

THE FAITH OF SIMEON AND ANNA

Luke 2:21-40

Key Verses: 2:30-32

"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

In today's passage, we learn how Jesus was circumcised and presented in the temple. At the time of the presenting of the baby Jesus, two old persons, Simeon and Anna, appear. We learn from the two old persons exemplary gospel faith. We also learn that Jesus is salvation for all mankind, a light for the Gentiles.

First, Jesus was circumcised (21-24).

Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore his circumcision ceremony should be extraordinary, more than the crowning ceremony of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603), which required 2,000 trumpeters, army parades and dignitaries and royal parties. But there was nothing special about Jesus' circumcision. It was to become our friend and shepherd. This was a divine glory. His parents, according to Jewish custom, circumcised him on the eighth day. Circumcision was the sign of being God's covenant people. When Abram was complacent with Ishmael, a son from his concubine, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless" (Ge 17:1). It meant, "You should not live as an ordinary man. You should live as a chosen people and a man of covenant with God." Since then, Abram made a big leap of faith. He was no more Abram, a noble father with no son. He became Abraham, a father of all nations. In the New Testament, circumcision is interpreted as circumcision of the heart. Romans 2:29a says, "No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code." In light of this, we must first circumcise our hearts before presenting ourselves to God. At the time of circumcision, we must make a decision of faith to be a father of all nations instead of an ordinary person.

Human beings are in conflict between becoming extraordinary or being ordinary people. One girl wants to be a medical doctor and then a medical missionary. But she does not want to miss any fun. She is a woman whose heart is not circumcised. God wants us to be circumcised and be his chosen people. Abraham was circumcised as a sign of his change from an ordinary old man into a father of faith for all nations. This is not a matter of option, but it is a divine imperative.

After circumcision, his parents named him Jesus, the name the angel had told them (21). It wasn't easy for Joseph and Mary to name him "Jesus," because Jewish tradition demanded that they name him "Little Joseph," after his father. As we know, the name "Jesus" means "the Savior of the world" (Mt 1:21). It was impossible for them to obey and name him Jesus. But they took the angel's message absolutely and named their son Jesus.

Second, Jesus became poor to make us rich (22-24).

Look at verse 22. "When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...." Exodus 23:15b says, "No one is to appear before me empty-handed." For the ceremony, Mary had to bring a lamb as a burnt offering. But she could not afford a lamb, so she brought a pair of pigeons instead. It was called, "the offering of the poor." Jesus was born into a poor family. This reminds us of 2 Corinthians 8:9. It says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Before knowing Jesus personally, no one is rich. Money does not make a person rich. Rather, it makes him stingy and selfish. But when we have God in our hearts we become as rich as God. Before conversion, Andrew Carnegie was a demon in selfishness. He made his employees work hard and gave only survival expenses, not proper salaries. He was a rich man. But in reality, he was a very poor man because he did not believe in God. After conversion, Carnegie paid proper salaries to his workers. He also gave away 99% of his income to the church and for social welfare. Still, he was the richest person in this country. We remember seven beautiful woman missionaries who first came to Evanston. They had no regular income. They could not cook for themselves regularly, for they had no money. But they were always ready to serve Northwestern students. They served Northwestern students through Bible study. They had nothing to treat students with. But miraculously, they could treat them properly. They were poor, but they were very rich in God.

Behind these ceremonies there was a conviction of faith in the parents that their children were not their own, but were the children of God. They circumcised their children as a sign of dedicating their children to God. They taught their children the Law of God. In this incident, we also learn that Jesus became like our brother. Jesus was born of a woman. He was born under the Law and had to undergo circumcision and purification. This was a great humiliation to Jesus, who is the Son

of God. But he took upon himself the impurity of his people, so as to save us from our sin and guilt. Hebrews 2:17a says, "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way...."

Third, Simeon, a man of faith and hope (25-28).

To people's eyes, Simeon was no more than an old man who sorrowed over his fatality, thinking that he would die soon. As we know well, when the world is dark and evil, the most ominous characteristic of the world is that people do not believe in God. When people do not believe in God, they become fearful and restless. When people do not believe in God, they live according to their feelings and become very immoral and violent. At that time, the world was dark and full of despair. But there was a man called Simeon. What kind of person was he? Look at verse 25. "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Simeon was a warrior of faith. At that time, everybody was sorrowful. But Simeon was not sorrowful, because he had faith in God. What kind of faith did Simeon have? Simeon had faith that God's promises were true. Simeon had faith that he would see the Savior of the world with his own eyes before his death. In that dark world, most people were nihilistic due to the lawless worldly situation. They lived on a day-to-day basis; if they were well after a day's hard work they sighed deeply, saying, "Today was lucky." Yet they worried about tomorrow during the night. But Simeon was different. As Noah wholeheartedly built the ark, working day and night, Simeon studied the Law of God with all his heart. Through Bible study, he heard the word of God. He found the promise of God that he would send the Savior of the world. In Jesus, Simeon found salvation for all mankind; they would be saved from their sins through the Son.

Simeon reminds us of a Korean grandfather named Young Kim. Most people in his town, young and old, were distressed and sorrowful under the Japanese rule. No one knew what to do. But this grandfather knew what he was doing. He was quiet and joyful all the time. On weekends he would come to the children's playground and hook the children's necks with his cane, several, one by one. Then he would tell them Bible stories in such an interesting way that many of them were moved to tears. During weekdays he taught his three sons the Bible, English and piano. After World War II, his children became international figures. Everyone thought he was a dummy who did not know how to organize his leisure time. But he was a man who had a personal faith in God in his heart.

Nationally speaking, the tragic situation of Israel in those times was simply

appalling. Under the Roman rule they were hungry and angry. There was no hope in men's hearts. For the past 1,000 years, so many prophets and devout people had wanted to see the coming of the Messiah. This hope had sustained their faith. But all of them failed to see it and died. So the hope of waiting for the promised Messiah vanished away. Here we learn Simeon's hope. Verse 25b says, "He was waiting for the consolation of Israel...." Simeon had hope because he had faith in God in his heart. He believed that the Messiah would come soon. In addition, Simeon had faith that he would not die before he saw the Messiah with his own eyes. In the midst of despair, he believed God's promise that the Messiah would come and comfort and redeem his suffering people.

When Simeon believed in the promise of God in that dark generation, something great happened in his life. The Holy Spirit came upon him and convinced him that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah. Look at verse 26. "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Simeon was old. Because of his absolute faith in God, God blessed his faith and gave him the conviction that he would not die. God also gave him the conviction that he would see the promised Messiah (Lord's Christ). May God give us the conviction that we would not die before seeing 10,000 American Bible teachers. Look at verses 27,28. "Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...." He had waited for the coming of the Messiah for a long time. Finally, his long-awaited hope was realized.

Fourth, Jesus is salvation (29-31).

Look at verse 29. "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace." This verse is Simeon's testimony. Simeon was a faithful shepherd of God's sheep all his lifetime. He could not do anything for himself. He could not even die because of God's flock under his care. Simeon had to keep watch over God's flock of sheep, suffering many long, weary nights. Now the promised Messiah had come to save his people. Now Simeon is indeed happy to die. Look at verse 30. "For my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon saw in the baby Jesus salvation for all mankind.

Fifth, Jesus is a light for the Gentiles (32).

This idea is derived from the prophecy of Isaiah (49:6). God chose Israel as his firstborn son, to raise them as a Bible teachers' nation and as a light for the

Gentiles. God gave his people a glorious mission. But they did not realize God's deep love for them. They did not obey God's commands. The chosen people Israel did not want to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Most of the Jews thought that the Gentiles were animals. But Simeon thought that the Gentiles were also precious children of God and Jesus was a light for the Gentiles. God revealed to them that he wanted to use his chosen people in order to save the Gentile people. Yet his people disobeyed. But Jesus obeyed God's will for world salvation. Therefore, Jesus is glory to his people Israel (32b).

Sixth, Jesus is the cause (33-35).

Look at verse 34b. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...." There are many kinds of people with different views of man and the world. But they are all wrong. Despite many ideas concerning human destiny, all men's destiny depends on how they see Jesus. Those who believe in him will be saved. Those who do not believe will be smashed into pieces before being led to eternal condemnation (Lk 20:17,18). Jesus is also a sign that evil men will speak against (34). Look at verse 35b. "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Simeon foresaw the suffering of the baby Jesus' mother. The whole life of Jesus would cause pain to his mother; especially, his death on the cross would cause her pain like a sword piercing her soul (Jn 19:25). How costly it was to be the mother of Jesus! May God raise many little mothers of Jesus among young American women.

Seventh, Anna's prayer (36-40).

At that time, men had no proper respect for women. But Luke the historian gave proper respect and position to women. Among many women there was Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of the tribe of Asher, a beloved wife to her husband. One day her husband died all of a sudden. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84 (36,37). When she lost her husband, she could have spent her life as a sorrowful widow. But to her, married life was the same, even though her young and handsome husband died. To her, the best married life was to make a decision of faith to live in the house of God among God's people, serving them as a mother of prayer. Her prayer topic was the redemption of Jerusalem. Jerusalem refers to Israel. She gave her life as a woman of prayer. She prayed for the redemption of Jerusalem. The moment she saw the baby Jesus, the Messiah, she thanked God, for the promise of the redemption of Jerusalem had been fulfilled.

We should not despair. Like Simeon and Anna, we must have faith in the

promises of God. We also must have a clear prayer topic so that God can hear and answer our prayers.