

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple
 (or, “How Would YOU Respond
 Upon Seeing Jesus?”)
 Luke 2:22-40 NRSV
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 James T. Richardson
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA – Rock Hill

LUKE 2:22-40 – NRSV:

- 22 *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*
- 23 *(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”)*
- 24 *and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”*
- 25 *Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.*
- 26 *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.*
- 27 *Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,*
- 28 *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,*
- 29 *“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;*
- 30 *for my eyes have seen your salvation,*
- 31 *which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*
- 32 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*
- 33 *And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.*
- 34 *Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed*
- 35 *to that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed---and a sword will pierce your own soul also.”*
- 36 *There was also a prophet Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriages,*
- 37 *then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.*
- 38 *At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

“TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!”

That is what the poster proclaimed as it hung on the wall of my office when I worked at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta. My memory is that I hung that poster on the wall of my office of Admissions at Columbia Seminary in order to try to get prospective students to think about themselves and what God had in store for them.

“TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!”

That, incidentally, is another way of asking the question:

“WHAT AM I LIVING FOR?”

Do you ever wrestle with that question:

“WHAT AM I LIVING FOR?”

There is one Charles Schulz PEANUTS CARTOON which caught my attention.

The scene is the backyard of Charlie Brown’s house right after a night of much sleet and snow. **Snoopy the Dog** is lying in his dog house which is up against the rear wall of the Brown house.. From the gutter over-hang on the Brown house and directly over the door to Snoopy’s dog house hangs a tremendous, pointed icicle left from the night’s storm. The icicle hangs like a sharp sword just about to fall.

As Snoopy lies in his house, he is in constant danger of being stabbed to death by the icicle if it should fall!

SNOOPY: It’s silly to be trapped in a doghouse by an icicle. I think I’ll just make a run for it!

I think I’ll just zoom out of here!

I think I’ll just leap up and zoom right out of here!

I think I’ll just lie here for the rest of my life!

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

If there is anything of which we are sure for us all, it is that we are going to die.

WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE?

Some of us probably want to make sure our family is financially secure.

Some of us probably want to make sure our name is remembered and well-thought-of.

Some of us may want to do something worthwhile for other people.

Some of us may want to “get even” with somebody.

Some of us may want to forgive somebody.

Some of us may want to pretend that the clock does not move and we are not getting older.

Some of us just may not want to think about any of this at all!

TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

Or, like Snoopy the Dog, do you think that you will just sit there for the rest of your life?

At the time of the birth of Jesus, the gospel-writer Luke tells us that there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was SIMEON, and he had one desire before he should die: HE WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT GOD!

Or, as Luke puts it: HE SHOULD NOT SEE DEATH BEFORE HE HAD SEEN THE LORD'S CHRIST.... GOD'S MESSIAH.....GOD'S PROMISED ONE.

Simeon wanted to know more about God.

Do YOU think that it is a worthy goal for YOUR life before you die.....to learn more about God?

I would be interested to know if you ever think about things like that.

FRED CRADDOCK is the Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. In one of his books, Fred Craddock says that there are at least **four purposes** fulfilled by the gospel-writer Luke in this story that we have before us. (cf. Preaching from the New Common Lectionary – Year B, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1984. p. 82-83)

(I) One purpose is to introduce another Christian hymn, the “Nunc Dimittis” (vs. 29-32).

“Now, Lord, let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

(II) A second purpose of the passage is to return Jesus’ family and the action of the story back to Galilee and to Nazareth.

It will be in Galilee and in Nazareth that Jesus will grow up and become strong, and he will be filled with wisdom, and he will begin his adult ministry.

(III) A third purpose of the passage is to characterize Jesus’ life, even in His infancy, as being in full obedience to the Law of Moses.

(1) The rite of circumcision, (2) the dedication of the first-born to God in the Temple, and (3) the purification of the mother of the new-born child are all examples of this being in full obedience to the Law of Moses.

(IV) A fourth purpose of the passage is the public declaration of the greatness of this particular new-born child.

In other places, the gospel-writer Luke does this (1) by an angel to the shepherds, (2) by the teachers of the Law at Jesus’ age 12, and (3) at the beginning of Jesus’ adult ministry at baptism by the Voice from Heaven. All three of these are what is known as “*epiphanal*” or “appearance” or “manifestation” experiences which reveal something to us about the Messiah or Jesus. This is what the Season of Epiphany is all about, and in today’s passage, this public declaration comes by two aged, pious Jews: **Simeon** and **Anna**

Now, this information about this passage is all very true and very interesting, but I want to draw our thoughts back to the saying on my office wall:

TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

Luke tells us that there was this old man named SIMEON who had one desire before he should die: HE WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT GOD.

Or, as Luke puts it:.....He should not see death before he had seen
the Lord's Christ.....God's Messiah.....

God's Promised One.

As you know I had four very sad telephone calls in the last two days, all of which concerned the death of loved ones in OAPC:

- (1) Earl Wilcox's sister
- (2) Dan and Barbara Aycock's son, Danny
- (3) Les and Cynthia Morgan's son, Everett, and
- (4) Bill Wylie's wife, Wylene.

We need to hold these families up in our prayers and in our expressions of love.

I must also tell you that I had a very sad telephone call this past Tuesday. Someone from Clemson called to tell me that Libby Crowther had died.

Back in 1980 when I had first gone to be the Pastor of the Fort Hill Presbyterian Church in Clemson, I performed the marriage ceremony for Pete Crowther and Libby Gage. Over the years when their two children were born, I baptized both of them, and I buried Libby's grandmother and grandfather. About 10 or 12 years ago Libby Crowther was diagnosed as having Multiple Sclerosis, a disease which this past week finally killed this young woman who was about 50 years of age.

All of these five deaths this past week made me cry. And it was in this mood that I wrestled with today's sermon.

The gospel-writer Luke tells us that *when* SIMEON saw the baby Jesus, SIMEON was led by God's Holy Spirit to understand that the baby Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. **And having come to that understanding, Simeon was then ready to die.**

What better time than this Sunday after our celebration of the birthday of Jesus to be reminded that we also have seen the baby Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. **And because of that fact, we also are ready to die.** Is that true for YOU? Are YOU ready to die?

That does not mean that either you or I seek death out, or that we love life any less. On the contrary, I love life and I love my family and I love you! I am not in any hurry to die! BUT I AM NOT AFRAID TO DIE!

The greatness of the man SIMEON is that Simeon was open to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, and it enabled Simeon to understand that one day that little baby Jesus was going to grow into a man, and Jesus was going to make the promise:

***“I am the resurrection and the life.
Those who believe in me, even though they die,
will live, and everyone who lives and believes
in me will never die.”*** [John 11:25,26; NRSV]

There is more than the grave! You and I do not have to be afraid to die!

And if you came here today hoping to hear some Good News, you just heard it!