

# Through Simeon

## *What God Said About Christmas:*

Luke 2:25-35  
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You know what an oxymoron is? It is when you put two words together that say the opposite thing, like jumbo shrimp, an accurate estimate, pretty ugly, or plastic glasses. Someone emailed me the *Top Seven Church Oxymorons*. Here they are:

7. *Brief meeting*
6. *Preacher's day off*
5. *Early sign up*
4. *Clear calendar*
3. *Volunteer waiting list*
2. *Realistic budget*
1. *Concluding remarks*

For some of you hosting family this coming week or involved in Christmas programs and events, *Christmas peace* may seem like an oxymoron. Truthfully, many things about Christmas seem oxymoronic. A peasant is a royal mother. A feeding trough is the crib for the king of kings. A society organized to honor God, and an insignificant little village within that society, have no room for God when he becomes human. God comes as a human and his first home is with animals in a stable. Do you understand what I mean when I say many things about Christmas seem like an oxymoron? What is the lesson? We can guess about the meaning of those events, or we can look at what God said to people at that time and preserved for us to know now. That is the focus of this series: *What God said about Christmas*.

Jesus was a month old when God directed Simeon, an elderly man, to step into the courtyard of the temple. Have you experienced that kind of direction? I've experienced it many

times. One day I was praying about a woman who in anger left the church I led. Her health had deteriorated; and she was in a nursing home in a town some 45 miles away. She was no longer a member of my church, yet I felt I should drive the distance and visit her. I wasn't sure. I knew the visit wouldn't be comfortable; and I wasn't looking for more rejection and condemnation. Nevertheless, I decided to go, in faith, trusting that I was submitting to and obeying God. When I arrived in the community, I drove around looking for the nursing home. I was confident I'd find it; but the more I drove, the more I worried I might be, like Moses, wandering in the wilderness a long time. I saw a young couple walking, so I stopped to ask for directions. The man was a lawyer who had just married and moved to the community from Seattle. He looked at me and said, "Wesley?" Both our eyes bugged. He was a teen I had counseled in camp and had in my youth group when I first worked for a church. Many years and thousands of miles later, God used me to get him and his wife back into a church family. In that same way, the Holy Spirit moved a praying Simeon to step into the courtyard of the temple exactly when Joseph, Mary and month-old Jesus were there. It was split-second timing; God was going to speak.

None of us know how Simeon knew the identity of Jesus. We don't know if there was a vision, a voice or just inner thoughts that he had learned to rely on. Whatever gave him knowledge, whatever opened his eyes to the identity of that month-old baby, it was an emotional experience. Listen to his words:

***Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"*** (Luke 2:29-32, NLT)

Simeon was ready to die. He knew all would be well. He could die in peace. He knew that God was keeping his promises. He knew that God cared about him personally. But God also had words through Simeon for Joseph, Mary, you and me.

Jesus is the Savior given to all people: Palestinian Arabs, Palestinian Jews, Chinese, Saudis, Indonesians, Canadians, French, Americans, all people. Jesus is a light that reveals God to the nations. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, most people, regardless of their nation, seek God. Most people believe God exists. However, their visions of God differ. Some see God as an impersonal force or mind. Some see God as nature or spirits. Some see God through the teachings of some charismatic or moral leader like Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith and Mary Baker Eddy. Many believe that God is unknowable. In college I met few atheists. Few would actually say there was no God. They found such belief too difficult to prove. Instead, I met more agnostics, and there were two types. One simply said that they didn't know if there is a God, and the second type said they didn't know if you could know there is a God; so they weren't motivated or willingly to discuss evidences for God. Christmas runs counter those arguments. God said that this 30-day-old baby would open the eyes of the nations to God and to who God is. Realize that God did not say that writings about baby Jesus would open the eyes of the nations; he said Jesus would.

God also said through Simeon that this baby is the glory of Israel. Jesus validates the contention of the Jews. Jesus reveals to all that God actually chose Israel among the nations to reach out to the world. Jesus validates the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He is proof of their truth. If you look at Jesus, you will discover the true nature of the God at work in the Old Testament. You also witness that this God keeps his promises.

However, God said more through Simeon. He turned to Jesus' mother and said this:

***This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*** (Luke 2:34-35, NIV)

Some of us might read that and think “huh?” Simeon’s first words were clear: Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” However, the next words were much more difficult. He said that *this child is destined*. That destiny is to cause many to fall or rise. Peter described Jesus as a stone lying in our path. Some of us will stumble over it; others of us will build on it. People stumbled over Jesus if they saw God working safely in the past rather than dangerously in the present. They stumbled if they interpreted God’s laws to fit their actions. They stumbled if they justified their actions. They fell if they looked to God more for comfort than conversion. On the other hand, they built their lives on Jesus if they saw their sin and were sorrowful. They rose if they were desperate for a new life. If they saw their condemnation and were looking for the way, the truth and the life, they rose with Jesus. They rose in mercy and grace, never in pride and never in achievement.

All over the world religious people congregate. However, there is a difference between those who congregate in self-satisfaction and those who assemble in repentance. We either are a fellowship of the repentant experiencing conversion or a fellowship of the rebellious comforting one another in our sins.

God said through Simeon that this Christmas baby will be *a sign*. Jesus will not only be a sign of God’s love; he will be a sign that is spoken against, and in that speaking the thoughts of many hearts will be exposed. In truth, Jesus is a sign exposing your heart. If you are quiet about Jesus, your silence says a lot about your heart. If you are noisy about Jesus, your noise says much about your heart. If you obey Jesus part way, your partial obedience says much about your heart. If you are self-satisfied or dismissive of some of Jesus’ words, that says much about your heart. It exposes many of your thoughts. How you deal with Jesus reveals your heart. It reveals your anger, fear and pride; or it reveals your faith. It reveals so much of your thinking.

Jesus exposed in his earthly life the self-serving thoughts and ego of the Sadducees and the bitter self-righteousness and pride of the Pharisees. What does his presence and spirit reveal today? What do your dealings with Jesus expose about your heart and thoughts? Are you fully submitted and wholly devoted to him? Or is he just another person you are using to fill the voids in your life?

Talk show host Bill O'Reilly calls Jesus a philosopher. God through Simeon called Jesus our Savior. Do you listen to Jesus as a philosopher, or do you cling to his every word as your Savior? Do his words collect dust in your house as they reside in a closed Bible, or do they gain access to your heart directing your vision, your goals and the activities of each day? Are you among the repentant seeking to wholly embrace the salvation of Jesus Christ, or are you following the religious steps of the self-serving Sadducees who had quite enough of Jesus?

Those questions may suggest that I'm trying to classify you into a group of pietistic and non-pietistic people. Pietistic people can be caught at any moment in deception and rebellion. The primary issue isn't what group you are part of; it is what are you doing with Jesus right now? Are you distant? Are you devoted? Are you dismissive? Are you obedient? Are you excusing yourself? Are you forgiven?

This week I read a prayer that bared my heart and exposed my sin. I encourage you to read it and make it your cry to Jesus as well:

*Lord, many days I run ahead of you. I set out my agenda without knowing your plan or confirming your presence. I don't make sure that I am moving in the direction of your power. Lord, I'm guilty of living my dreams and my passions while merely donating to yours. Instead, I want to totally direct my lifestyle to your purpose. Lord please have mercy on me through the assurance we have in Jesus Christ.*

In heart-felt repentance, we open the inn to Jesus. We welcome the visit of God among us. His salvation unfolds in our world. Hear what God said about Christmas, and believe!