

# THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Derrick C. Brown



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## Luke 2:22–40 ESV

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Luke the Evangelist around AD 55–60. This is the chronicle of the Presentation of Our Lord, occurring forty days after His birth, as was the custom of the Jews. This narrative is found only in Luke’s Gospel account.

<sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

- The laws of purification after childbirth stated that on the eighth day after a son was born, he was to be circumcised. Thirty-three days later, the child was to be brought to the priest serving at the Temple. (Leviticus 12:1–8).
- As prescribed in the Law (Exodus 13:2, 12), the firstborn, if a male, was to be set aside (consecrated) to the LORD. In Jesus, we see this Law fulfilled, for He is the Holy One of God. (John 6:69).
- Joseph and Mary, offer the alternative sacrifice for purification prescribed in the Law (Leviticus 12:8). Yet, behold, they present Jesus, the True Sacrifice, for a far greater purification – the payment for sin. For Jesus is the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world. (John 1:29).

<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.

- “Simeon is a righteous member of Israel. He is Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. ‘Spirit’ is used three times in 2:25–27 to accent the revelatory character of Simeon’s words.” (Just, *Luke* 1:1–9:50, 119).

<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.

- Scripture does not indicate Simeon’s age; he clings to the promise that before death, he would see, with his very own eyes, the 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

- The promise made to Simeon finds its fulfillment. As with all prophecy, Christ is the fulfillment.
- Simeon holds and beholds Jesus, the Promised One of God. Rightly does he give thanks. He cannot contain his joy.

<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.”

- True consolation (see v. 25 above) comes in the peace of God. Simeon held and beheld the One who would broker the peace between God and man with His atoning sacrifice, that is: His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. (*Small Catechism*, Second Article).
- Though Jesus is but forty days old, Simeon’s eyes, by Grace, are opened to see the salvation of the Lord
- The incarnation and nativity were not by chance. All had be foreseen and prepared from the foundation of the world.
- Jesus’ death, and the salvation it would purchase, is not limited to the Jews, but freely offered to all peoples.
- Verses 29–32 form the *Nunc Dimittis* (LSB 199), the song the Faithful sing after receiving Christ in His very Body and Blood.

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- Verses 29–32 form the *Nunc Dimittis* (LSB 199), the song the Faithful sing after receiving Christ in His very Body and Blood.

<sup>33</sup> **And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.**

- “The patriarch Simeon steps up, even though by virtue of age he can scarcely see his way, and with penetrating clarity of discernment recognizes and praises this child as the Savior and Light of the World. All emperors, kings, and sovereigns are mere darkness, but this child is the Light of the World. All the world is subjugated under death and damnation, but through this child the world will obtain salvation. This child, in short, is the one whom the prophets foretold. The words of the Evangelist are very apt, but Simeon, no doubt, has fine-etched them. It was a sermon, says the Evangelist, that caused the child’s father and mother to marvel about the child. The thought that he was to be a light unto the Gentiles was not understood clearly from the words of the angels until Simeon spoke.... How could this little child be the Savior and Light of the World when he had nothing but ordinary swaddling clothes and his mother had scarcely a farthing in her purse. No doubt the rest of the people would have disdained the words of aged Simeon as though he were merely beating the wind. But Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said of the child.” (Luther, *House Postils*, First Sunday after Christmas: First Sermon–1531).

<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.”**

- “What did Simeon mean by these words? He meant, ‘Dear Mary, people will stumble at and take offense at your Child. They will fall and rise up, curse and speak against Him, and slander and condemn His words, works, ways, and life.’ ” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 43).
- “Not a physical sword, but rather anguish and sorrow. In other words, he said, ‘You will meet with anguish and distress because of this Child. They will persecute Him from infancy to death, slander His teaching, curse His life, and finally put Him to death, and you will be made to see these things with your eyes, and hear them with your ears. This will be a sharply cutting sword (Hebrews 6:12) to your heart.’ ” (Ibid).

<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.**

- The good works in [Anna] are praised. So why do preachers reject them? True Christian good works are not rejected, only false confidence in works. Thus the works-righteous cannot defend their cause with [Anna] here. If they will look at it properly, they will find that this [Anna] is not justified by her works but only by faith. The tree was good, so it brought forth good fruit. The person was godly and believing, so all that she did was good. Luke calls her a prophetess full of the Holy Spirit, like the priest Simeon also. First the fountain must be regarded, then what flows from the source. Scripture does not call any work good unless it flows from a believing heart. God only looks at the works of believers (Jeremiah 5:3). The works of unbelievers He does not regard (Genesis 4:5). [Anna] was a godly virgin, a godly wife, a godly widow: in all three roles she exercised her fitting works in faith and fear of God. Let every Christian do likewise, attend to his calling, and do in faith what is committed to him, and he will be pleasing to God.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 44).

<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.**

- Like Simeon, Anna gives thanks to God that He has sent salvation and redemption in the Person of Jesus.

<sup>39</sup> **And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.**

- Fulfilling all that was required by the Law here, Jesus returns to Nazareth.

<sup>40</sup> **And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.**

- Christ grew “in a natural manner like other men with respect to reason, strength, and wisdom. That is, the older and taller He grew, the more reasonable He was in spirit before God and all men. Briefly put, He became an increasingly godly, capable, wise, and compassionate Boy from day to day.” (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 44).



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