. In the Jewish context, this redemption is both spiritual and national, pointing to the deliverance from sin and the restoration of Israel. Jerusalem, as the heart of Jewish worship and identity, symbolizes the broader hope for the nation's renewal. Anna's proclamation connects Jesus to this redemptive hope, affirming Him as the one who will bring about God's promised salvation.”

Anna didn't only speak about the child at the temple. The verb tense is a continuous action. She was aware of others who felt the same way she and Simeon did. She spread the good news to all who are looking forward to the redemption. We don't know how many that was, or if they kept spreading the news. It was 30 years before Jesus began his ministry. People who heard, may have gotten discouraged during that time, and quit sharing.....

The Jewish people were told: “O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins” (Ps 130:7, 8).

However, and gladly, as we have seen, Jesus didn't come as the Anointed One from God only for Israel. He is the light to the world... which includes the gentiles. "In him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). "For he (God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13, 14). "for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

What have we learned?

Consolation, salvation, redemption, deliverance, rescue, being set free are only possible because Jesus Christ was born and died a sacrificial death. Jesus is the one who is full of grace and mercy. He alone possessed complete and full righteousness. He was the only one in a right relationship with God. He was ready, willing and able to do whatever was necessary to take care of people's sin problem, to eradicate it. As conceited and full of themselves as people often are, there was and is no way for any human to accomplish the feat of being their own savior. Not by their own works of righteousness. They are empty. His sacrifice was perfect and sufficient.

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:8, 10 – 12).

The annual presidential pardoning of turkeys prior to Thanksgiving has become an established event and is often the cause of numerous jokes about what other turkeys should be pardoned. Some say the tradition dates back to Abraham Lincoln. Most trace the event to the 1940s. President Reagan was the first to use the word "pardon" in connection with a live turkey. This year's recipients of the presidential pardon were Peach and Blossom. I find it interesting that for a number of years turkeys who were pardoned were sent to Frying Pan Farm Park. Frying Pan? Really? Give them a complex. Pardoned turkeys have been sent to zoos, petting zoos, universities, farms, and even Disney World to live out the rest of their days because they received the life-giving power of a pardon.

One writer (Lisa Samra, Our Daily Bread, 11/28/24) elaborates on how God pardons sin and forgives (Micah 7:18): "As the Creator and Judge overall, he can authoritatively declare that he won't hold our actions against us because of his promise to Abraham - ultimately fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection. Being pardoned from all the ways we fail to live up to God's standards is an undeserved gift that brings immense blessings. As we grasp more and more of the benefits of his complete forgiveness, let's respond in praise and gratitude. May we live, merciful Father, in gratitude because of the pardon you've offered us."

We express love to Christ because he has transformed us, our souls, our spirits, our destiny. We give him thanks.