

Christmas Conflict

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[0 : 00] A very quick look tonight at this story, Luke chapter two. It's a story that is an annunciation, a pronouncement of who Jesus is, but it's not a very common one.

So we often read the annunciation stories, the pronouncement from Angel Gabriel and others, Mary's song about this little baby boy. Simeon's song is one that we don't often look at in the Christmas season.

Maybe that's because at the very end of Simeon's song, he adds a couple more lines of comment and verse 34, he says, behold, this boy is appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel. Now I have been around the school nativities this year. I have been in the department stores, Marks and Spencer as of late, and I've heard the songs, Hark the Herald, Angel Sing coming through the speakers, being sung in the nativity play at the school.

Hark the Herald, Angel Sing, Glory to the newborn king, peace on earth, mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. And we say in the department stores, when we hear it, as modern people, isn't that a nice song?

[1 : 21] Isn't the nativity a nice story? It's a sweet time of life. It's a sweet season. And boy, when you read Simeon's song, when you've really listened to Hark the Herald, Angel Sing, you realize that Christmas is all about conflict.

Christmas is about conflict. Simeon says, this son was born for the rising and the falling of many. And Hark the Herald, Angel Sing, it says God and sinner reconciled that at the heart of Christmas, the incarnation, there's a conflict.

God and sinner, not at peace. There's a reconciliation that's needed. And so Christmas, the song of Simeon here tells you that there's a conflict at the heart of Christmas.

Only one point tonight, but two types of conflict. So actually two points. It's a disguise, a one point sermon with two types of conflict means it's actually two points.

So let me show you two types of conflict that are here in the Christmas story. Simeon says, this baby boy will cause the fall and the rise of many. Division conflict.

[2 : 28] What kind? First, in the scene, Jesus is a newborn. He's 40 days old. And he's brought by his mother Mary and his earthly father, Joseph, to the temple on the 40th day.

This is a ceremony of purification of dedication that was required by the law of Moses in the Old Testament. And we're told here that the Holy Spirit was upon this man.

We know nothing about him. Simeon, he's an old man. And the Holy Spirit says, Simeon, you will not die before you see, quote, the consolation of Israel come.

Now we don't know how long Simeon's been waiting at the temple to see whatever it is that has been told to him. He will see. But he knows it when he sees it.

And this hope of consolation, consolation is just the Greek word being translated here, the word comfort. And it's the same word that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete, it's that word.

[3 : 29] It's the same exact word. And it has a background in the Old Testament where Simeon longs for the comfort that an anointed one, a Messiah, would bring.

And that's because the people of Israel have been exiled. They have gone through it from the time of Babylon all the way to this first century moment. They are under Roman occupation.

Their land is not theirs. And he wants to see the comfort. Isaiah 40, God says, Comfort, Comfort, my people.

The land is in darkness. But could they ever see the light and the prophecies of the Messiah that was to come? And here that's what Simeon's looking for. The comfort of Israel. The hope of Israel's Messiah that was promised in the Old Testament.

He looks up, he sees Jesus. It actually says that he took the baby, the 40-day-old Jesus, in his arms. This is a unique moment in history. It's not to be advised to take a stranger to take a baby in a public place like this.

[4 : 29] But Simeon does it. He had the Holy Spirit. And then it says he blessed God. That's the Greek word eulogy. He eulogized God. Like we give praise to someone, a eulogy.

He praised God and he sings this song out. Let's take one minute and walk through this song together and just listen to this very, what we call this full Christology.

Christology, what we believe, what we say, what we study about Jesus, his person and his work. Listen to what Simeon says about a 40-day-old baby. This is into this Christology.

He says, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace. Meaning now that I have seen this baby, I can die and know that death is not the end.

There's peace in my life. That even the baby Jesus brings peace to me. And then he says, it's according to your word, meaning this is the moment that the prophecies of the Old Testament are being fulfilled.

[5 : 29] And he says, for my eyes have seen salvation, your salvation. Meaning that when I look at this little one, I don't just, I see salvation itself.

Anna the prophet test right after this, 84 years old. She says, when she looks at the babies, she says, I see redemption. Then that you have prepared this salvation in the presence of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and to Israel.

And that this boy is salvation for all people groups, not just Israel, but for the Gentiles, for every type of person there is in all the world. Now this is a very full Christology.

Simeon was not trained in Christology. He never went to seminary. He sees this baby boy at 40 days old and is able to sing a song like this, moved by the Holy Spirit.

And that means that, well, let me put it like this. When Simeon sees 40 day-year-old Jesus and sings this song, he doesn't say, you know, I get the sense that this baby will grow up and be a very great moral teacher.

[6 : 34] He will really be an inspiration. He will probably be the backdrop to the best parts of Western civilization. You know, we will really build great cities because of him.

He doesn't say that. He doesn't say, I imagine that this little baby is going to be a wonderful example to so many to really clean their lives up and have better moral posture.

He says, I see this baby and I see salvation. I see redemption. He says, I see God. He gives you this Christology. Now that means to bring it to the point.

When he says that this baby comes today to be the fall in the rising of many, what he's saying is, is at Christmas, the conflict that needs to take place in every single one of our lives is a conceptual conflict.

And the conceptual conflict at first is this. The Bible will not allow you to be indifferent about who he is. Simeon looks at a baby and says, that is God.

[7 : 41] That is salvation. He. He tells you about his person. He doesn't look and say, look, you can be inspired by him. You can think he's a great example. He comes and says, there's a conceptual conflict that has to take place.

You've got to say, this child is God or he isn't. You got to trip over that. You've got to either be lifted up by that or you've got to trip over that.

There's no space at Christmas, according to the gospel, to be indifferent about who this little one is. He comes and says, he is God. All of the gospels were written within 30 years of Jesus's death and resurrection.

And that means that when a text like this is floating around, Luke says, I've sought the eyewitnesses. When a text like this is floating around, there is no ability in a generation where most of the people that knew Jesus in the flesh are still there, are still alive to write this unless it's true. And here he is saying, when I saw the baby, the 40-day-year-old baby, 40-day-old, not year old, 40-day-old baby, I saw God himself.

[8 : 53] I think, friends, the question before us, do you come to Christmas this year indifferent about Jesus Christ?

And Simeon says, the gospels won't let you do that. Jesus Christ, the Christmas child, does not ask to be merely respected. He doesn't ask to be liked.

He doesn't ask to be thought of as a great teacher. He doesn't ask to be your inspiration. He commands to be worshiped. He commands that you give your whole life away to Him, every part of yourself.

And so there's no, the conflict at Christmas. Do you believe what the gospel say about Him? Now the second conflict, final conflict is this. That's a conceptual conflict.

There's a conflict, though, more fundamental in the heart that takes place. And this is really the heartbeat of what Simeon's talking about here. It's a conflict in the heart that leads to peace.

[9 : 54] And so you see in verse 35, Simeon says, Mary, he turns to Mary, Mary, a sword will pierce through your soul as well, so that the thoughts of many hearts can be revealed.

So he turns and says, the conflict, the coming of Christ brings conflict. What does it bring? The thoughts of many hearts have to be revealed. There's a conflict that's got to take place down in the soul.

And that's when we realize what he's saying. He said, Jesus come, came, so that many would fall and rise. And he's talking about a process.

He's talking about something that has to take place in the heart, in the life of the soul. He says, Mary, this is going to happen to you. This sword is going to stab your soul as well, the fall and then the rise.

The baby has come so that many hearts would be revealed, that many would fall but then rise. And Mary, you're a case study in that. This is going to happen in your life as well. Now he's working with Old Testament language here from Isaiah chapter 8.

[11 : 01] Isaiah chapter 8, this prophecy, and he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both the houses of Israel, a trap, a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and many will stumble before him.

So this is the Old Testament idea of the stumbling stone. The Messiah would come and be a stumbling stone. He will cause us to fall. I've used this illustration before here, but I'll use it again.

You don't remember it. I was in Frankfurt in 2017 in Germany and I tripped over. I tripped and I looked down and there's a little stone above the pavement risen in interest of.

And in 1996, I read the story after 1996, all across Germany, these little stones were put in the pavement that are lifted a little bit higher than the normal pavement.

D'stolpersteine. Let me get my German shot. Yeah, good. D'stolpersteine. I've got lots of German friends in the room that can help me. These are 10 centimeter, about 10 centimeter stones and they're called stumbling stones.

[12 : 09] It's a biblical idea. And in Germany, they're there and they're put out in front of the houses where they know where Jewish people were ripped up from their homes and sent to death camps.

And so you're bent to trip over them. It's a health and safety nightmare, but such an important memorial, a memorial, right, where you remember that even in times of so-called progress, like the modern era, great evils, the evils of humanity continue to arise from our hearts.

And you trip over them. You remember. You remember who you are. You remember what you're capable of when you trip over this D'stolpersteine. That's exactly the same idea that's coming up out of this text.

It's a biblical idea. What is it saying? Jesus came for the first of the fall. Mary, your heart has to be exposed. Many hearts have to be revealed. He's saying first, the Song of Simeon, every single one of us, the conflict that needs to take place at Christmas is that we need, we must trip over him.

Our hearts are exposed in the moment that the Son of God became flesh. The very first proclamation of God in the incarnation is we as human beings are judged.

[13 : 25] Jesus Christ came into the world because we are not who we are supposed to be. And so this Christmas, the conflict that has to take place is the conflict that happens when you look deep down in your soul and you look at him and you see him as a mirror and you realize who you really are.

The sins beneath the sin, the selfishness beneath the selfishness, the depths all the way to the bottom. We have to stumble. We have to trip over him. He is a stumbling stone.

And then, but what does Simeon say? He says, he will cause the fall and the rise of many. And it's a process. And this word rise is the Greek word anastasis that's usually used in the New Testament for the word resurrection.

You go back to not only Isaiah 8, the prophecy of the Messiah coming as a stumbling stone, but Isaiah 28. And realize there's two meanings to this stone in the Old Testament.

He's a stone of offense, a rock of stumbling Isaiah 8 and then Isaiah 28. See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious corner stone for a sure foundation.

[14 : 38] And the one who relies on it will never be stricken with pandas. And Simeon is looking at this 40 day old baby and saying, this baby is the stumbling stone and the resurrection stone.

He will cause the falling and the rising of many. And you, Mary, are the great case study. He will pierce your heart.

Mary, the commentators will say, you know, Mary, what's Simeon saying? Mary would see her son murdered by the hands of the nation.

She would feel pain upon pain throughout his life as she watched him become our bleeding savior. But I think it's talking about something more than that. Mary, you know, she struggled with him, with who he really is, just like every other sinner in this world.

She too had to trip over him in order to rise. She too had to have her heart exposed. A sword appears. You see what it's talking about at Christmas? Jesus Christ is coming into the world to cut, to cut, to cut deep down into the heart.

[15 : 44] But how? Not, not like the warrior sword, not at all. How do you, when a nation, when a great injustice is happening in, in a nation, what has to happen?

Another power has to rise and bring justice through conflict. War. How, how do you get, how do you bring a person who has a wicked evil tumor deep down in the bottom of their, of their gut?

How do you heal them? The surgeon has to go in and he has to cut them. And he has to make them bleed. And he has to pull out the disease in order to heal them. Jesus Christ came to cut us not as a warrior, but as a surgeon.

He came to cause us to fall. He came to expose us. But not so that we would fall forever, so that we would be, being exposed. Have the tumor ripped out in order that he could bring us resurrection, anesthetics.

We would rise. We would, we would come back. He would dust us off. He would lift us back up. How does he do it? The painful surgery that we need this Christmas. It's handed out in verse 23, verse 24.

[16 : 55] Remember this is, as we close, this is the event where Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be consecrated on the 40th day as required in the law of Moses.

And we read in verse 24 that one of the ways you could, you could do this sacrifice was through the use of turtledoves or young pigeons. Pigeons in Leviticus 5 and Leviticus 12, we learned that this sacrifice is required after a birth and that if you are absolutely poor, then you are allowed to use pigeons, turtledoves and pigeons instead of a lamb.

And we realize here that when Mary brings Jesus to the temple for purification, his family is poor. They don't have the money to use the normal sacrifice.

And so they do it in a way that's for those who are poor. That's the beginning. Jesus Christ came into this world and it started in utter humiliation.

He came and was born in a, in a, in a stable, in a trough amongst the muck of the animals. He was poor. He was homeless. He lived his whole life instead of humiliation.

[18 : 09] He was rejected. He came ultimately, this is a sign, a sign that he came to the cross to be utterly and ultimately humiliated in our place for us.

He came to receive the warrior sword, the sort of judgment so that when we're exposed by him, he could dust us off, lift us up and say, now go, I'll offer you peace.

Christmas peace. It comes through a Christmas conflict. And that conflict is the conflict he ultimately endured, the humiliated son, when he went to the cross for us.

He is born this day. He is a 40 year old baby to take the sort of judgment that we deserved so that you, this Christmas, could have the surgeon's scalpel.

And that means I just want to leave you with this, this very week, this very week as Christmas approaches, will you allow the sting of repentance to become part of your life?

[19 : 10] Will you allow the sting of repentance? You know, repentant stains and then it brings peace and then it heals. Martin Luther, this is not just for, look, if you're not a Christian today, you need repentance.

If you're a Christian today, you need repentance. Martin Luther, the 95th Theses, the very first one, he said, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent in Matthew 4.17, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

The way that you can have peace this Christmas and in 2025 is to really embrace the daily, weekly rhythms of the sting of repentance in your life.

What is it? It's a sword in your soul. It's really looking deep within and it's trying to locate the selfishness underneath the selfishness. Trying to really look at the depths of the soul and say, this is who I really am.

And then it's saying, I've got nothing to, I can't fix it. I cannot do anything about it. I need the sheer mercy of this 40-day-year-old baby who came to die for me.

[20 : 15] That's the sting of repentance. Real Christian repentance is when we come and say, it's my son, it's my heart to deny Lord that you even love me.

And then Jesus comes and he says, now rise, Anastasis, let me lift you up. I think that there's nothing that will raise the corporate life of our church community, St. Columbus, in 2025.

There was nothing that will make your life as a Christian more radiant, more glorious, more joyful, more peaceful in the coming year than having a daily rhythm of repenting and coming back to Jesus.

Let us pray. Father, we ask that you would give us hearts of repentance and we pray, Lord, that we would see the conflict, that in the incarnation we see our judgment and in the incarnation we see our peace.

And so Lord, point us to the fact that the surgeon has come tonight and give us hearts that long for true repentance.

[21 : 24] And we pray, Lord, in that power of the Christ who has come and died and rose again for us. And so we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.