

SERIES: 12 Voices of Christmas

VOICES: Simeon - Voice of Peace

Anna - Voice of Thanksgiving

SCRIPTURES:

Simeon: Luke 2:21-35

Anna: Luke 2:36-38

WED. BLURB:

The voices of Christmas fill the skies Christmas Eve as the angels announce the birth of Jesus and sing praises to God. Then, the voices fill the town as the shepherds declare these amazing things to all the people. Come, late Christmas Eve (11:30 p.m.!) to hear the voices of the angels and shepherds declare the praise and true meaning of Christmas for all of us!

The voices continue on Sunday! During morning worship the voice of Simeon declares God's peace to God's people when Jesus is brought to the temple. Anna also raises her voice of thanksgiving for the salvation that God has brought to earth.

Come and continue to hear the voices of Christmas. The world may declare the holiday over by Dec. 26, but the voices of Christmas continue, and they will change your 2016!

SIMEON: VOICE OF PEACE

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:21-35. Reader: Rebekah

PP#1: Luke 2:21-35

21 When eight days had passed, Jesus' parents circumcised Him and gave Him the name Jesus. This was the name given to Him by the angel before He was conceived. 22 When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. (23 It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") 24 They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Reader: Luke 1:5-20.

"When eight days had passed, Jesus' parents circumcised Him and gave Him the name Jesus. This was the name given to Him by the angel before He was conceived. When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. (It's written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.') They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

PP#2: Luke 2:21-35

25 A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law.

Reader: "A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law.

PP#3: Luke 2:21-35

28 Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, 29 "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, 30 because my eyes have seen your salvation. 31 You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. 32 It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

Reader: "Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, "'Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.'"

PP#4: Luke 2:21-35

33 His father and mother were amazed by what was said about Him. 34 Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

Reader: "His father and mother were amazed by what was said about Him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too.'"

PP#5: The Voices of Christmas

Angels: The Voice of Praise

"Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation." - Luke 2:29-30

SIMEON SPEAKS:

[*Wearing a kippa.*]

No one likes them. We didn't want them here. But it looks like they are here to stay. They've been here 60 years already. When their general, Pompeii, marched in and subdued our land, all of us in Judea knew that we had fallen to an unequalled military empire. I was only a child, but I remember.

The Romans grabbed our country by the throat with an iron grip. They set up camps, built fortresses, and dug an artificial sea harbor.

PP#6: *Roman soldiers occupying Jerusalem, perhaps somewhere near the temple.*

In some ways our conquerors have treated us with respect. They gave us special permission so we could continue practicing our own religion. They let us build synagogues. They do not force us to violate our Sabbath. We are even exempt from service in the Roman army.

But on the whole, they act with cruel arrogance. They have confiscated our homes, violated our women and demoralized our nation. They punish resistance ruthlessly. Slaves and foreigners are crucified on Roman crosses planted all over the Mediterranean world. How can anyone who is oppressed like that know peace?

Soldiers everywhere. Garrisons. Horses. Spears. Armor. There is no peace in this land as long as Rome rules. Some in our land dare to plot rebellion. Zealots. Many have died. I fear many more will, too. But Rome will not be conquered by military might or rebellion. So others in our land seek another path to peace.

PP#7: *Image of some common Jewish men (not priests or Levites) praying in the temple.*

I belong to a small group of men and women who are looking for God's solution. I spend my days at the temple. But I am not a priest. I'm not even a Levite. I have no special duties in the temple, other than the duty of all God's people to honor and worship Him, to delight Him, and to call upon His name. But I believe the promises of God. Our prophets have written that one day God Himself will restore Israel to blessing, joy and peace. So we earnestly anticipate a day when Israel will know peace again. That day is coming. God has promised. So, we spend our time at the temple, praying daily for God to bring peace. We pray from the psalms, like, "Hear our just cause, O Lord. Give heed

to my cry. Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips. Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence. Let Thine eyes look with equity." The psalms of David are powerful for praying down God's kind of peace.

PP#8: *Image of Simeon seeing the Holy Family coming into the temple.*

I am Simeon. And I am the voice of peace. I am the voice of peace, because God Himself promised me I would see His peace. It happened like this. I had been praying from the Psalms. "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising vain things? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed?" What a joy it would be to see when He gives His anointed the nations for an inheritance! The peace that God brings will be real peace.

And as I prayed and thought these things, God made a promise to me. He told me that I would live to see the arrival of His anointed. What does a man do with such a promise? Since the Book said that God would install His King upon Zion, His holy mountain, I began to spend all the time I could in the temple. I was there with the crowd for each of the regular times of prayer and sacrifice. I was there at other times, too. I chanted the psalms day after day, worshiping God in my heart. I was not there all the time, but I was there often.

And then, one day I saw a young woman and her husband bring their new baby to the temple. This is not unusual in itself. Nearly every day babies are presented in Jerusalem. Our law requires that after giving birth to a son, a woman cannot enter the temple until after her purification service on the fortieth day. That is when the child is presented in dedication. Many old women come to the temple each day and like to make a fuss over the babies. Temple grannies, I call them. It is not unusual for the parents to let one of these women hold the child and pray for it, especially a child from their tribe in Israel.

PP#9: *Image of Simeon holding Jesus and praying praising God.*

But when this couple entered the courtyard, God's promise washed over me like warm water. I knew this was the child God had promised. I hurried over to them. I held out my arms like an old temple granny and asked to hold their baby boy. The young woman looked at her husband. He smiled and nodded. She gently held out her baby. I took Him in my arms and held Him close to my chest. My eyes filled with tears. The promised Messiah! I lifted Him high in the air and began to praise God. I lifted my voice and thanked God for ushering in His peace on earth. God had fulfilled His promise to me. Now I could die in peace.

We did not live in a peaceful land or in a peaceful time, but this baby was going to bring peace. I was holding Him in my hands. I had seen God's salvation. I had seen God's light to the nations, the glory of Israel. Here was peace. Peace for Israel, peace for the whole world. He would not conquer the Romans, but He brought a different kind of peace. His peace was not just absence of conflict, but a much deeper, much more abiding peace. His peace pierces the deepest parts of the soul. His peace centers the heart, no matter what is going on.

I handed the infant back to His mother. I had said quite a bit, more than most temple grannies would. I could tell they had not expected it, so I tried to explain. I told them what God had promised me. I blessed them. I told them some of the great promises of God concerning His anointed. But as I watched Mary's face, I caught a sudden, terrible glimpse of her future. What great sorrows lay ahead for her! I wondered at what cost her Son would secure peace.

PP#10: *Another picture of Simeon and the Holy Family.*

Then the couple told me about the shepherds who visited them on the night their Son was born. They told me how the army of angels the shepherds saw sang. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth!" Peace on earth.

I add my voice of peace to that chorus. I saw that peace face to face in a baby from Bethlehem. I may live in a land filled with hatred and oppression, but God let me live to see His anointed Christ.

I tell you today: Christmas is about peace. It is about peace for our world, it is about peace for all the peoples. It is about peace for you and for me. My heart was transformed. Just by holding the Baby, I felt His peace. Yes, I knew that when I would die the Romans would still oppress our people. But even so, I could die in peace.

The Lord is enthroned as King forever! The Lord gives strength to His people! The Lord blesses His people with peace!

Shalom...shalom to you...shalom to each one of you...shalom!

SIMEON: VOICE OF PEACE

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:21-35

Reader: Luke 2:21-35.

“When eight days had passed, Jesus’ parents circumcised Him and gave Him the name Jesus. This was the name given to Him by the angel before He was conceived. When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. (It’s written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.’) They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what’s stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

“A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn’t die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus’ parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

“‘Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel.’

“His father and mother were amazed by what was said about Him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, ‘This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too.’”

ANNA: VOICE OF THANKSGIVING

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:35-38. Reader: Rebekah

PP#11: Luke 2:36-38

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. 37 She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Reader: Luke 2:36-38.

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

PP#12: The Voices of Christmas

Anna: The Voice of Thanksgiving

“She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” - Luke2:38

ANNA SPEAKS:

[Reese, with a cane]

I am an old woman. I come here to the temple every day. My name is Anna, of the tribe of Asher. Asher, you wonder? Whoever heard of anyone from the tribe of Asher? When Joshua divided Canaan, the tribe of Asher got its land far in the north, against the Mediterranean Sea. It was a weak tribe, unable to drive out the Phoenicians. In later years some of its cities were given to the king of Tyre. And when Israel fell to Assyria, the ten tribes of the north, including Asher, were scattered in captivity and disappeared from history.

PP#13: *Image of an old Jewish woman, perhaps in the Temple area.*

But my ancestors left their inheritance in the north and moved to Judah before the Assyrians came. Ours was not the only family that hated our country’s unfaithfulness to the true God, and so many of us moved south to Judah where they could worship at the temple in Jerusalem. We kept the records of our genealogy, so our tribe was not lost. But that was all so many hundreds of years ago.

My father's name is Peniel. You remember the patriarch Jacob who wrestled with the angel of the Lord. Then he changed the name of the place to Peniel, the face of God—for he had seen God face to face and lived. Think of that—to see the face of God! Does that sound funny to you? How can a person see the face of God, who is a Spirit? Remember what the psalm says: “My heart says of You, seek His face. Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide Your face from me.”

I have sought the face of God for many years. Do you know what? I *have* looked into the face of God. I am 84 years old. Years ago I was married, but my husband died after just seven years

together. So I have been a widow ever since, with no home but the temple, no family but God's people. I am a prophet. I fast and pray night and day. In Israel we believe that prayer, fasting and thanksgiving must be given to God by His people. It takes me so close to God that sometimes I can hear Him speak to me. Among the 12 voices of Christmas, I am the Voice of Thanksgiving.

PP#14: *Image of Anna and Simeon in the temple, with the Holy Family.*

Since I spend almost all my time at the temple, I was there as a matter of course the day that I saw His face. I was standing in the temple courtyard praying. People were coming and going, as they always do. Suddenly, something came over me, and I stopped my prayer and turned to one of the gates. Across the courtyard I saw a man and his young wife enter the temple carrying a little baby. That was not so unusual. Couples regularly bring their babies to the temple for dedication.

But as soon as this couple entered the courtyard, an old man approached them. I could see them talking. Something drew me to them. So I began to make my way through the crowd across the portico and up the stairs to the level of the courtyard where the couple stood. The pretty young wife looked at her husband and then held out her child to the old man. He took the baby in his arms and then held him above his head. People stopped and stared. He said, "Mine eyes have seen God's salvation, a light of revelation to the nations and the glory of the people of Israel!"

I knew he was right. This baby was God's anointed, the One our people had been waiting for to redeem Jerusalem. The old man finished his prayer and gave the baby back to his mother. They talked. I could not hear it all. Such a look crossed that young mother's face! If this were God's anointed, I had to be in on the celebration! Before they could move away, I put my hand on her arm. She smiled and showed me the baby.

PP#15: *Image of Anna with Jesus in the Temple.*

It was then. At that moment, when I looked into the face of that baby, I saw the face of God! I raised my hands and gave God thanks for bringing this baby into the world. This child was cause for the whole world to be grateful. So I sang and shouted thanks to God, for our salvation had come in this baby. This child was the key to our redemption.

I sang songs of praise from the great singers of Israel. "Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms! Enter His gates with thanksgiving and come into His courts with praise! Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name!" I kissed the girl's cheek. I turned to the crowd. "Today God has brought His redemption to Jerusalem! Hear the word of Yehweh! Give Him thanksgiving, for His mercy endures forever!" I walked all over the courtyard that day, repeating the news again and again: "God has visited His people. He has not hidden His face from them, but the light of His countenance has come to shine on His people." I looked into the face of God.

I raised my voice of thanksgiving for all His people to hear. And today, I raise it so you will hear it as well. God has brought salvation to you. We are not left alone. We have hope. We have joy. We have a future with God. God's salvation has come. Praise God! Give thanks!

ANNA: VOICE OF THANKSGIVING

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 2:15-19

Reader: Rebekah

Reader: Luke 2:36-38.

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Piniel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR DEC. 27, 2015

Christmas Series: “The Voices of Christmas”

Sermon #7 & 8: “Angels: The Voice of Praise”
“Shepherds: The Voice of Declaration”
“Simeon: The Voice of Peace”
“Anna: The Voice of Thanksgiving”

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself & share a way you saw God this Christmas.

Read: Luke 2:1-7.

1. What is something that stood out to you this time when you heard this story? Why?

Read: Luke 2:8-14

2. What is something that stood out to you this time when you heard this story? Why?

Read: Luke 2:15-20

3. What is something that stood out to you this time when you heard this story? Why?

Read: Luke 2:21-35

4. Discuss any connection you see between the Jewish right of circumcision and Christian baptism.

5. Verse 22-23. Read Exodus 13:1-2, 11-16. What is the significance for Jews of dedicating every firstborn male to God?

6. Verses 24. Read Leviticus 12:1-8. What is going on in Luke 2:24, and what is its significance?

7. Verses 25-27. What do you know about Simeon from these verses? What kind of man was he?

8. Verse 30-32. What does this prophecy from Simeon say about Jesus?

9. Verses 34-35. How have these prophecies been fulfilled?

Read: Luke 2:36-38

10. Verses 36-37. What do you know about Anna from these verses?

11. Verse 38. Why, do you think, Luke included this episode in his story of Jesus?

12. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?