

Advent 2025: Behind Enemy Lines, Luke 2:25-35, 12/21/25

As a pastor for nearly twenty years, I've done my fair share of baby dedications. It's always a sacred moment, and a joy for me to stand with parents who want to commit themselves and their child to the Lord.

Most of the time, baby dedications go beautifully. The baby is calm, cooperative... But sometimes... not so much. Sometimes the baby takes one look at me and immediately decides, *Nope*. Arms reach back for mom and dad. I've had babies try to eat my microphone, grab my face, I haven't had a spit up incident yet, but I'm realistic that my chances are high. But like I said, most of the time they go beautifully. Regardless of the child's mood, the most important thing that happens in that moment, is the sacred privilege of the dedication prayer over these children.

I pray for their future, that they would thrive in every way, that from an early age they would come to trust Jesus as their Savior, and that they would grow up to become resilient disciples, making an impact in our world. And I look forward to the day when I've been here long enough to watch those prayers being answered.

Today, we are going to go back 2000 years to the dedication of baby Jesus by his parents at the temple in Jerusalem. But before a priest can hold the baby and pray a word, a strange old man named Simeon takes Jesus into his arms and delivers an ominous prophecy about Jesus' future. While it's not the dedication that Joseph and Mary expected, it's the one that God in his sovereignty provides. Today we are going to enter this scene and discover what this prophecy means not only for Jesus, but for our lives and future 2000 years later.

We pick up the story just after the Charlie Brown Christmas scene- just after the angels, and the shepherds, and Jesus born in a manger, just a few weeks later. **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.

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),

24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Mary and Joseph, following the Mosaic Law, came to present their first born in the temple, accompanied by a sacrifice. Now the requirement was an offering of a lamb, however, if a family could not afford a lamb, the Law said instead they could offer two pigeons or two turtledoves or a partridge in a pear tree... Now in a sense, in beautiful irony, Joseph and Mary did bring their lamb, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They didn't know it at the time. But the fact that they had to bring two pigeons shows you is that the Messiah was not just born into humanity, but into poverty. And I want you to let that sink in for a minute. Here is the Lord of glory, here is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who dwells in the unfathomable riches of glory, being born to a poor family of low status, in a nowhere

town in Israel. If you are wondering if Jesus could possibly understand the human experience, your struggles in life, he does, he lived them for that very reason.

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 on him.

26 *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*

What do we know about Simeon from the Bible or history? This is it. This passage. He's obscure, but my sense is that he was likely an old man, who day after day, would sit near the temple waiting for what Luke calls the "Consolation of Israel." A devout Jewish prayer in that day was: "May I see the consolation of Israel." **Isaiah 40:1 "Comfort, oh comfort my people."** is how this messianic prophecy begins. Console or comfort, thus, the idea of "waiting for the Consolation of Israel" was simply a term that says he's waiting for the Messiah to be born who would bring deliverance, hope and salvation to Israel. But we also know that this man is very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned several times in these few verses. And he was given a very unique promise- that before he died, he would see the Messiah. Day after day he's waiting, probably in the temple courts and finally the day comes.

27 *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,

28 *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

29 *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

30 *For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*

32 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."*

Not only was Simeon led by the Spirit of God, he was interpreting the Word of God. Simeon is saying- "this child is the answer to the entire Old Testament story." He's the long awaited fulfillment and the proof that God has not abandoned His people, Israel's story reaches its climax in Jesus, producing the Messiah who blesses the world. When Simeon calls Jesus salvation and light for both Jews and Gentiles, he's interpreting the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9 that he has broken into the darkness and evil and bondage of the world to bring light and salvation and freedom. Just a beautiful dedication prayer.

Luke tells us in **verse 33, The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.** Which—of course they did. Any parent would. Up to this point, this dedication is going great.

Light. Salvation. Glory of Israel. These are the kinds of things you want written in the baby book. *"Our son: light of the world. Glory of Israel, Salvation. Very advanced for his age."*

But then Simeon keeps talking. **34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother..."**—and you can almost feel the room shift. Because what comes next hits very differently.

"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. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Whoa. Imagine being Mary and Joseph in that moment. Imagine if you brought your baby up here for a dedication, and I held your child out for everyone to see and said, *"Everyone wave—this child is going to grow up to be the most divisive person on the planet. Some people will love him, some will hate him, and he's going to reveal the absolute worst in people's hearts. And mom—just so you know—all of this is going to emotionally wreck you. Now... isn't he adorable?"* That is not how baby dedications usually go.

But Simeon, and the Gospel writer Luke, wants them—and us—to understand something crucial: this child didn't come to simply be admired and adored and sung about by the masses at Christmastime. He came to confront sin and evil, to call out the hypocrisy of the religious system, to show the world that dead religion is a dead end, Jesus came to be a fork in the road, the dividing line of human history.

Simeon wasn't some crazy old man, this accurately describes the 33 years of Jesus' life recorded in the gospels. He revealed what was really in the hearts of both the religious insiders and outsiders alike. He was beloved by those who saw him for who he was, and ruthlessly hated by those who rejected his true identity. In his final days, he would pierce the soul of his mother who had to watch her son suffer the agony of Calvary. His life, death and resurrection caused the spiritual rising or the falling of all who encountered him based on whether they accepted or rejected Jesus. Jesus became the ultimate dividing line, just as Simeon said he would.

That's as far as we're going to go in the passage today, because I want to talk about you and me today 2000 years later.

An old baptist preacher from a century ago, A.T. Robertson, once remarked on this passage—**"Jesus is the magnet of the ages. He draws some, he repels others."** That was certainly true in Jesus' day, but it's just as true 20 centuries later as well. He's beloved, honored, worshipped by millions, and he's hated, cursed and rejected by millions. No other historical figure in world history has been as polarizing as Jesus.

Why is that? Didn't he just preach love, acceptance, heal people, and teach people the golden rule? Yes, but Jesus also reveals what's really in our hearts, the stuff we don't want others to see. **Jesus is the dividing line of morality.** John 7:7 *The world hates me because I show that what it does is evil.* Who here just loves getting called out for their stuff. Fun isn't it? No, sin

loves to hide. We don't like having "come to Jesus" meetings. It rubs against our pride that thinks we are good enough. Jesus is a moral dividing line.

Why else is he so polarizing? Because **Jesus is the dividing line of eternity.** John 14:7 *I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me.* And a lot of people aren't going to like that- it feels too narrow, although it's open for everyone. It's going to challenge many people's religion and religious systems that they cling to, that they are a good enough person to get to heaven, they don't need Jesus.

Why else is he so polarizing? **Jesus is the dividing line of our priorities.** Luke 9:23 *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* And a lot of people won't like that because they want just enough Jesus to sprinkle on top of their lives, to retain ultimate control of their lives, but not give over the reins of our lives. We'll take the things about Jesus that we like, and discard the commands that go against our own priorities. We want to straddle the line but Jesus says I must be your ultimate priority. No straddling the line.

That's why Jesus is the magnet of the ages, the spiritual dividing line of human history and in our lives. So what about us? How does this Christmas child become a dividing line in your life today? Three Questions: First, for those of us who already follow Jesus-

Question #1- Where are you attempting to straddle the line with Jesus? Are there areas of your life that Jesus is asking for your allegiance, for your obedience, and you are hesitating, one foot in and one out? Maybe it's your priorities of how you spend your time, or your money. Maybe it's what you watch or listen to. A habit in your life you need to give over to him. Maybe it's an unwillingness to forgive someone in your life. In the early days of following Jesus for me, it was letting go of unhealthy relationships, it was giving Jesus the reins over my sexual life. But can I tell you, there are always going to be areas in our lives that we struggle to give him complete control over. For me, it's trying to control outcomes, instead of trusting the Lord for his will to be done. Jesus wants to be your ultimate priority, not because he wants to rip you off and control you like a puppet, but because he wants you to experience where the purpose-filled, abundant, joyous life really is, he wants to give you real freedom over your struggles here, and he wants you to experience the incalculable reward in eternity. There will never be someone who gets to those pearly gates and says, "You know, I should have lived a little bit more for me down there. I gave Jesus too much of my time, money, priorities."

Question #2 How is Jesus a magnet in your witness? Do you know we are called to be magnets for Christ? This is really important- Jesus and his message is polarizing for all the reasons that we just said. And Jesus also said that sometimes those who follow him will be hated, rejected, mocked, scorned because if they don't like Jesus and his message, they aren't going to like his followers. But let's make sure it's for the right reasons. Let some people reject us or mock us because they are repelled by our message, because we are following Jesus in his moral vision for the world, even when that is very unpopular and offensive to some. That may repel some. Jesus said it would. But make sure it's not because we are hypocritical, arrogant, judgmental,

angry, terrible listeners, and shut other people down. Those are wrong reasons to be disliked and that's not persecution, that's being a jerk. We are called to be honest and bold in our witness, but also to do so with gentleness and respect. To be loving, patient, merciful and gracious...the fruit of the Spirit.

But for every person that is *repelled* by our message, by our worldview, our way of life, just know that there is someone that is *compelled* by it. That the Holy Spirit is at work in drawing them in when they are watching your life, they see your hope, they see how you face pain, they are compelled by your prayer life and your sense of peace. The Holy Spirit is drawing them in by your words, and you don't know who may be searching at just the time that you enter into a spiritual conversation.

A couple months ago I officiated the wedding of my cousin and her new husband. A quick backstory- my mom was adopted and never knew if she had any siblings until about 6 years ago when she found out she has 5 sisters and a brother. DNA testing is wild. The majority of that side of my family are not Christians, and that's the wedding I'm at. So I struck up a conversation with my mom's youngest sister that I'm meeting for the first time, who is closer in age to me than my mom which was strange, and so I ask her the question that I always ask when I'm trying to move to a spiritual conversation- I said, "So do you have a faith background?" And she looked at me for a moment with a smirk, and said, "You know it's interesting that you ask me that, because I've been in this season of spiritual searching. Like there is something missing in my life and I have all kinds of questions. But I don't think I'm ready to talk about it yet with my pastor nephew that I just met." And we both kind of chuckled and moved on with the conversation to other subjects. But the next day, after the wedding and after some liquid courage, she comes and finds me, and she starts up the spiritual conversation again, asking me all kinds of skeptical questions, telling me about her past experiences with religion. And she asked me how I became a Christian, I had the privilege of sharing my whole testimony and the gospel with her. And I could see in her eyes, there was a longing, but also spiritual warfare going on, a battleground in her soul. But the door to ongoing spiritual dialogue was opened, I just reached out to her this week to restart the conversation. Pray for my Aunt Anne...

We are called to be magnets for Christ. Now, you might not stand up in the middle of the HS cafeteria and say, "Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life." But you can lead your volleyball team in a prayer in Jesus' name. You can wear a Christian shirt or bracelet that provokes questions, you can bring your Bible to work and put it on your desk, you can ask for prayer requests on your social media, you can invite your friends and neighbors to Christmas Eve. How are you being a magnet for Jesus, drawing people to see Jesus for who he is?

Now let me talk to the seeker, the person coming here today with questions about God, about religion, or maybe you are at arms length with Jesus.

Question #3 What are you doing with the "Magnet of the ages?" Are you being drawn, or repelled? Listen, my question isn't "Is religion drawing you or repelling you?" My question isn't "Are Christians or religious people drawing or repelling you, that's another sermon." My

question is Jesus himself drawing you or repelling you? Now here's what is amazing about Jesus. From Jesus' side- the answer is clear. He's drawing you in, he wants a relationship with you. He says in John 12 that he draws all people to himself. In Matthew 11 he says, "Come to me all who are weary and anxious and I will give you rest." He says in Revelation 3:20 "I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." A beautiful metaphor for a personal relationship. He's drawing you today. He's been whispering to you, and watching over you with patient love your whole life. The fact that you are here is proof of that. In fact he has your whole life.

How are you responding? Let me show you what it looks like to respond to Jesus, in fact it was in the Luke 2 passage we read, did you see it?

28 Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: 30 "my eyes have seen your salvation." What had his eyes just seen? The son of God, Jesus, that's the salvation he's talking about. Many people think that salvation is in trying to follow the golden rule, or obeying the 10 commandments, or being religious. That's not what Simeon said.

1 John 5:11-12 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. Can it be any simpler?

And salvation comes to us when we do with Jesus what Simeon did. Took him in. He drew close to him. Trusted him for salvation personally. The most important thing we can do is to make sure we are "a Simeon" before we leave.

Salvation isn't something you do, it's Someone you know. When you know Christ personally, and your sins have been forgiven by him, you don't do anything. He did it for you. When you know that One, and have a relationship with that One, that's salvation. Salvation isn't something you do, salvation is Someone you know.