

Sermon Christmas 1 2021

December 26, 2021

Luke 2:22-40

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

If you were with us yesterday, you might remember that I made the point about how I desire for you all to hear the lessons in the service and make connections between them, to understand why they're put together as they are. Today, I would add that I would love for you also to read to the Old Testament and see Jesus there, see how it is all in place that it would be fulfilled by Him. As I often say, to understand the Bible we have to remember that the Old Testament is the context for the new and the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. Today's lessons give us some of the clearest indications of that.

To be clear, I don't want to minimize a number of direct prophecies we've heard fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, especially from Isaiah, in this season of Advent and in these past two days. You know some of those, I'm sure. You know how Isaiah said the virgin would be with child. You know how it said that there would be this child called Immanuel. You can hear Handel's Messiah ringing in your head, "and His name shall be called, 'Wonderful Counselor,' Almighty God, 'The Everlasting Father,' 'The Prince of Peace.'" All of those are familiar things from the Old Testament pointing to this Jesus.

But in today's lessons you see a different aspect. First you see the promise to David. And I'm sure I've commented on this before, but I love this passage. Here David has this great and humble idea. He looks around at the lavish abode that are his dwellings and he understands that the Lord deserves something even greater. And so in a very pious desire, he goes to Nathan, the prophet, and he tells Nathan that he's going to move the Ark out of the tent of the tabernacle into a permanent building in a Temple. And of course, this is a good thing to want, and so Nathan gives him the thumbs up. But what does God say to Nathan? He says, **"Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"** In other words, He says to tell David that He didn't ask for this house. Instead, what's going to happen? **"The LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for**

my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” I love that! David wants to build God a house, but God says, “No, I am going to build you a house! And your house will last forever!”

Now, at first glance, it seems this is fulfilled by Solomon. Solomon is that offspring from David’s body who does build the Temple. But that’s not it. After all, Solomon died. That Temple doesn’t last. It’s destroyed by the Babylonians. Sure, there’s another. After that Temple is rebuilt with the aid of Cyrus after the Israelites return from their captivity in Babylon, it stands for hundreds of years. In fact, just before the life of Jesus it got a major renovation and was made even far grander than it had been as King Herod made it vastly greater. But of course, that temple too was destroyed. Yet the house of David stands forever in this Jesus who is of David’s body as well. Jesus the fulfillment of this.

But before we leave this topic of Jesus fulfilling this, it’s good to consider what we see in the Gospel lesson that connects to this. There in this lesson, Joseph and Mary bring Jesus into that Temple that Herod had made so grand. In fact, one has to wonder if God Himself used Herod’s own egotistical pursuit of recognition to prepare this Temple for the greatest glory that could be received, this God in human flesh presented there in the Lesson. Yes, just as the glory of the Lord first filled the tabernacle in the wilderness in the days of Moses, on this day that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple, the glory went into that Temple in a way that it had never been present before. In that body the fullness of the deity was pleased to dwell. And on that day it dwelt in that Temple.

Of course, as I mention God using Herod for this, we can’t but also acknowledge how He used the Law itself for it. As Luke mentions, the Law called for Mary and Jesus to be there. It said that the firstborn had to be redeemed. Just as God had spared the firstborn in the plague in Egypt for all of those who covered their doors in the blood of the Passover Lamb, so also they had to now be redeemed. They were to be sacrificed for. And Mary as the mother also had to present a sacrifice. She had to be purified of the uncleanness that came upon her in the birth of the child. And so all of this worked together to bring Jesus to the Temple.

Of course, who was there? Simeon and Anna. Is that also coincidence? Is it just happenstance that the day Mary comes, there happen to be two people who recognize who Jesus is as the fulfillment? Of course not. In fact, Luke even makes that point when he says that Anna was a prophetess and that Simeon was filled with the Holy Spirit. But why is this important? The Law said every testimony had to be established by the agreement of two or three witnesses. Now, obviously Mary and Joseph have witnessed this.

Joseph had the angel appear to him, and tell him Mary hadn't cheated. Mary had the knowledge that she was a virgin in addition to the appearance of the angel to her. Then you had all the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. In particular, you had the shepherds coming out of nowhere. I was thinking about that this week. Can you mothers imagine that? I can only imagine how that would have gone over if we were in the hospital and total strangers came into see the baby. Or if we went to church and these people we didn't know came and grabbed our child like Simeon did, holding the child in his arms. That wouldn't have been an easy circumstance.

But what did this serve? It was witness after witness showing that this child was in fact this Son of David fulfilling the Old Testament. It showed that God was working all of this to testify to the fact that as the child was brought into the world, and as He was brought to the Temple, there were His mouthpieces pointing out who Jesus was as the Messiah. All of this was working to fulfill the promises made to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, and to David, like I said Christmas Eve.

But what's this to you? Is this just a story? Is it just talking about a bunch of teaching from the Bible that happened two thousand years ago and longer? It can seem pretty abstract in that way, can't it? So what?

Well, first of all, it's good to remember that even though most of us likely aren't Jewish by blood, because we are grafted into the vine of God's people by faith, that history spoken to the Jews is our family history. I know a lot of people are interested in genealogy, and I can appreciate why. But here is our genealogy as Christians. It comes from the people of Old.

But second of all, as we that God fulfills these promises of the Old Testament, we see something notable in that. We see that He also fulfills His commands. In the Old Testament Law He tells us exactly what we have to do to inherit eternal life. That is, He tells us exactly what we have to do to get to heaven. He gives a ten part explanation to it: the Ten Commandments. In fact, He tells us "do this and you will live." Or as we see a number of times in the life of Jesus, people will come to Jesus and they'll say, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And He'll say, "What does the Law tell you?" That is, "What does God tell you in the Old Testament that you have to do?" And they summarize the Commandments perfectly: "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus repeats that, "Do this and you will live." But what's the realization? We haven't. We haven't loved God perfectly nor our neighbor. We've taken our eyes off of them and focused on our own selfishness first.

But that's where this matters. As God is bringing this Jesus into the Temple, testifying to who He is through Simeon and Anna; as Mary and Joseph are fulfilling that Law by taking Jesus to the Temple and performing the sacrifices, this is done so that all will be fulfilled for you. All the tiny aspects of the commands that you assume aren't that bad, or don't deserve hell, those are covered by the blood of this Lamb. Every piece of your failing to Love God and Neighbor is completed by the One who never faltered in His love of the Father, and in His willingness to give up His very life for you.

And the fact that God cares enough to fulfill the promises shows that as He also fulfills those commands in Jesus, He really cares enough for you save you and take you into His Kingdom. He doesn't want you to miss it, He wants you to heed His Word and trust in Him. He wants you there.

In fact, as Anna and Simeon were witnesses, He gives you witnesses as well. Obviously, there is the witness we have in the Bible. That tells us all about it. Also, you have pastors who bear witness to all of this for you too. He gives them that word that you would hear their testimony and believe. And then in John's first letter—not the Gospel, but the first letter—it says, **“This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”** We can understand that to say that there is the testimony of the Spirit given in that word, then there is the testimony of the water and the blood. That is the testimony spoken to you in Baptism: “Here Christian, in this water, know that you are joined to the One who has taken on a body like yours, died for you sin, and been buried that your sin is buried with Him. Know that He was raised to new life, that you too will be raised with Him.” And spoken to you with the Supper: “This is the cup of my blood, Christian, that blood pointed to by the blood of the animals in the Temple, the blood poured out for your sin on the cross.” Yes they aren't Anna and Simeon, but they still show you what God has done and does for you.

Hear, then, their witness and believe. Hear the Scriptures and see the unity. Know that this Christ in the Temple is the One foretold of old, the One whom God attended that you would be saved. Know that, and know the peace that Simeon Himself spoke of. Know that when you behold Him, you have the peace and the promise of His Kingdom. Amen.