

Jesus' Identity Confirmed at the Temple

Luke 2:21-40

- A. Jesus' presentation at the temple (2:21-24).
- B. Jesus' identity confirmed by Simeon (2:25-35).
- C. Jesus' identity confirmed by Anna (2:36-38).
- D. The family returned to Nazareth (2:39-40).

A. Jesus' presentation at the temple (2:21-24).

1. (vs. 21) “And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision” or “so that he could be circumcised” (LEB); the summary statement in the ESV is excellent: “And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised” probably in Bethlehem – as a Jewish male baby under the Law (Gal. 4:4) in accordance with the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:3) as also happened with John the Baptist (Lk. 1:59). The enemies of Christ usually try to destroy His efficacy in two ways: 1) robbing Him of His humanity, 2) robbing Him of

1. (cont.) His deity. The docetic Gnostics said that He wasn't really human; He only appeared to be human so that no one would ask questions (R.T. Kendall). Well, if Jesus were not human, then He could not die. If He could not die, then clearly there was no death on the cross to pay for our sins and thus no salvation. Moreover, He had to be God in order for His death to have the value to pay for our sins. Of course, Jesus was all of God and all of man in one person and thus He could and in fact did pay for our sins (Heb. 2:14). If anyone were inclined to doubt His humanity, all

1. (cont.) they needed to do was interview those who carried out His circumcision. They could easily attest to the reality that Jesus did not merely seem to be human. Circumcision “shows Jesus’ identification with John specifically, and with humankind generally. Jesus’ name was very significant, meaning ‘Yahweh is salvation.’ God specified it before His conception as He had done for John. Prophecies about John’s future followed his circumcision immediately, but they occurred later for Jesus, namely at His presentation in the temple (vv. 22–24)” (TC). But

1. (cont.) before that, “His name was *then* called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb” (Mt. 1:21, 25; Lk. 1:31).
2. (vs. 22) “And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed,” a period of 33 days for males as it says in Lev. 12:4, “they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.” God commanded in the Law of Moses in a special sense that every firstborn “both of man and beast; it belongs to Me” (Ex. 13:2b). This One, God’s “beloved Son” (Lk. 3:22) was unique.

3. (vs. 23) Luke gave the OT reason for this: “(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD’)” (Ex. 13:2, 12; Num. 3:13; 8:17).
4. (vs. 24) This followed: “and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, ‘A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.’” Luke made nothing of this but theirs was the offering of the poor. A lamb was to be brought but if “she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons” (Lev. 12:8).



B. Jesus' identity confirmed by Simeon (2:25-35).

1. (vs. 25) In Luke's effort in "having investigated everything carefully from the beginning" (1:3), he discovered some remarkable things, including this man Simeon: "And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him." "Righteous (δίκαιος – dikaios)" also describes Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:6). "Devout (εὐλαβῆς – eulabēs)" or "God-fearing" describes Ananias whom God sent to see the recently

1. (cont.) born-again Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 22:12) and also that one in pursuit of God, Cornelius, in Ac. 10:2. In addition the text here says that he was “looking for the consolation of Israel,” that is, the comfort (παράκλησιν – paraklēsín), that is, the “**lifting of another’s spirits, *comfort***” (BDAG); here, “In an eschatological sense...(i.e., Messianic salvation; see Is. 40:1; 61:2),” (BDAG) that is, salvation for the nation of Israel, only fully realized in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth in person. Finally, the text says, “and the Holy Spirit was upon him,”

1. (cont.) meaning something like, “he was full of the Holy Spirit,” so that he was in a position to receive revelation directly from God (Lk. 1:15, 41, 67).
2. (vs. 26) “And,” not surprisingly, “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”
Similar to the apostle Paul in Gal. 1:12, he had not “received it from man, nor was” he “taught it, but” he “received it through a revelation,” in Simeon’s case, of the Holy Spirit. So, Simeon *knew* that he would not die physically before seeing the Lord’s Christ,

3. (cont.) that is, the Messiah, who was the consolation of Israel (vs. 25). In Simeon's time, the Holy Spirit still revealed *directly* to people. That is no longer the case. We learn all that we need to know from the written revelation of God in His word, the Bible, the only book of that sort that God ever wrote. In it, we find everything necessary for life and godliness (2Pt. 1:3).
4. (vv. 27-28) I am inclined to think that Simeon had an inkling that something special was about to happen that day because "he came in the Spirit," that is, he was specially under the control and direction of the

4. (cont.) Spirit, “when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,” and apparently, he *immediately* recognized Him for who He was and, “then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God,” that is, “he spoke well of God,” “and said,”

5. (vs 29) “Now Lord, let Your bond-servant depart in peace, according to Your word,” (mng. God’s special revelation to him in vs. 26). Simeon realized that it was time for him to depart this world and go home similarly to Paul (2Tim. 4:6) and Peter (2Pt. 1:13-15).

6. (vv. 30-32) Simeon plainly stated the reason for his soon departure, the prophetic word intended personally for him had been fulfilled: “For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” When Simeon saw “the Lord’s Christ” (vs. 26b), he had indeed seen His “salvation” or the means of individual spiritual salvation from sin and corporate salvation of the nation of Israel as in the expression “thus all Israel will be saved” (Rm.

6. (cont.) 11:26). But though it was not well understood at the time, this salvation was intended for “all peoples,” including, “the Gentiles,” something that Luke emphasized since he *was* one. So, this salvation was intended to be “worldwide, not just for Israel (cf. Ps. 98:3; Isa. 52:10). Luke mentioned the fact that Jesus would provide salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews many times.”

7. (vs. 33) “And His (legal, cf. 3:23) father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.” Perhaps the scope of the salvation their Son would bring was beyond anything that had crossed their minds. So, TC says, “Mary and Joseph understood that Jesus was the Messiah. However they had evidently not connected some of the Old Testament revelation about Messiah to which Simeon referred with Jesus’ ministry. Perhaps they understood Messiah to be mainly a political leader as was the view of most of their contemporaries. God

7. (cont.) used a stranger (Simeon ed.) to inform them of their Son's significance for the Gentiles.”
8. (vv. 34-35) “And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’” Two responses to this Child would happen. Some would believe and rise; others would not believe and fall. Both responses revealed hearts. Mary would experience anguish at the unbelief.

D. Jesus' identity confirmed by Anna (2:36-38).

1. (vs. 36) Luke transitions quickly to the last witness to Jesus' identity at Jerusalem. "And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher," clearly Jewish. TC says "Anna" is equivalent Hanna. As a prophetess she received messages from God for people. Prophetesses were common in the Bible (cf. Ex. 15:20; Jg. 4:4; 2Kg. 22:14; Neh. 6:14; Is. 8:3; Ac. 2:17; 21:9; 1Cor. 11:5), but there are none today because the gift of prophecy has been done away (1Cor. 13:8-10) so, there are no

1. (cont.) prophets either, nor are preachers prophets. Apparently, Anna was elderly, “advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,” at which point her husband had passed away.
2. (vs. 37) Anna “then” lived on “as a widow to the age of eighty-four,” her age at the time of Luke’s writing. Instead of wallowing in self-pity or bemoaning her plight or pursuing a life of wonton pleasure, “She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.” That was commendable then

2. (cont.) and it is also commendable in the church age (1Tim. 5:5-10). Paul called such ladies, “widows indeed” (1Tim. 5:3), and they could be put on a list for church support. I believe that in a similar way, Anna would have received support via temple offerings.
3. (vs. 38) As a prophetess, apparently having received supernatural revelation that this infant, Jesus, was indeed the Messiah, “At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the

3. (cont.) redemption of Jerusalem,” and ultimately, Israel. See the same metonymy (a figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole) in Is. 52:9. As before in Lk. 1:68-71, “Redemption here speaks of political and spiritual liberation for the nation.” “Redemption” here is essentially equal to Simeon’s “consolation of Israel” in Lk. 2:25.

D. The family returned to Nazareth (2:39-40).

1. (vs. 39) “When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.” Joseph and Mary were godly, Law keeping Jewish young people who did what the Law commanded. The Law is about *doing* (Gal. 3:12). The LEB says, “And when they had completed everything according to the law of the Lord.” They did what they knew they needed to do to be in compliance with the Law. So, “they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.” About 65 mi.

1. (cont.) north of Jerusalem.
2. (vs. 40) “And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” As Al Valdés wrote, “These statements do not militate against the deity of the Child. Rather, His perfect responses to the diverse situations of life—as one Person with two natures (simultaneously perfect God and true Man yet without sin)—resulted in the only perfect human personality development ever.” Growing and becoming strong is physical development. Increasing

2. (vs. 40) in wisdom is spiritual development in His humanity. That same sort of thing that we have in Lk. 2:52.

Conc.

All of the events pointed to in these texts came about because Joseph and Mary were keeping the Law of Moses. That is perfectly fine; the Law was still in effect. So, he underwent the rite of circumcision (Lk. 2:21). Then the days of Mary's purification were completed and they traveled to the temple to make the appropriate offering (2:22-25). That's where they encountered the remarkable Simeon (2:26-35) and also, Anna, (2:36-38). Finally, they went home to Nazareth (2:39-40; Mt. 2:23).