

Gospel Beginnings: What Happened Next?

DAVE BAST

Luke 2 is one of the most familiar and beloved of all the Bible's chapters because it is the chapter that contains the Christmas story; but Luke 2 does not end with the shepherds around the manger worshiping the baby Jesus and telling Mary about their encounter with the heavenly host. After the shepherds depart, after the angels have all disappeared and the echoes of their songs of glory to God in the highest have died away, the story of Jesus' life goes on; and the next stop on its tour is the Temple in Jerusalem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and as we continue now with the story of Jesus' birth we have been looking at the four Gospels and how they really begin, each one of them – the first chapter; but we are going to pick up an interesting little story from Chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel; kind of a post-Christmas something or other that happens as Jesus is brought to the Temple. From Luke 2 beginning at verse 22:

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. ²³As it is written in the Law of the Lord, every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord, ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: A pair of doves or two young pigeons. ²⁵Now 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. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Moved 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, ²⁸Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God saying, ²⁹“Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace, ³⁰for my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹which You have prepared in the sight of all nations. ³²A light for revelation to the gentiles and the glory of Your people, Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there it is, and what is interesting, and maybe we can spend a little bit of time talking about this, Dave, Luke typically wrote for more of a Greek audience that would not know all the background of Israel automatically the way, say, Matthew's more Jewish readers would likely have done; and yet, as we continue on in this second chapter, the same chapter that began with the census and Quirinius and Jesus' birth in the stable, we get a whole lot of stuff about the Jewish Law and the Jewish customs, and that is what this is all about.

DAVE BAST

Over and over again that phrase reappears in this story: To do what the Law required; to do according to all the customs of the Jewish Law – the Jewish Law, the Jewish Law, the Jewish Law – and you naturally want to say, well if this is the gentile Gospel, what is the deal with all this Jewish Law stuff? Presumably, Luke's readers would not be familiar with it or interested in it; so, why all this emphasis? I think there are a couple of things we could say in response to that. One is, for Jews and gentiles alike, the whole story of the Bible becomes our story. The Old Testament becomes our book as well; and so we are interested in the Law

because it has something to teach us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This story, Luke is saying, did not come out of nowhere – it did not come out of a clear blue sky. It has been anticipated. The way has been laid for a very, very long time; and so, Mary and Joseph, as good Jewish parents, as part of the covenant people of God that go all the way back to God's covenant with Abram and Sarai, they are going to do what is required, and there were several things that were required of any Jewish parent of a male child in particular in this case, on the eighth day, the sacrament of circumcision would have been done, and then on the fortieth day after the birth, which would have been the first time the mother ritually would have been allowed to go to the Temple, they went to the Temple to offer these sacrifices that we read about in the verses you just read, Dave.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and the interesting thing is, Luke mentions specifically that they offered a pair of birds – two pigeons or two doves. Well, if you go back and actually read the prescriptions in Leviticus, which admittedly, not a lot of people do probably – those are the clean pages in most people's bibles...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they are not marked up much.

DAVE BAST

Right. The primary requirement was: Sacrifice an animal and a bird; but if you were poor – an animal was expensive – so if you were poor, it was acceptable to offer two birds in place of the animal.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is what they do here, and as we said in our program on Luke, the theme of the poor and the marginalized, and the invisible people of society – being God's kind of people – that is a key theme in Luke – and by mentioning just that little detail; they offered two birds; Luke is saying one of the reasons Jesus is going to identify with the poor once He starts His ministry is because He was poor Himself. He was not born into royalty; He was born to a couple of common folks.

DAVE BAST

Yes; there is a verse that I did not read, but it comes later in Luke 2 – verse 39: When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, then they went back on home to Nazareth in Galilee. And to me, that may be the real theme of this story and its emphasis on the details of the Law and the sacrifice. It tells us what kind of people Joseph and Mary were, as you just said: Devout, humble, poor people, in love with God and wanting to do everything according to His will; but it also suggests that right from the start Jesus perfectly fulfilled everything that the Law required; and one of the things that we are going to learn about the Lord Jesus is that He did it all. He was the second Adam, who did not stumble and fall; who did not disobey; who did not turn away; but He kept it all right down even to the ceremonial dots – He dotted the i's and crossed the t's...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus would end up being more than all that, but what Luke is telling us is He could not be less; and it is so important for us to remember that this is part of God's big story, that Jesus was a Jewish man... We often forget that. My friend, Frederick Dale Bruner, the Bible commentator, tells the story – perhaps a bit of a fable – but in World War II when Hitler was in charge of Germany and they were against the Jews and they didn't even want anybody with Jewish blood to be in the Christian Church; and so the story is told of a Christian church in Bavaria somewhere where the minister stood up in the pulpit and said: If there is anyone here with Jewish blood, you must get up and leave now. Nobody moved. So he repeated it: If there is anyone with Jewish blood, you must get up and leave the church now. And the story is told that the Christ figure on the cross got down...

DAVE BAST

Got up and left, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And walked out of the church. He was a Jewish person fulfilling the covenant that had been from old. This is the grand, grand story that was promised, and now it is being fulfilled, and we will hear that from the lips of Simeon in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and Scott, let's talk a little bit about this character, Simeon, who appears in the Temple as Joseph and Mary are bringing Jesus and making their sacrifices and fulfilling the Law.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He, along with the prophetess, Anna, who will be mentioned also a little more briefly at the end of this story in Luke 2 – Simeon, and also Anna, are such curious figures because I do not think there was anything in the Bible leading up to this point to make us expect that such a person would appear. All of a sudden, you find out – kind of from out of the blue in this case – that there is this old guy who has never been mentioned before in the Bible, but who had been told a long time ago – and apparently Anna had, too: You won't die until you lay your eyes on the Messiah. Why that happened we are not told. How he was singled out we are not told. Maybe he was a particularly righteous person or maybe he asked that of God once, I don't know, but all of a sudden, here he is. He knows he is not going to die until he sees the Messiah, and he finally does. I have sometimes wondered if he was a little surprised to find the little guy in diapers at the time. Maybe he expected to see the Messiah on a white stallion leading an army into battle; but whatever, he knew he would see the Messiah, and that day he did.

DAVE BAST

Very curious story. It is tempting to think that maybe he was a priest in the Temple – that is why he was there – although it does not say that. It just says he was a man and very old by this point. How did God tell him? Did he hear a voice? Like you said, we just do not know. The interesting thing about him... The one thing that we are told about him over and over is that he was full of the Holy Spirit. I think the Holy Spirit is mentioned about three times in just a few verses in connection with Simeon. Somehow, this person was graced with the Spirit; and if we think about that a little bit in terms of salvation history, we might recall that prior to Pentecost, the filling of the Spirit is a more unusual sort of thing for people to have. In the Old Testament, the Spirit kind of comes upon people for special purposes or reasons. It is not like He is a constant, continual presence...

SCOTT HOEZEE

So Simeon was singled out for something special...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; he has been chosen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is one of those... We said in our previous program, too, on Luke, that Luke did a lot of careful research. He himself said: I have carefully looked into everything. And you sort of have the feeling that Luke interviewed Mary, maybe across several days or weeks, and you can almost imagine Mary saying: Oh, by the way, did I ever mention to you Simeon? And Luke said: Who? Simeon. This old guy in the Temple – have I mentioned him? No, tell me about him. And then she tells the story that he was an old man and we are told he was awaiting the consolation of Israel; he was awaiting the comfort; and it reminds you of Isaiah 40: Comfort; comfort My people, says God. It reminds me of the Heidelberg Catechism: What is your only

comfort in life and in death? Simeon was looking for the ultimate comfort for God's people, and what would it be? That God Himself would come down here to save us.

DAVE BAST

To save us, absolutely; and so, he sings, too. We talked about all the singing that goes on in Luke 1 and 2. There are four great songs, and Simeon's is the *Nunc Dimittis* Now Dismiss, Lord – as I learned it years ago in the old version: Now let us thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. A light for the nations. And it is the glory of your people, Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is his song. Now he can die in peace, but he packs a lot in there, too; and he gives the hint. This is the glory of your people, Israel. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel – the comfort for Israel – but in his own song, he also has that line, it is also a light of revelation for the gentiles. Jesus is coming for everybody now. Salvation is going to be available to everybody; not just people from a certain line of heritage or birth. He is coming for everybody, and that is the fantastic, good news that he sings there; and he sings it as he holds the child. You know, if I were Mary, I would be... You know, when you are a first-time parent, you treat your children like...

Dave Bast: You are a little nervous, right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like eggs, like you can easily break them; so she hands Him over to this tottering old man whose eyes may have been covered with cataracts. She lets him hold the baby, and it is only then when he touches the Messiah that he sings this wonderful song, and he sees. He says... I wonder if he could see much of anything with those old eyes, back in the days before eyeglasses or cataract surgery, you wonder if he could see much of anything; but here he says he *sees* the fulfillment of everything that was promised. The Bible is all promise and fulfillment, and in this case, Simeon is all about fulfillment.

DAVE BAST

He sees it in prospect. He sees it in infancy. He sees it as a baby in his arms; and you know, a lot has to happen before that is going to be fulfilled; but as you mention that, that he is holding the child, a couple of months ago, Scott, our youngest granddaughter was baptized, and it was a great experience. We were there, of course, and I led in prayer during the service, but the pastor took the child in his arms to baptize, and then he walked out into the congregation, and we all sort of trailed along; and it was a visible sort of promise of salvation again for us. Because of that child we, not only, but our children, too, can claim the covenant promises of God and look for this same salvation, which will be for all the world. Simeon speaks of it in terms of light, a light for the nations – another theme that bridges from the Old Testament to the New Testament. I think he is thinking of Isaiah; you know, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light (on them the light has shone). He is thinking of what John will say: The true light that enlightens everyone has come into the world, and it has come all in this baby – in this child, and what He will become and what He will do. It has cosmic significance, but it starts here.

DAVE BAST

And I wonder sometimes, you know... It is so easy for us looking back to make assumptions about Bible characters, even Mary and Joseph. We sort of can assume, yes, well, everything that happens in the Bible happens inevitably and nobody is ever terribly surprised. I do wonder if Mary and Joseph were startled and surprised. They both know, even if nobody else does or believes them, this child had a miraculous origin. Joseph and Mary know that. Mary remembers what the angel Gabriel said, but you know, you go to the Temple just to do this regular thing that everybody who has a child does, and all of a sudden there are these two old people, and they say these amazing things. I would not be surprised if Mary and Joseph were speechless; looking back at their little kid, taking him home – oh, boy, I think His diaper needs to be changed, but they are looking at Him and saying: That is right. This is the One. He is the light of revelation to the whole world, that old man said. What a thing we have here in our little nursery.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. That is a great point. You know, sure, they had talked it over themselves. They knew they were to name Him Jesus, which means savior. The angel had told Mary He will be the Son of the most high. He will reign on the throne of David. That is all Messianic; but here comes this unexpected confirmation from an outside source; because, you know, I am sure they must have said: Could we have been dreaming, literally? Are we fooling ourselves?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Is this really happening?

DAVE BAST

Yes. Is it true or are we crazy? And no, no; here comes this man full of the Holy Spirit and this prophetess as well, who confirm He is the One.

But Mary, guess what? There is some bad news that goes with this too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He says something else.

DAVE BAST

Simeon is going to talk about that as well. We will look at it.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Following all of the details of the Christmas story, we are looking today at some of the after Christmas details Luke gives us in his second chapter. Particularly, we have looked at this man, Simeon, whom Joseph and Mary run into in the Temple when they go to do the standard 40 days after birth sacrifice for their child; and Simeon says amazing things, as we were just looking at. He points to the child, saying: He is the one; He is the light of revelation to the gentiles. He is going to bring salvation. Wonderful things, but he says one other thing. Listen to this:

³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed; ³⁵and a sword will pierce your own soul, too, [Mary].” (He is saying that to the mother.) A sword will pierce your soul, too. Uh oh.

DAVE BAST

The shadow of the cross falls over the child...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right here...

DAVE BAST

and His family right here; and you cannot escape it; you cannot avoid it. We are reminded of the pain that will be the means by which our salvation comes – pain obviously for Jesus Himself, supremely; but pain for his family; pain for his mother – a sword will pierce... And you know, it did not just happen at the cross. You see these little hints. Mary does not figure prominently in the rest of the Gospels. She is here and there – she appears, but she is not a main character. She is kind of on the periphery; but when she does appear, there is often this rather strange distance that comes between Jesus and her.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Isn't she sometimes called the *mater dolorosa*?

DAVE BAST

Yes, the mother of sorrows...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The mother of all sorrows; and it goes back to our previous program when we looked in Luke 1 at the annunciation, Gabriel's announcement to her, and we noted at that time that Gabriel came and said: Good news! You are highly favored with God, Mary. And Mary's first reaction was: Oh, no. Now what? She was troubled, and as we said at the time, troubled because she knew her Bible well. Most people who got greeted that way were in for a hard life. Being God's special, chosen person often led to hardship, persecution, suffering.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and part of Mary's suffering is Jesus is not really for her. He may be her firstborn son, and has that very special relationship to her, but He is born for all; He is born for us; and Mary has to kind of let go and give Him up. There is that curious thing that happens in John 2, the first miracle that Jesus does, He does in Cana; and Mary kind of comes to Him and says: Now, hey; take care of this. There is a problem. They have run out of wine. And Jesus says: What do you have to do with Me? My time is not yet here. He is almost like holding her at arms length, and a sword must have pierced her soul as she felt that and realized: Ah, yes, He has a bigger agenda.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there were other times in the Gospels, too. The family worried about Him; Jesus went off, you know. He probably worked as a carpenter for most of His adult life. He seemed pretty normal; but then the day came when He put down His tools, hung up His carpenter's apron, and went out on a preaching career, where He said all of these parables and sort of crazy things. And so, you have the story where Mary and some of His brothers come and they say: He is out of His mind. We have to take Him home and get Him out of sight. He is an embarrassment. And of course, what a terrible thing to have to think about your child; but then, right after that, one of the disciples comes and says to Jesus: Oh, your mom and brothers are here. And Jesus says: They are not my real family. You disciples are my real family. A sword pierced her soul yet again.

DAVE BAST

And then supremely, Mary the faithful disciple, through it all, through thick and thin, she stands with Him and serves, really, as a tremendous model of faith and submission, and she stands right next to the cross and sees Him die, and as that spear pierced His side, the sword pierced her soul...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The sword pierced her soul, even as Simeon had said.

DAVE BAST

And we have this sense that it is only through the suffering and death of Jesus that salvation will come to all; and so, there is that dark theme, and that leads into the other thing Simeon says: He is destined for the fall and rising of many. It is not universal good news because some people just won't stick it. They will not have Him. They will not accept Him or receive Him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot be neutral about who Jesus is and what He is going to say about Himself. Again, another C. S. Lewis line... C. S. Lewis and a lot of people in Church history have had no truck – no patience – for people who say: Well, of course, He was not God's Son or the Messiah, but Jesus was a good man. He was a good teacher, an interesting guy; but, no, no; Lewis said you are not allowed to be neutral because Jesus made too

many claims for Himself for you just to say He was a good teacher. If He was not the Son of God who had come to save the world and said the things He did, then He was as crazy as a man who claims to be a poached egg. You cannot be neutral about Jesus. You either rise with Him or you stumble over Him, even as Simeon said. He is either the cornerstone of the new foundation – the new building that God is building in the kingdom – or He becomes a stumbling block – a stone you trip on and fall flat on your face. Either way, Jesus is the deciding point of history.

DAVE BAST

Well, this child, said Simeon, is destined to cause the falling and rising of many, and to be a sign that will be spoken against; and He is spoken against, as you say; although in that famous passage Lewis says: Don't come with any of this patronizing nonsense that He is the good teacher. He didn't leave that option open and He didn't intend to. So, He is not that. That is not... So, a lot of people then say: Okay, forget it then. I will have nothing to do with this divine word incarnate savior who died for me and I have to trust Him in order to be saved? Forget it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ah, but you do; and that is why I like the last time we ever see Mary in the Bible. It is in the book of Acts, early, and then she just disappears, but what do we see Mary doing? She is in prayer with the other disciples. Jesus has ascended back to heaven. She is in prayer to her own son because she has become a believer; and that is the Good News we hope for at Christmas and at all times, to believe that Jesus is the Messiah; to go to Him in prayer, and to worship Him every day.

DAVE BAST

Amen! Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation, and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our programs relevant. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future groundwork programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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