

# Explore the Bible: The Promised One

December 5, 2017

- The Explore the Bible lesson for Dec. 24 focuses on Luke 2:25-38.

We pause our study in Acts for this significant time and to remember a brief vignette that followed soon after the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ. We should see this passage as connected to last week's study in Acts 15 by recalling the promise would be for all people—no exclusions.

Before delving in to the narrative, we should not miss the lowly estate of the infant Jesus and his earthly family. His customary circumcision took place, and now the purification for him and his mother was required in Jerusalem.

Notice their offering—a pair of doves or pigeons (Luke 2:24). The family could not afford a lamb due to their humble means. So, they brought the offering they could afford (R.T. France, *Luke*, 38). Even the Savior of the world knew lowliness, which makes the Promised One approachable and available to all. This is good news!

## Simeon's Praise (Luke 2:25-32)

Simeon's greatest attribute clearly is the fact that God's Spirit was both upon him and leading him. We get the idea he is an older man, and by tradition, we assume he was a man of spiritual influence. Yet, we know little about him and nothing of his "title," but that is not what matters.

He was a stranger who was moved by God to cross paths with Jesus' family. It seems as if he did not ask permission, but he simply took the child, held

him and praised God vocally. Ask your group: *How has God used a stranger to speak truth into your life?*

This stranger's greatest desire was to see the hope of Israel, and God was faithful in drawing him to meet their hope—Jesus. In his praise, this man spoke a great deal, but the most significant wording is found in verses 31-32. Israel's hope was seen by everyone, and it would be for everyone.

Since we are at the doorstep of Christmas, consider how our praise is similar to Simeon's. Now is a good time to consider whether we get as excited about God's hope being born for us all. *How can we reintroduce such praise in our Christmas celebration?*

## **A Future Piercing (Luke 2:33-35)**

Hope requires action, and love requires sacrifice. These latter requirements do not take away from hope and love, but they do help us see what it takes for them to be fulfilled. *What would you be thinking if Simeon spoke these words over your family?*

Joseph and Mary were shocked and in awe of Simeon's praise statement. Their marveling soon would be followed by a prophetic word: With blessing comes pain. From our perspective in as readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we easily can see that the blessing outweighs the pain. Yet, for these new parents, we can imagine the sobering effect of verse 35.

Just as they celebrated this new life, we also celebrate the birth of Christ. At the same time, we must recognize the intended purpose of "God with us." Jesus did not come to be a beautiful baby or a perfect man; he came to rescue us with his own life.

## **Anna's Affirmation (Luke 2:36-38)**

Anna is intriguing. She has a more recognizable pedigree than Simeon and stood unique from the rest as a prophetess. Like Simeon, she was devout and faithful. Sadly, we are not told the words of thanksgiving she spoke that day.

Yet, her life speaks to the faithfulness of God. She also looked to Israel's redemption. She was a faithful worshipper, a longtime survivor of pain, and a witness to those around her. Anna is our example of an evangelist; she shared the good news she witnessed with everyone with whom she came into contact.

Ask your group: *How does Anna's life challenge us to be better witnesses to others?* Her role in this story is one of validation. R.T. France points out a distinction between Simeon and Anna: While his praise may have been private, Anna's was public (R.T. France, *Luke*, 40).

## **Conclusion**

Following this brief narrative, we simply are told Joseph and Mary did all that was required and returned to Nazareth to begin life with their new child. Luke tells us Jesus "grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40).

As the literal Son of God, it makes sense that he would be so wise and full of grace. Yet, one must connect his being blessed by Simeon and Anna to this reality. Anna and Simeon's part in our Savior's life cannot be overlooked.

*What do we gain from this brief interaction?* Two strangers engaged a lowly family and began to tell the world that God's hope had arrived. This is our call today. With two strangers as our example, we are witnesses who

cannot hold back words of praise for God's goodness. This good news is, indeed, for all people!

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