

Her Temple Visit

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to carry on looking through, we've started at the beginning of Luke and we're looking at the early days of Jesus. Through the eyes of Mary, that's really what we're doing.

In whatever way that the Bible allows us to do that, because we think she is very important and we think her involvement in the birth of Jesus is obviously hugely significant.

And so that's what we're doing in our service today. Now about two years, two years around this time, man is just sitting down there, Corey arrived and that was the second time he and the family had arrived.

And you knew that that he was coming and you knew, well those of you who were in St. Columbus at the time, knew that we had a succession plan in place, that Corey would be here and God willing and everything went together and went according to plan.

As we prayed about it, that Corey would be the assistant and then he would become the minister. And over these last two years, that's what we've communicated all the time, that's what we've said.

[1 : 08] And that's what has been happening here. We've been preparing the way, that's what we've been doing, making a succession plan and preparing the way for the future.

And that's a good thing to do. And we all do that. We're all planning all the time for the future in different ways. And when we make plans, you know, and we've always had to say this about St. Columbus, we would say, we look for the Lord wills if that's what becomes because God has allowed us to do that.

And because there's always lots of variables aren't there? Not just in something like that. But in all the plans we make, as Christians would say, well, full Lord wills, if the...

We used to quite often say, DV, which is just Latin for days, valentice, if God wills, if that's what God's will is. And we recognize that there's not just human variables around us that might make our plans not work, but also God might have different plans for us sometimes.

But it is an important part of life, isn't it? We all make plans in different ways and different levels.

And I hope as Christians, we commit our plans to the Lord and we ask Him to guide us.

[2 : 21] Now, but with God, with God, it's entirely different. All His plans happen.

He doesn't ask for anyone else's will to be done in order for His plans to happen. He never gets it wrong. What He wills and what He prepares us for is what happens.

That's what makes Him God. And that's what makes us not God. That's the difference. And it's usually significant. And He often reveals His plans to us.

Not everything, there's lots of things He doesn't. There's lots of secrets that He hasn't spoken to us about. But He does reveal many things to us. And I often think of Tim Geller's quote about prayer, which I think is a really helpful one, where he says, God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows.

It's such a great quote, isn't it? So helpful as it makes us think about who God is that God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows with the undercurrent that God knows everything and plans everything and is sovereign and is infinite in His knowledge, past, present and future, hard, though that is for us to grasp.

[3 : 42] But that's exactly what Luke wants us to grasp here about the coming of Jesus. It's exactly what Luke is saying in this passage, particularly I think in this passage, that what he wants to say is Jesus was always God's plan A. Always.

Always is not an afterthought, there has never been a plan B for society, for the world, for salvation. There's never been. There's only one.

And it's the Lord Jesus Christ and the coming of Jesus. And we're going to look at that through the eyes of what Mary experienced here and, or what she did here more than what she experienced,

well, a bit of both really.

And we're going to have to delve a little bit into the Old Testament, okay, because the Old Testament comes before the New Testament. So if there was a plan that God was revealing, it's going to be in the Old Testament as it's fulfilled in Jesus in the New Testament.

I'll try and be very brief. And if you don't know anything about the Old Testament, that's fine. We'll just try and quickly explain through what happens here that God was revealing His plan for a long time before Jesus actually came.

[5 : 02] And we see it particularly through the Old Testament rituals and religious observances that Mary and Joseph go through with Jesus as a young baby.

They're very strange to the modern year, what happens. But they were absolutely common for the Jewish people and for those who had faith in their God and in the covenant and in His promises and His purposes.

And the Old Testament really is all about making known to us the purpose and the plan of God, that God was prepared. The Old Testament is really just God preparing the way for the coming of Jesus. That's what it's all about. And so we find that this coming, this preparation for the coming of Jesus was soaked into God's people and into God's Old Testament religious structures and ceremonies. It all pointed forward in different ways to the coming of Jesus. Everything, everything in the Old Testament points forward to the coming of Jesus. It's remarkable and as we can strip it back and think about it, it is more and more remarkable.

[6 : 17] But very briefly, we just look at a couple of things here. First of all, in verse 21, we have the fact that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. That was the covenant sign. It was the covenant sign of belonging to God's people in the Old Testament.

It's a physical sign of removing uncleanness as it pointed towards removing uncleanness in the heart. It talks in different places about the circumcision of the heart as well.

It's about the removal of uncleanness of the heart before God. And Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. It was pointing to the need for forgiveness and the need for cleansing before God.

And then we're told in verse 22 that there was a time for their purification according to the law of Moses, again going back to the Old Testament.

And this was Mary particularly as a mother who'd given birth, but it speaks here of the whole family.

A ceremonial cleansing. When the time came, now that time was 33 days.

[7 : 22] So it was 33 days after the circumcision, which was on the eighth day, which was really the first day. So there was seven days before that. So the 33 in the seven make 40 days.

Now we all know, if we know our Old Testament, that 40 days has a lot of significance in the Old Testament. There was 40 days of rain before the flood. There was 40 years in the wilderness. There was all kinds of symbolic truth that was hidden behind this 40, this number 40, the reminder of the desert warning.

Even in the New Testament later on, it becomes significant with Jesus being 40 days tempted in the wilderness, yet in the desert. So there's this kind of symbolic reality, again, of the 40, speaking about often relating to the judgment of God or the reality of sin and the need for God's intervention in their lives to rescue and redeem and to save them.

And interestingly, this kind of ceremonial purification was related to the birth and bleeding and the reality of these things with blood and bleeding being associated with life draining from someone.

[8 : 46] And interestingly, blood being associated with life, the giving of life and also the draining of life when it's taken from us. And so again, there's a spiritual symbolism in the cleansing which was not saying anything about needing atonement or cleansing from giving birth, but it's much deeper spiritual reality of all of us needing that cleansing from sin.

And there's a way in which the Old Testament is there speaking about that, our spiritual estrangement is from birth. And that ceremonial washing points to that.

And then of course, there's the consecration of the child. They offer a sacrifice where verse 23, every male who first opens the room shall be called holy to the Lord or consecrated to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves and two young pigeons.

So again, this first child was consecrated to the Lord as a recognition that he's the giver of all life and that he was to be recognized as such that all life comes from him.

And then a sacrifice was ordered to redeem that life back as it were. The all life needed to be redeemed. So all life needed the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins.

[10:19] And there was a cost therefore to be paid in redemption in order to have that relationship with our heavenly Father. So you've got all these Old Testament, I know it's, I just rushed through that quickly.

But on all these Old Testament rituals, they're pointing forward to something that's going to happen in the life of Jesus and we know what it goes on to speak about.

And everything is pointing forward to redemption, to rescue, to salvation, to hope, to a future, to forgiveness. All of these rituals pointing, none of them were just rituals for the sake of it.

They were all pointing forward to Jesus. And then we come to them being in the temple and these Old Testament prophets that come and prophesy and speak to them.

There's Old Simeon and there's Anna as well. Two Old Testament prophets who, both of them who were told are old and are waiting for the coming of the Messiah, the Messiah that's promised in the Old Testament, the coming of the Redeemer.

[11:20] And interestingly, and I think this is important, both as Luke, Dr. Luke describes it and mentions things. See, three times we're told here that God spoke to Mary and Joseph through Simeon and Anna in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's mentioned three times just in a couple of verses and Luke wants us to understand that this message that they get is from God. It's the Holy Spirit has inspired them to say that this child, this baby is God the Son, is the Redeemer, is the Savior, is people.

Now, I don't for a minute think, unless it was revealed to them miraculously, I don't think for a minute Simeon or Anna truly understood who the Messiah would be and what he would come to do because there was many different ideas of what a Messiah for the people of Israel would be, mostly related as you know, if you've been here at all around kingship and about throwing out the Romans, not a lot to do with someone coming to die in a cross.

But nonetheless, God revealed to these Old Testament prophets, these Old people a great truth about Jesus. You know, my eyes have seen your salvation.

You have prepared in the presence of all your people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel. This famous message which in Latin is called the nuke dimitis, which is just the first bit there.

[12:55] Allow your servant to depart in peace. He asked for permission to depart to go to heaven because he's now seen what he's been looking for and waiting for all these years.

And then in these verses that we read, 29 to 32, they're all taken. Where are they taken from? They're all taken from Isaiah. They're taken from the Old Testament, different bits of the Old Testament.

So again, we've got this, not just the Old Testament ritual, but the Old Testament prophets who's been replayed here by Simeon and by Anna. And he recognized, whatever he recognized, he recognized that Christ wasn't just an insignificant local deity, a national hero.

He wasn't that. He wasn't a provincial king of a land mass, but he was a light of the world. That's what's prophesied here about Jesus Christ. He's a light of the world for the Jew and the Arab, for Scots and Australians and everyone else in between.

The redemption for every living person who will come and put their trust in Jesus Christ. Now, just a couple of very quick asides here.

[14:07] The only hope for Israel and for Gaza and for Palestine, but especially for Israel just now as we think about it, is that they repent of rejecting the Messiah.

And they look to Him rather than looking for some kind of physical home as their redemption and seeing the crucified and risen Savior as the temple who was destroyed and who was raised again and built again in the third day.

And that's why we must be praying for Arabs and Jews to come to know Jesus Christ. This is the only peace they'll be there. There's only a cycle downwards into hatred and evil the way they're going.

And it's only as they come to Christ for heart cleansing and repentance that they will be able to live together. That will be the glory for Israel. That will be the glory for the people of Israel. As they come to recognize Jesus, the one they rejected as their Savior.

That's one aside. The second aside is, and this is a good one for me, God uses old men and women a lot in His kingdom.

[15 : 25] We shouldn't forget that. And we should remember because Simeon and Anna were old, probably just cast aside. But it's so important to respect and to value and to recognize...

I'm not speaking about me, I'm speaking about others, much older than me. The wisdom and grace of the elderly in our midst.

It's important for you as young people to make connections with and to be friends with older people and older Christians to learn from them, to listen to them and to understand their wisdom.

It's very important for older people here to recognize their role, not just in sharing truth with one another, but in leading and guiding and helping the young among us.

The importance for older people have been righteous and been devout and finishing well. That's such an important thing.

[16 : 29] It's so easy to not finish well, and yet we're called to finish well. And for our youth and our elderly together, which is why we try and do a lot of things multi-generationally here.

There's places and times for doing things within generations. But multi-generational family Christian life is really important. Now, that is a broad aside from this passage.

But I think it's a worthwhile application and a right one. So we have the Old Testament rituals that we're spoken of here, and we have the Old Testament prophets that speak about Jesus and speak about what He's coming to do.

So I want to just finish with a conclusion about Jesus, Mary and you, or you and me. From this passage, the first about Jesus is that Jesus obviously didn't need to be circumcised as a sign of dealing with the sin in His heart as a sinner because He wasn't.

He was perfect. But He was allowing this to be done, and Mary did this and was called to do this because Jesus was fulfilling everything about the law of God because He was to be the perfect substitute.

[17 : 48] He was to be the one who did everything in our place as our representative. He didn't need to be baptised, but He was because He was a representative, taking baptism in our place.

He didn't need to be circumcised, but He was doing it because He was a representative and He was going to be our Savior and He was going to become sin for us on the cross. So it's a symbolic representation really of what Jesus came to do.

And also in His consecration as the firstborn, He was, which speaks about giving to the Lord and then redeeming back.

It's a pointing forward to Himself as being the firstborn over all humanity, the firstborn of the resurrection, the one who again represents humanity and who, with this sacrifice that speaks of atonement and redemption, was pointing forward to His own atonement on our behalf and His resurrection for us.

So there's incredible depth and parallelism and symbolism and clarity in God preparing the way in the Old Testament and all these rituals and everything that happened to Jesus and to His life and death and resurrection.

[19 : 09] So there's much mystery, I recognize that, there's much teaching and depth of understanding. But like any, if there's any revelation of divine love, it's going to be mysterious, isn't it?

It's going to be layered. It's going to have infinite numbers of revelatory truth for us to grasp.

And that's what Jesus is about. It's about His intense love for us that He would come and do all that. We'll see a little bit more about that this evening.

So there's Jesus and then there's Mary. And we've been looking at the story of Jesus birth through the eyes of Mary. And she's such a great character.

We do know that she recognized her need. She understood her need. She consecrated her son, but there was also sacrifice and a torment that went with that.

[20 : 17] And she was fulfilling her covenantal responsibilities as a sinner who recognized she needed, as we saw in her song previously, her need for mercy.

She believed in God's promises. Remember I prayed at the beginning about trust? We often break our own trust. Other people break their trust to us and us to them.

But she believed in God's promises with all the challenges that she faced. She trusted and she obeyed. She recognized she was a sinner saved by grace.

Really before it all became clear about how God would redeem her. And she recognized her need for atonement. We're also told about her that she marveled, her and Joseph marveled at the revelation of Jesus at what Simeon said in the prophecy in verse 33.

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. So Holy Spirit who revealed this prophecy to Simeon gave her and gave us.

[21 : 25] Because remember we are kind of like shoulder to shoulder with Mary. Because we hear these things too and we see them and we are giving this insight.

Incredible insight into the child Jesus. This was no ordinary child, Jesus no ordinary child. He was unique once for all, Savior for all of humanity.

All of sinned, all need a Savior. There couldn't be a greater claim than even some of these words that we find Simeon giving to her.

Mind blowing privilege she received as she heard this. She marveled at the revelation of Jesus which is great. We'll also see a thing from this passage that, and we've seen it before when we looked at Mary that she was a nobody.

She was a nobody who was given great honor. She was poor. Verse 24 gives a little hint about that. It says that she offered a sacrifice, a pair of turtle doves and two young pigeons.

[22 : 26] Now if you go back again to the Old Testament to Leviticus 12 verse 8 it tells us that if you were too poor to offer a lamb you would offer turtle doves and a pigeon.

She had nothing in this world. Her and Joseph had nothing in this world's understanding. There were nobodies in this world.

Absolutely. Backwater people. And yet even the great thing is that in God's salvation God recognizes using material poverty as a picture of His provision for all of us in our spiritual poverty.

He doesn't look on our gifts or our talents or our position in the world or our fame or our wealth or our independence. He sees us all as poor and needy and he says, but look I provide for you.

In the Old Testament it was in the physical sacrifices it was with a pigeon or a turtle. But in Christ it is Christ.

[23 : 34] For the greatest and for the least, for the most well known, for the richest, for the most poverty stricken but all must come poverty stricken in heart to Jesus in order to be saved.

Back then, and this is for me the most significant thing about this passage for Mary is that she would know deep suffering.

It's surely one of the most powerful prophecies in the whole Scripture. And a sword will pierce through your own soul too. He speaks about Jesus being for the falling and rising of many, but then he speaks directly to Mary and says, you know, you're highly blessed.

People of all centuries will remember who you are, but a sword will pierce your own soul. And there's this paradox, there's this reality, oh no, you know, we don't want this reality.

Christ heals, doesn't he? Christ forgives. Christ blesses. Absolutely. And that's entirely right. Now this prophecy also speaks about Christ dividing and people rejecting Him because we're rebels.

[24 : 53] And that even happened in Mary's own family. We're told in John's Gospel that Jesus' brothers didn't even believe in Him. So there was sibling division over Jesus which must have been hurtful for Mary and may have been in part an answer to this or a way in which this prophecy was outworked in her life.

But surely as she stood before the cross and had heard ringing in her ears the cry of the people saying, crucify Him, crucify Him.

Surely. She stood there, seeing her son crucified, her son, her firstborn on the cross.

Was that the outworking that she expected of the Savior? Was that the kind of redeemer she thought He would be? Her son crying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Surely that must have been the answer or the revelation or the outworking of this prophecy. And she stood as a mother at the foot of the cross in confusion and pain and desperate hurt for her beloved son.

[26 : 08] And knowing that her son would divide, would redeem the rising of many but also for others. She knew deep suffering.

So bringing it all together and we apply the truth about Mary and Jesus and the story to ourselves. What can we learn from this passage? Three things quickly.

First of all, we all belong to God. He's the author of all our lives. And we all need His redemption.

That's what Simeon says here. He reminds us, doesn't he?

He's a light of revelation to the Gentiles. It's just everyone who wasn't Jews and isn't Jews and glory for your people Israel. So this is about redemption, this story.

It's about atonement. And that's what Jesus has always come to do. He sacrifices himself for us, shed his blood. No greater love than anyone in this.

[27 : 02] They lay down their life for their friends. The deepest, most costly, free act of love that's ever been known. And we're called to have our hearts exposed before Him.

Because we need to, don't we? Why is it? Why is it that so many people are uncomfortable when we talk about God in their company? Are resistant to that?

Or change the subject? Or walk away? Why would that be the case? It's because there's a natural resistance within us, all of it, that we need to deal with and have that estrangement dealt with through Jesus Christ so that we can be clean, we can face Him, our sins are forgiven and we can cry out, Abba, Father.

We're going to terms with our Creator and our Father as the source and the giver of all life who will defeat us, it will defeat death on our part so that the sting is removed and death becomes an entry into His nearer presence.

So we belong to God. I think we can take that from that. As Christians, we're called to live in His light as children because that's what Mary did.

[28 : 18] Mary did a lot less light than we have. We've got the complete Scripture in 2,000 years of church history and of history and of many, many millions of people coming to faith in Jesus.

But we're called to live as Christians in the light of His revelation. That's what exactly what Mary did. Mary was obedient to the law of God as she saw it and she saw her need of forgiveness as she fulfilled the rituals which pointed forward to the coming of Jesus, who her own son became and was the Redeemer.

And it's the power of the Holy Spirit that we're called to depend on to live this way, just as Simeon was dependent on the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to him. So we are to allow the Holy Spirit which has spoken up very powerfully here and consistently has been the one who reveals.

So we're looking to the Spirit of God and our Christian lives were praying to Him. And we know that the New Testament sees lots of things about what the Spirit does. He comes to comfort, He comes to guide, He comes to give us gifts, He comes to teach, He comes to be our companion and to live in us as believers so that we can understand how to love God, love one another and love the lost. You and me, we belong to God, we're called to live in His light and the Christian life. Therefore, it is a paradox. It's a life of amazement and also of suffering, like Mary's was.

[29 : 52] That's what we're to remember today as Christians and to consider that life, and if you're not a Christian to recognise that as well, that there is this paradoxical temporary reality until we meet with Jesus face to face.

It's a life of amazement, she was awestruck, but also a life of suffering. And that's what we should know as Christians that we ought to be awestruck by Jesus.

It's kind of hard, I think sometimes, isn't it? Because we know so much about Him and we've grown up with it, many of us and we know things. But we're called to be awestruck. But we also to recognise that there is suffering because Jesus came and people either follow Him or reject Him and there's an opposition, there's a spiritual opposition, there's an unseen battle going on.

And we don't know what is the future. We plan, as I said at the beginning, and we hope when we prepare. But we actually don't know what our lot is going to be.

We don't know what lies ahead. But we will suffer. We know that. Christ suffered, all His people suffer. We suffer for belonging to Christ. We suffer because we are dealing with our own sinful hearts and we're seeking forgiveness and we're being transformed.

[31 : 16] We suffer because there's opposition to the gospel. But we are not alone. And we're called to trust and we're called to recognise that it's a battle that we are in, in this life.

But there's joy and there's peace in the battle, not from it. And we're called to recognise that. We're called to trust in the way that Mary did and more so.

And seek God's glory to be revealed, to know His peace and to remember that one day every tear is wiped away.

That is the God who plans, who purposes, who has said that will be the case. One day, every tear will be wiped away. He will wipe away every tear, like the loving Father that He is, loving Mother, the loving parent wipes away the tears of their children.

We can make no guarantees for our children, but He can make guarantees for us. And that's the greatest thing about the gospel as we put our trust in our Heavenly Father, revealed in the person of Jesus who showed His incredible love, not just in His birth, but in His life and death as we'll hopefully see a bit more about tonight at the carol service.

[32 : 43] Let's pray. Father God, help us to know You and understand You better. We recognise that there's many things in the Old Testament when we read it, we're struggling with, really difficult to understand, difficult to make sense of, culturally odd and historically strange to us, so different from our modern culture and our practices.

And yet, we recognise You worked in history, You worked with peoples, You worked with cultures, You worked to make clear Your own purposes through the nation of Israel, through whom the promises were given from Abram.

And we pray and ask that we would take time to delve into some of these realities which always speak about Jesus, remarkably, always speak about humanity, always speak about our need. Lord Jesus, help us to see that. And we do pray that we would understand that no matter how often we look at Jesus, it's like that, an infinite, an infinitely cut diamond that doesn't matter which way you move it, it reflects some new reality and some new beauty.

And may we find that in Jesus, may we not get bored with You, Lord, forgive us when we are bored with You and we're more excited with selfish desires and stuff that take us away from You.

[34 : 08] And help us to be awestruck and realistic about being awestruck and also the reality of suffering in Christ's name.

May we never suffer for being idiots, or being fools, or being big mouths, or being self-righteous, or being proud. But if we suffer for following Jesus humbly and loving people against all the odds, then Lord, may we take that every day of the week.

So help us, we ask, and pray, and guide us, protect us, and keep us in Jesus' name. Amen.