



# *Anticipated*

Jesus is the promised Messiah.

## LUKE 2:25-38

This time of year is filled with anticipation. We might have expectations for receiving a particular gift, for the people we will see, or the activities in which we will participate. No doubt, some of the things we have anticipated meet our expectations and some do not. In today's lesson, the anticipation of the Messiah did not disappoint two people who had waited for His birth.

**What do you anticipate most during the Christmas season? Does it usually fulfill your expectation or leave you wanting?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **LUKE 2:21-38**

Prophecy had a rich tradition in Old Testament times. Moses spoke prophetically to the people of God, and messianic expectations included a Messiah who would be a prophet like Moses (Deut. 34:10). Prophets like Deborah (Judg. 4:6-7) and Samuel (1 Sam. 3:20; 7:6,15) helped conquer and settle the land of Israel. Prophets such as Elijah and Elisha guided the kings by giving both welcome and unwelcome advice to them. Prophets continued to deliver God's message to kings and others throughout the time of the united kingdom, divided kingdom, exile, and resettlement.

Prophets experienced a call from God and received a message from Him—sometimes through direct revelations, visions, or dreams. Sometimes their work was foretelling the future; at other times it involved forthtelling God's message for that exact moment.

Prophets played a foundational role in the early church. God gifted some as prophets to deliver His message (1 Cor. 12:28-31). It was on the foundation of the apostles and prophets that God built His church (Eph. 2:20). The activity of the prophets in the early church included predicting events (Acts 11:28; 20:23; 27:22-26) and announcing judgments (Acts 13:11; 28:25-28). These prophetic insights were not to glorify the prophet but to result in missionary efforts (Acts 13:1-3). Prophecy was not to be blindly accepted but evaluated by the church (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20-21).

Because prophetic activity was silenced between the testaments, the early church saw the coming of Jesus as the in-breaking of the Spirit's work. The angel's announcements to Zechariah and Mary resulted in them prophesying (Luke 1:46-79). It was in this context that a prophet and prophetess in Jerusalem encountered Jesus and prophesied that He was the promised Messiah.

**Read Luke 2:25-38, noting any similarities in the two encounters with Jesus. How does their commitment to God impact their response to seeing Jesus?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## ANTICIPATED (LUKE 2:25-27)

**<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,**

### VERSES 25-26

Luke introduced two prophetic voices in the story of Jesus, and neither is known outside of the text of the Gospel. The first of these figures was a man named **Simeon**. He appears as an ordinary man with an extraordinary vision of what was occurring in his time. The text refers to Simon as **righteous and devout**. The first term emphasized that he was a man of high moral standards. He was an honorable man who could be trusted, making him an excellent character witness to those who took the promise of the Messiah seriously. The second term, **devout**, indicated reverence or respect that would cause a person to fear God. Simeon was a man who took his religious responsibilities and beliefs seriously, and it was to him that God revealed a prophetic word about the birth of His Son.

Luke revealed three interesting facts about Simeon. First, he was **waiting for the consolation of Israel**. The Greek word for *consolation* was the same root word as the word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit was the One called alongside to bring comfort and encouragement. Simeon was looking for that day when the Spirit was poured out upon the people of God to bring them comfort and encouragement. He was looking for the inauguration of the Messianic age, when Messiah would come and bring deliverance to Israel. A second characteristic of Simeon was that **the Holy Spirit was upon him**. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on a few selected people (Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 16:13). After Pentecost, He indwelt all believers permanently (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 3:16). The presence of the Spirit in Simeon was Luke's way of indicating that Simeon had a reliable

testimony because it was inspired by the Spirit. The third characteristic of Simeon was he would not die until he **had seen the Lord's Christ**.

Israel had longed for a Messiah for thousands of years. They expected a prophet like Moses, through whom God would establish a covenant with His people (Deut. 18:15-19; Jer. 31:31). This Messiah would open the eyes of the blind, heal the sick, and set captives free (Isa. 61:1-2). He would extend the rule of David and even exceed his importance (Ps. 110:1-4). Year after year passed with no Messiah, but the people kept their hopes alive. Simeon had the assurance that his eyes would see the Messiah.

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### **BIBLE SKILL: Review Bible commentaries.**

Review Bible commentaries on Luke 2:25 and 38, paying particular attention to comments on “Israel’s consolation” and “the redemption of Jerusalem.” Review other Bible passages identified in the commentaries. Write a summary of what you discovered and how these two phrases are connected.

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### **VERSE 27**

Only by following **the Spirit** would Simeon be in the right place at the right time to have an encounter with Christ. The Spirit led him to the **temple**. The purification rites for a child would have occurred in the temple’s courtyards.

The text refers to both Joseph and Mary as Jesus’ **parents**. Luke had explained that Jesus was born of Mary as a virgin, but Joseph was recognized as the adoptive father. Jesus’ parents brought Him to the temple **to do for him according to the custom of the Law**. This process is summarized in Luke 2:21-24. The child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth and then named (Luke 2:21). For the next thirty days the mother and child went through days of purification where

they were set apart from the temple. However, when those days ended the child was brought back to the temple for dedication, and a sacrifice was made in the temple. It was on this specific day that the Holy Spirit led Simeon to this specific place where he would encounter Jesus.

**How does trusting in God's promises help a person endure the daily grind of life and time?**

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## **RECOGNIZED** (LUKE 2:28-35)

**<sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”**

### **VERSES 28-32**

As Simeon saw the answer to God's promise arrive at the temple, **he took him up in his arms** and **blessed God**, acknowledging that God had fulfilled His promise to keep him alive until the birth of the Messiah.

By beginning his praise with **now**, Simeon acknowledged the importance of the moment. God had fulfilled His promise to send the Messiah and had fulfilled His promise to let Simeon see the Messiah. The word **Lord** describes a sovereign who had absolute control and authority over a **servant** or slave. Simeon expressed that God could now dismiss His servant **in peace**. He could die a happy man because God's promises had been fulfilled in his lifetime. He further declared that his eyes had seen God's **salvation**. Zechariah had noted that God raised up a “horn of salvation” (Luke 1:69), and Simeon also sensed that God had sent a Savior into the world, whom he held in his arms.

The next portion of Simeon's blessing emphasized the scope of Jesus' salvation. He declared that God had **prepared** this salvation **in the**

**presence of all peoples.** His blessing echoed Isaiah 52:10, “The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” God was not saving the world in secret or hiding His plan from human sight. Simeon was a witness to the coming of Jesus to save the world, and the prophet blessed God for that privilege. Ahead of his time, Simeon foresaw that the ministry of Jesus was **a light for revelation to the Gentiles.** Salvation was more than the fulfillment of Israel’s nationalistic hopes; it was a light revealing God’s desire to reach the nations with His gospel. The salvation of Jesus was not exclusive to the Gentiles but was **glory** to the people of Israel. God had chosen them to be a blessing to the nations (Isa. 49:6), and they had fulfilled that as Jesus came into the world, born of a Jewish woman. Their glory was in God and in Christ.

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### **KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father***

God is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Isa. 64:8).

### **VERSES 33-35**

Joseph and Mary **marveled** at what was being said about their child. How could they be amazed in light of all they had already seen? They had heard messages from angels, encountered shepherds who praised their child, and knew in their hearts about the virgin birth, but to hear the blessing Jesus would be to both Jew and Gentile left His parents in awe.

Simeon then **blessed** Joseph and Mary by speaking a word of prophecy to them, specifically to Mary. Jesus would be a watershed, dividing those who **fall** from those who rise. The word **fall** occurs elsewhere to describe the house that was built on the sand and fell to ruin (Matt. 7:27). The word **rising** is the word generally used to describe a **resurrection**. This was the dilemma created by the arrival of Jesus. Those who followed Him would be destined to a resurrection, but those who did not follow Him would be destined to collapse and fall. Jesus would be the **sign that is opposed**, the dividing line between those who believe and those who do not.

Simeon also revealed that the coming of Christ would cost Mary. He said that **a sword** would **pierce** her **own soul**. This was probably

a reference to the sorrow Mary would experience in seeing Jesus rejected and crucified. Jesus would bring a dividing line between those who believe and those who do not, but Mary would pay a different price as she watched her own child die on a cross.

**How does Christ divide and unite people at the same time?**

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### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Simeon's words of praise in Luke 2:29-32 are traditionally known as the *Nunc Dimittis*, Latin for "now dismiss."

### **SHARED** (LUKE 2:36-38)

**<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.**

### **VERSES 36-37**

Luke continued to emphasize the renewal of prophecy at the coming of the Messianic age as he introduced **Anna**. This is not the only time a woman prophesied in the New Testament. Philip's daughters were designated as prophetesses also (Acts 21:8-9). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, Joel had predicted that God would pour out His Spirit upon all people, and both men and women would prophesy (Joel 2:28).

Luke identified Anna by several characteristics. Her father was **Phanuel**, a name that corresponded with the place where Jacob had "seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30). This is the only occurrence of his name in the New Testament, but Luke emphasized that he was from the tribe of **Asher**. This credentialed her as a legitimate Jew who



waited for the coming of the Messiah. Luke also noted that she was **advanced in years**, noting that she was a **widow until she was eighty-four** after having lived with her husband for **seven years**. Scholars debate whether she was a widow for eighty-four years or whether that was her age at the current time. If it were the former, she would have been over 100 years old. The clearer reading of the text would suggest the older age for Anna. The aged widow was waiting for the coming of Messiah and was a trustworthy, reliable source of this prophecy. Luke also noted that Anna **did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day**. This may indicate she was at the temple as many hours as it was available, giving her devotion to the Lord through prayer and through fasting.

**How does the description of Anna make her a credible witness?  
What qualifies people to be credible witnesses for Jesus?**

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### VERSE 38

Anna the prophetess, upon recognizing that the Messiah had come, did two important things. First, she **began to give thanks to God**. Luke used a rare word for thanksgiving in this passage. It was a word based on the root of *confess*. Her thanksgiving was a mixture of thanksgiving and confession at the same time. She was thanking God for sending Messiah and confessing that He was indeed the Messiah.

The second action that Anna took was to **speak of Jesus**. She spoke her prophetic words to those who **were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem**. Part of the Messianic expectation was that Jerusalem would finally receive from God the comfort for which it longed. Isaiah 52:9 looked forward to this: “Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.” Simeon had called this “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Both were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. With this conviction, Anna began speaking to others about Christ and sharing the redemption that is found in Christ alone.



# APPLY THE TEXT

- God’s promises bring purpose in this life.
- Gentiles and Jews find redemption in Jesus.
- Believers must tell others that redemption is found in Jesus Christ alone.

**How does faith in Jesus Christ bring purpose to your life? How did your purpose in life change after you encountered Christ?**

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**Who do you know that may feel excluded or outside the possibility of knowing Jesus? What action can you take to help them feel welcomed?**

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**As a group, brainstorm ways you can be involved together in sharing the story of salvation in Jesus Christ. What are some practical ways that God can use your group to lead neighbors to Christ?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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