

The Reading of Psalm 148: 1-14

Praise for God's Universal Glory

¹ Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

⁶ He established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.^[a]

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,

⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

¹⁰ Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!

¹² Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.

¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!

The Reading of Luke 2:22 – 38

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

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;^[d] 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.^[e] ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[f] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon^[g] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹“Master, now you are dismissing your servant^[h] in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which 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^[i] 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 ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna^[j] 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, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child^[k] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

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Kerra Becker English
Luke 2: 22 - 38
“My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation”

NOW THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS

Now the Work of Christmas Begins
By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

Some have called Simeon and Anna the last of the Old Testament prophets because they were the ones gifted with bearing witness to Jesus as the Messiah before they died. Both were advanced in years and deeply rooted in the Temple in Jerusalem, Simeon as a priest, and Anna as a prophet who had spent most of her adult life praying there. In Luke’s gospel, they definitely serve in a transitional role – one that takes the reader from the promise of a Messiah to the beginning of the fulfilment found in Jesus Christ.

To link this revelation with the Temple and the ceremony of purification is to remind the reader that Jesus is part of a much longer story. The Law of Moses is his law. The expectation

that the firstborn son would be dedicated to God – a long standing tradition for Hebrew families. Though Jesus will himself prophesy the end of the Temple, he will also rebuild the idea of the temple as being fulfilled in the role of the Messiah to bring together humanity and God without having to have a specific place or specific mediators to allow that connection to happen. In Jesus, Simeon and Anna recognize both a continuance of and a break within the tradition that they have dedicated their lives to serving.

Both Simeon and Anna bring a profound message through what they say and do, and it's a shame we don't pore over these words more often in study and prayer. More than any other biblical figures, they, like Howard Thurman in his poem, tell us how the work of Christmas begins. It begins incarnationally. God becomes human so that the gift of salvation may be brought, fully and completely, into our world.

So what is it exactly that Simeon sees that the Holy Spirit has promised?

This specific proclamation by Simeon bears reflection line by line, to allow our eyes to open and see the same way Simeon's eyes were opened.

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

Finding peace in death, fulfillment as a temple priest after YEARS of service

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

Not “my salvation” – YOUR salvation. God's plan for salvation, universal not personal.

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

No one gets left out or excluded. This is a revelation happening in religion.

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles

For the other...

and for glory to your people Israel.”

And for us.

³³And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

What do you do with this kind of information being said about your child? Was it an additional confirmation given that they had already experienced such extraordinary encounters with the divine already to have their angelic promises confirmed by this priest?

³⁴Then Simeon[□] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,

OK – now this part sounds more ominous. The world will be shaken by this person, who is 40 days old at the time of the ceremony of purification. Who will rise and fall?

The great upending that Mary speaks of in the Magnificat – rich sent away empty, poor get their fill, powerful topple from their thrones, the lowly are lifted up...

and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed

Jesus will be opposed. In fact, he will be accused, tried, found guilty, and executed. Those who oppose him – help to reveal the inner thoughts of many. Observing how people react to Jesus or to those whom Jesus cares about will reveal inner thoughts – sometimes particularly evil inner thoughts.

—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Mary’s load to bear will be like a sword to the soul.

For Simeon, the work of Christmas begins as all people are blanketed with the promise of salvation.

Then for Anna, who hadn’t left the Temple for 84 years, her response is to go and tell, to anyone who would listen, men, women, Jews, Gentiles. She took the same message that Simeon voices and made sure that no one within earshot of her would be exempt from hearing the news. Her preaching about the birth foreshadows the preaching of the women at the tomb who go and tell the amazing story of the resurrection.