



SIMEON'S SONG

Today we come to the final song in Luke's list of lullabies for a King – the song of Simeon ...

Luke 2:21-40

One of the things I miss from when Josh and Abi were younger is the school nativity (cue embarrassing photos!). And yes, I also kind of miss doing the proud dad bit, clambering about for a good photo and fighting back the tears (and the other parents). But at the same time, there are certain things nativities almost always get wrong:

- A bunch of inn-keepers all saying "No room in the inn!" The Greek word for inn, *kataluma*, doesn't mean inn as we think of it, but 'upper room.' It was probably the house of a relative in Bethlehem, not an inn.
- The angel Gabriel becomes the angel Gabrielle (I know that angels are genderless so it's not an issue really). But then you've got a choir of angels singing about Jesus' birth, and they look more like fairies!
- 3 kings, bearing gold, frankenstein and mirth (ho ho ho), following the star of Bethlehem. Only problem is, they weren't kings – they were *magi*, the Greek for wise men or star-gazers. They were *not* kings!

But they also miss out a really important part of the story: Jesus' visit to the Temple, for His circumcision. And for some strange reason, they leave it out!

Every time! But it's important – why? Because it proves that Jesus was very, very Jewish – and very, very flesh-and-blood.

But there's something else ...

In Leviticus 12, when a woman gave birth to a boy she had to be cleansed 33 days after his circumcision. The ceremony included the offering of a lamb, or for the poor, a couple of turtledoves or pigeons. So Mary and Joseph, as a poor family, took baby Jesus to the Temple, and offered the latter. And it was at this point that they got ambushed by a strange old man named Simeon, who grabbed baby Jesus and started to sing him a lullaby.

Simeon's song, AKA the *Nunc Dimitis* (Latin for "Now let your servant depart") is a song of hope, of expectation. What does it say about the nature of hope?

1) It's What We Hear (vs29). *Sh'mon* ('one who hears') was pinning his hopes on the personal promises God had made to him. But sometimes we say, "I hope", when we really mean, "I wish" – an unrealistic hope. E.g.:

- "God will keep me from having any problems."
- "God will always heal me / others."
- "God will answer every prayer with 'Yes.'"

When I pin my hopes on the wrong thing, I may as well be pulling on a wish-bone! And I could end up disappointed; disillusioned; even depressed. So what is realistic hope? It's a hope based on the promises in God's Word:

- "Nothing can change God's love for me."
- "God will always do what's best for me, ultimately."
- "Eternity will be bigger and better than this."

Simeon was living in the real world (if you want evidence of that, just look at what he says to Mary and Joseph).

But he knew what God had said – and he held onto it.

2) It's What We See (vs30-32). I remember Abi's first Parents' Evening: Abi's teacher said to me, "We were discussing Christmas being Jesus' birthday, and I asked Abi, 'What can you tell me about Jesus?' She thought about it, and then she said, 'He loves me!'" The teacher said, "I was expecting a little bit more from a Pastor's daughter than that!" But me, I was like, "Yes!!! My little girl knows Jesus loves her!" OK, she hadn't got her head round the heavy Christology yet, but still ...

How often are we expecting "a little bit more than that"? Many of Simeon's contemporaries were expecting a Messiah who would show up in power and glory and kick the Romans in the head. But Simeon recognised God working in a little baby, born to a poor family, from the middle of nowhere, who would be "a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the one to make Israel shine." That's how God does things sometimes – blink and you miss it. The smallest things can make the *biggest* difference.

So recognise God at work in the small things: the random blessings; the divine coincidences; the special moments.

3) It's What We Do (vs25-28). Simeon was a man who lived in hope, and it impacted everything he did, e.g.:

- **He was waiting for Jesus.** Simeon had been hanging round Jerusalem for years, waiting for the day when He would see the Messiah come to His Temple.
- **He was walking in the Spirit.** He was in tune with the Spirit of God on a daily basis, so much so that God was close to him and was actually telling him stuff!
- **He was worshipping God.** Simeon's song didn't just come out of nowhere – a spiritual vacuum. This was a man who knew what it was to worship, all the time.

I.e. Simeon was living in light of the Messiah's coming. What about us? You see, advent isn't just a time to remember Jesus' first coming – it's a time to remember He's coming back! And when He does, it's the end of this world and the beginning of a new one. So, are we living in light of that event? Not just looking forward to 2019, but looking forward to "the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2)?

Now *that's* what you call hope!

What Would You Sing?

So that's Simeon's song – a song of hope. What is hope?

- It's what we hear.
- It's what we see.
- It's what we do.

So, where are you today? If you were Simeon, what kind of song would you sing at this moment? Perhaps you feel as though everything around you is dark, and you can't see any good in the circumstances you're in. Perhaps you feel confused and you can't see a way out of it. Perhaps you feel cut off from God and you need to know He's still there. Perhaps you feel you've sinned and you need to know God still loves you. As a response today, we're going to pass round a candle, and when it comes to you, just hold it and pray a very simple prayer: "Jesus, light of the world, give me (or them) hope."