

Luke 2:22 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"^[a]), 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."^[a]

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. 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^[a] 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."

³³ The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹ "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"^[a] ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

8:00am Gospel writers have very clear aims for what they include and what they ignore.

Concerning Jesus early life, Matthew wants us to know about Joseph and the dreams, about the wise men visiting Bethlehem and the escape to Egypt. His purpose is explicitly to tie Jesus' story into the story of the nation of Israel...Jacob and his sons escaped famine and death in Egypt...Jesus escapes Herod and certain death in Egypt.

None of that is of concern to Luke, he doesn't even refer to the time spent in Egypt.

Luke is concerned to show us that Mary and Joseph were devout Jews and did everything for Jesus just as the law of Moses required.

Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day.

After 40 days Mary came to the temple for the purification rites after giving birth to a male child.

Jesus was presented to God in the temple

Jewish boys had a Bar-Mitzvah at age 12 and were then expected to attend the three great festivals OR if they lived a long way away then at least attend Passover.

Whatever else happened later, Luke is keen to show that Jesus was brought up firmly within the Jewish faith and by devout Jewish parents.

We have a lovely scene where the devout Mary and Joseph meet the even more devout elderly Simeon and Anna.

Then we have the following story some 12 years later of Jesus coming with family and friends for the Passover and

staying in the temple listening, asking questions exploring matters of faith and apparently those around him were amazed at his understanding and answers.

I know this is meant to show us a picture of Jesus exploring and growing deeper into his faith but I'm afraid I'm on the side of Mary and Joseph who searched for him for THREE DAYS!

Katherine and I once lost sight of our youngest child at Cadbury World for about 2 minutes and they were the longest 2 minutes of our lives.

So, what do we make of the scripture today?

Let's accept what Luke is showing us – Jesus was brought up firmly within the Jewish faith. Whatever happened later wasn't because his parents were radicals or heretical or lackadaisical...in fact what happened later was perfectly in keeping with Jewish prophecy and expectation.

Good to know. But so what? Our understanding about Jesus Jewishness is affirmed, what difference does that make to us?

I think all five of today's characters have a lesson to teach us, should we be mindful to take note.

A young Jewish couple dutifully following their faith and doing all that is right...but more than that. Mary and Joseph are both open to the work of God – for Joseph via dreams and for Mary via an angels visit.

Can we learn from them? To take the duties of faith responsibly and also be open to the impulse of the Spirit when the unusual is asked of us?

Simeon is a remarkable man of faith who by the work of the Holy Spirit has come to know he will see the Messiah before he dies. Moved by the spirit he comes to the temple and sees the infant Jesus.

Can we learn from him?

Are we able to wait on God and join in praying the kingdom into being? What might the Lord reveal to us of his plans that we help by praying into fruition.

Anna is a woman whose consolation has been her faith and through whom God speaks by prophetic word. She affirms all Simeon says.

Can we learn from her?

However blessed we are with homes, families, friends, interesting work to do, finances to provide the necessary – true fulfilment, joy and peace is rooted in Christ. The bible speaks of God being a jealous God. Like any lover, he wants to be the beloved in your life and will challenge when we place ourselves at the centre – by which I mean we place our own desires at the centre.

The closer our walk with God, the more open to him, the greater the possibility that we speak with the Spirits authority and wisdom, the prophetic word.

And finally Jesus. Can we learn from him?

I would hope so! But the lesson I think is that he took responsibility for his faith life. He didn't just go with the institutional flow, he owned his faith, it was personal. It puts me in mind of two of my favourite saints. Saint Aidan, who followed the monastic routines and devotions, but who would take himself off to inner Farne to spend time alone with God. The monastic routine wasn't enough.

And Brother Lawrence who found the worship rituals of the monastic life to be virtually irrelevant to his spiritual life and only did them through obedience. His passion was to spend every moment consciously aware of the presence of God and the institution didn't help much.

Of course I'm opening myself up for someone saying "yes, church worship isn't helping me much either!"

I hope we do and I hope we can...but corporate worship is no substitute for owning and developing your relationship with Christ. That presents us with a challenge.

What might you and I do to take our faith further in 2025?

Retreats / bible reading notes / lectio 365 / home groups / study courses / a new pattern of devotions each day / replacing secular music with worship music for some of the day / silence / stillness / contemplative prayer / Morning prayer (you will be very welcome) / spiritual direction / how about one minute mindfulness!

Let us pray.

Lord, you have my heart – and I will search for yours. Jesus, take my life and lead me on.

Guide us Holy Spirit as we seek to go further and deeper in faith. Increase our faith we pray, for the sake of your kingdom and your glory. Amen

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 2 Feb 2025