

THE EARTHLY ANGELS OF CHRISTMAS

Two people that don't get the "top-billing" at Christmas time are a couple of senior citizens, Simeon and Anna. These were devout people of the highest order that give great credibility to the coming of the Christ-Child. In their blessing I hear the exclamation of adoration. Lets re-enter this beautiful biblical narrative taking place at the dedication of Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jesus has been born, the angels have burst forth through the Judean skies to proclaim it, the shepherds have come to Bethlehem and worshipped Him and the Wise Men are on their way. But now we come to a sacred moment in history as *"...the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him"* (Habakkuk 2:20).

I. The Announcement in the Number

Luke 2:21 says, *"And when eight days were accomplished..."* For centuries, students of the Bible have declared the number eight as the number of new beginnings. Even numbers divided or multiplied by eight denotes new beginnings. After Cain committed the first murder of righteous Abel, God raised up Seth (Genesis 5:4) to carry the righteous seed and appropriately, Adam lived 800 years (100 x 8) after this defining moment. Abraham circumcised his son, Isaac whom God had chosen to carry the seed of the Messiah at eight days (Genesis 21:4). The earth was born again after forty (8 x 5) days and forty nights of flood (Genesis 7:12). Israel finally inhabited the Promised Land after forty (8 x 5) years of wandering (Exodus 16:35). There was a space of 400 (8 x 10) years between the Old and New Testaments. The Lord Jesus began His ministry after the temptation in the wilderness for forty (8 x 5) days. Jesus rose again on a Sunday, the day after the seven original days of creation, hence giving us the preeminence in the eighth day or resurrection day, which we celebrate as the first day.

We see in the mentioning of this historic event, the number eight appears telling us this is a new day full of ancient promises that have now begun to be revealed.

II. The Authority in the Name

Luke 2:21 says, "...His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb." The person in authority has the privilege of naming the child; this is why the parents, as a rule, name their children.

However, Mary and Joseph did not name Jesus - God named the child. He is the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9,13,22) come to earth. No man has authority over Him.

In the following verse of Luke 2: 22-24 we see Mary needs purification and sacrifices must be made reminding us that although she has often been referred to as part of the holy family, there is only One who is truly holy and that is the Lord Jesus.

III. The Anchors in the News

When we hear this term we think of the front man or woman who tells us the leading stories of the day. In the Temple event, God has two co-anchors that herald the good news! Christ is come! Simeon and Anna are the harbingers of happiness hosting the Christmas story. In Luke 2:25-39 we observe:

The Person God uses: Luke 2:25,36,37

A. The Pure in Heart

The Word of God defines Simeon as just and devout In Luke 2:25. In Luke 2: 36, 37 we see that Anna had become celibate after the death of her husband and for a multiplicity of decades lived in perpetual fastings and prayers. God uses clean vessels. *"If a man therefore purge himself from these (acts of iniquity that disqualify), he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (II Timothy 2:21, 22). The Bible says, *"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully"* (Psalm 24:3, 4).

Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"* (Matt. 5:8). This is why Simeon and Anna recognized so quickly who Jesus is.

B. The Patient in Spirit

Luke 2:25 says that Simeon was *"...waiting for the consolation of Israel..."* One of the definitions of consolation is: a contest in which people or teams have previously lost compete with one another. Although we are not talking about a competition, we are talking about an entire human race that has lost and desperately needs consolation. Anna *"...was of great age..."* (Luke 2:36). It is a little difficult to tell exactly how old she was because the Bible says she had *"...lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years..."* (Luke 2:36b, 37a). Most of her entire life she had lived wholly dedicated to the Lord and because of this, her spiritual radar was highly activated. The Bible alludes to her intense sensitivity and awareness when we read, *"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem"* (Luke 2:38). How very sad, the doctors and teachers of the law and prophets were blinded but Anna knew she was in the presence of God immediately.

C. The Empowered of the Spirit

The Bible says, *"And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus..."* (Luke 2:27). God uses the person who gets out of His way and then allows God to put them in the way. I appreciate Eliezer, Abraham's servant who said, *"...I being in the way, the LORD led me..."* (Genesis 24:27). The timing of Simeon's service in the Temple was perfect. I am reminded of God placing Elisha at the right place at the right time and it is expressed in the words, *"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman..."* (II Kings 4:8). People who find their rendezvous with destiny are those who are surrendered to God and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

D. Those Who Embrace Christ

Luke 2:28 tells us, *"Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God..."* Think of it, Simeon was now holding Him who was holding him! *"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms..."* (Deuteronomy 33:27). We must be close enough to know God's heartbeat, feel His breath from the Word and close enough that when He whispers in that still small voice, we hear and obey Him. This leads me to my next sub-point.

E. Those Who Hear God's Word

1. God's Word to us as individuals

It was revealed to Simeon He would not die until he sees the Messiah (Luke 2:26). That's why he said he could depart in peace because the personal Word of God had now come to pass.

2. God's Word to others

Simeon was so full of God's written Word that he was able to quote from words that had been written by David and Isaiah over 700 to 1,000 years earlier (Luke 2:30-32; Psalm 98:2; Isaiah 52:10; 42:6; 49:6).

IV. The Agony with the Newborn

In Luke 2:35 Simeon promises Mary that a sword would pierce her soul and through her broken heart a multitude would be helped through the following generations. II Corinthians 1:4 informs us that God, Who comforts us in all our tribulation will allow that same grace to help us help others through their tribulations. Christ was born to die, but His death brings the only hope to mankind. As we contemplate this Christmas season, we should never forget the main reason Christ came. He came be our Savior and that requires the agony of the cross.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.