

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

Luke 2:22-40 : Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

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; [a] 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. [b] 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon [c] 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 [d] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant [e] 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 [f] 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna [g] the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 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 [h] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Don and I have two sons—Nicholas and Zachary. When Nicholas was born, he weighed under eight pounds. Zachary arrived twenty months later. He weighed almost nine pounds. The same doctor delivered both of them. After Zachary was born, the doctor told us that now we have our intellectual—our lawyer; and, I guess because Zachary was a big baby, the doctor told us we now have our football player.

Was the doctor correct? Well, Nicholas went on to become a music therapist and then his master’s in marriage and family counseling. Zachary did play football from the time he was eight years old until he graduated from high school. But when he went to college, he said he didn’t want to play football anymore. So, our doctor’s predictions about our sons’ futures were partially correct, but in the end, the boys made their own choices, determining the direction they wanted their lives to go.

We all have choices to make that determine the outcomes in our life’s journey. God has a plan for us even before we are conceived. In Psalm 139:13-16, we read these beautiful words about God’s roll in our formation: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.”

God created not only our physical being; but he also gifted us with the talents we need to fulfill his plan for us. It’s our job to nurture and develop our God-given talents and seek out the ways in which God would have us use them. We make choices every day of our lives that shape who we are on that particular day; and the choices we make shape the outcome of our day, as well as influencing the people around us throughout the day. At the end of the day, when you look back over the events that transpired and the things that were said, do you feel satisfied that your choices reflect the outcome God intended for the use of your gifts to fulfill the plan he has for you?

God had a plan for Jesus when he sent Jesus into the world. While Jesus was fully divine, he was also fully human. So, his life began just like every other Jewish baby boy’s life began. Rituals and Jewish laws were very important after a baby’s birth, and so, as we heard this morning, Mary and Joseph fulfilled the requirements expected of them after Jesus was born.

Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby’s birth: (1) Circumcision – Every boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth. Verse 21 tells us that Mary and Joseph had this done. Circumcision symbolized the Jews’ separation from Gentiles and their unique relationship with God.

(2) Redemption of the firstborn – A first-born son was presented to God one month after birth. The ceremony included buying back—“redeeming”—the child from God through an offering. This way, the parents acknowledged that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life.

(3) Purification of the mother – For 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the temple. At the end of her time of separation, the parents were to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The priest would sacrifice these animals and declare her clean. If a lamb was too expensive, the parents could bring a second dove or pigeon instead. This is what Mary and Joseph did.

So, we find Mary and Joseph at the temple doing their duty as all good Jewish parents did. A man named Simeon approached them. Simeon was a member of a small group of Jews known as “the Quiet in the land.” Unlike most Jews who were waiting for a mighty warrior type of Messiah to come and defeat their oppressors, this small group had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies.

They believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives, they waited quietly and patiently upon God. Simeon with humble and faithful expectation was waiting for the day God would comfort his people. God promised Simeon through the Holy Spirit that he would live until he would see God’s Anointed King. In baby Jesus, he recognized that promised King.

Upon recognizing him as the Promised One, Simeon made these claims about Jesus’ future: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,” meaning he is like the line in the sand; and some will choose to follow and accept him while others will reject him and be forever lost. Simeon said Jesus would be “A figure misunderstood and contradicted,” which I think is self-explanatory. And finally, he said, the way people would react or avoid Jesus would

reveal the inner thoughts of many—meaning there is no way anyone would be able to sit on the fence about accepting Jesus. You are either with him, or you are not.

Mary and Joseph also met a woman named Anna who was also a member of the Quiet in the Land. Like Simeon, Anna saw Jesus for what he would become. They saw God in him. Simeon and Anna saw the good he would bring about for all people.

When children are little, we almost all think our children are special. We brag about their accomplishments. We celebrate their victories and reward them for every success in order to boost their self-confidence. And we talk to them lovingly about the things that make them special.

But if we were to really see into their future, we might change how we raise them. It's best to let them grow as they are intended. But it's also best to look beyond the surface and see the good that they can do. In this text, we see parents amazed and possibly struggling with what has been told to them about their child.

God, our Heavenly Parent, considers each of us special, too. As I mentioned earlier, God has a plan for each of us, just as he did for Jesus and as I said, God equipped us with talents to live up to our potential and to fulfill the plan he has for us. God encourages us, opens doors for us to fulfill that potential for doing good, not only for ourselves, but also for building God's kingdom. And, if God wanted, he could direct our way so that we would never miss a step in achieving the goals set before us.

But, that's not how God works. We are not God's puppets. The reality is that everyone must eventually determine his or her own path. If we're honest with ourselves, we all know we do not always make the wisest decisions, and we fall flat on our faces. We may feel the pain of knowing we disappointed God, failed to do our best for him and perhaps, even caused others to stumble with us. What then? Well, we can either listen to the voices in our heads, or the voices of those judging us, telling us we are good-for-nothings; or we can listen to the voice of God, telling us we are special. God, with his loving grace, picks us up, and sends us on our way. Because of God's grace, we learn from our failures; and we get another chance to live up to the potential God gave us.

God has a lot invested in us; it's our job to live up to that potential. This is not only true for us as individuals, it is also true for us as a congregation. So many good things have happened through the work of this congregation. You've used the gifts of the members of the congregation, fulfilled your potential many times over.

Christian author, Craig Brian Larson, shared this illustration on potential. "On my desk I like to display, on a bookstand, the kind of gift books you put on the coffee table – those filled with professional photos of nature or tourist destinations. My current book is "America's Spectacular National Parks" by Michael Duchemin. For several days I have had the book open to a photo of the Grand Teton Mountains, an extra-wide photo that fills the left page and crosses the fold to take up half of the right. It is a majestic display of deep blue sky; rugged, gray, snow-capped mountains; and a calm lake in the foreground.

This morning I decided to turn the page to the next photo, and as I did, I discovered that I had missed something important. The right page of the Grand Tetons photo was an extra-long page folded over, covering part of the Grand Tetons. So, when I opened it up, it added some sixteen inches to the width of the photo. Wow! The Grand Tetons became even grander.

The Christian life has unfolding moments like that when we discover there is much more to God and his kingdom than we knew—much more to his purpose for us than we imagined. Abraham experienced that at age seventy-five, Moses at age eighty, the apostle Paul on the road

to Damascus. Again and again in the Bible, when God met people, he opened a glorious page for them that had previously been folded.

Brothers and sisters, God's unfolding a page for us at HCOB. And, as we follow the path ahead of us, we will need to take into consideration that changes have occurred. Some people are no longer with us, and others have joined us. There are different talents waiting to be discovered and used. There are Spirit-inspired ideas ready to be revealed and given life. But for them to come to life, we all need to live up to our potential, using our God-given gifts, just as God planned for each of us to do until that day when we join him in paradise for eternity. I'm excited to begin, are you? Amen.