

Positioning Yourself for Revelation

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’ The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”

Luke 2:25-35 NIVUK

<https://bible.com/bible/113/luk.2.25-35.NIVUK>

Last week we talked about how the Holy Spirit was, and is, always the prime mover – the first in on the action. This is clear and evident in the story of the birth of Jesus. We spoke last week about the ‘overshadowing’ of the Holy Spirit, particularly with regard to our minds, understanding that if we stay focussed on him, he will bring peace to our minds.

This week I want to focus on another aspect of the Christmas story that will help us prepare our minds for revelation from the Holy Spirit so that we may understand and know the Father and Jesus better. We can also learn how to hear God more clearly through scripture. The most important thing we will learn is how to prepare our minds and hearts to receive revelation from the Holy Spirit to help us see the kaleidoscope of grace Jesus is continually pouring out on us.

We don’t always see clearly because our ‘lens’ is not always in the right position. This morning I want to talk about a character in the nativity story who had, over years of dedication, turned his ‘lens’ to the right position so he could ‘see’ what the Spirit of the LORD was doing clearly and bring revelation to others so they could understand and enter into God’s grand plan to rescue all of us.

Firstly, it is important to say that Simeon's part in this story was not accidental. It didn't just happen to him in some arbitrary action of the Holy Spirit. Simeon positioned himself for revelation.

Luke tells us at the beginning of his Gospel that he had investigated everything regarding Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and that his report was based on interviews and eyewitness accounts. This means Luke did his research. He found the people involved in the story and interviewed them.¹

In the narrative of this encounter between Mary, Joseph and Simeon, we are told very little about Simeon. However, Luke gives us enough insight to piece together how this epic moment came about. To best understand how Simeon came to be a crucial player in this drama of salvation, I want to imagine Luke's interview with Mary and how it all played out in her eyes. We can take the clues we are given in the passage and put the pieces together.

What follows is an imaginary transcript of the interview Luke would have had with Mary. We will use what little information we do have from the account in scripture to put together an understanding of how and why the Holy Spirit used Simeon in this way and how Simeon positioned himself to be receptive to this revelation from God.

Luke: "Mary, what was Simeon like?"

Mary: "He was an old man but had a kindness and light in his eyes. He also had a presence about him, the same sense I got when I was visited by the angel Gabriel. I sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is why I trusted him and allowed him to hold my baby."

Luke: "What did he tell you about himself?"

Mary: "He told me that he had made the Temple his home. That he had committed himself to a life of holiness and to live rightly before God as best he could. He told me that he had asked God to help him do this and God empowered him by the Holy Spirit to devote himself to a life set apart for God.

Luke: "How did he know who Jesus was and what would happen to him?"

¹ Luke 1:1-4

Mary: “Simeon said that when he chose to devote his life to God, he asked the Holy Spirit to give him revelation as he read the scriptures. Simeon told me he had felt drawn to study Isaiah 40-55, and become a student of those scriptures. Although he read all the scriptures, he felt that God had said these passages were important for him to make a careful study of. He did not fully understand why but obeyed the LORD.”²

Luke: “How did he know who you were and how to find you. The Temple is overflowing with pilgrims and covers a large area. How did he identify you and Joseph?”

Mary: “He said that he was praying at that time in another part of the Temple. He said that over the years he had learned to hear and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. He said that the revelation God had given him regarding Isaiah’s prophecy was what he was praying through when he felt the voice of the Holy Spirit say now was the time and that what God had shown him was happening at that very moment. He knew he needed to get up and go to a different part of the Temple. Then he said he had a picture of what myself and Joseph were wearing. That is how he recognised us.”

Luke: “When he took Jesus in his arms did he explain what he was speaking over him?”

Mary: “Simeon explained after he had prophesied over Jesus and us that what he had been taught about these scriptures and how they would be fulfilled was different from what the Holy Spirit had shown him over many years of praying over these scriptures. He said he tried to share this with the priests and others but they dismissed him as being old and out of touch and said he did not understand the scriptures. But he said he held on to what the Holy Spirit was showing him and his faith grew and that he knew he was hearing from God. He said the Holy Spirit began to show him that he would see the fulfilment of the promise with his own eyes before he died. I asked him what the scriptures where and he said they where from Isaiah 40-55.

Luke: “So everything he said was taken from these scriptures?”

² When Simeon spoke over Jesus what has become known in the church as the “Nunc Dimittis”, and even his words to Mary and the suffering of Jesus, can be found rooted in Isaiah. The following passages are alluded to: Isaiah 40:1-2 / 42:6 / 46:13 / 42:2-3 / 50:4-7 / 53:7-12. Ref. Levison, Jack. ‘An Unconventional God’, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2020, pg.22-23

Mary: “Yes, everything. But part of the prophecy was specifically for me and was a direct word from the Holy Spirit for me. It was the part about a sword piercing my heart. I did not understand this until after Jesus rose from the dead. It was then that I understood that Simeon was referring to how I felt when Jesus was crucified. My heart broke, it was as if my world had come to an end.”

Luke: “Why do you think God chose Simeon to be the one to speak this prophecy over Jesus and you?”

Mary: “I think there are three main reasons. Firstly, he was devout and righteous. He lived for God alone and to please God by the way he conducted his life. Secondly, he loved to pray and read the scriptures and let God speak to him. He believed God the Holy Spirit still spoke to people directly both through the scriptures and prophecy. He believed in allowing God the Holy Spirit to guide and direct both his prayers and his reading of scripture. Thirdly, he believed God would give him revelation if he trusted the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Holy Spirit could open his spiritual eyes to see what God the Father was actually doing in the world at that time and he believed the Holy Spirit when it was revealed to him that he would play a part in God’s grand plan of salvation.”

Luke: “What was special about Simeon that God should choose him?”

Mary: “Nothing really, except that he positioned himself by the way he lived, his devotion and his faith, to be ready to hear God when he called and respond to that call.”

Conclusion

There are three simple things Simeon did to position himself to hear the voice of God. And let us not forget that he did not do any of these things in his own strength but asked the Holy Spirit to help him. Simeon devoted himself. He devoted himself to relationship with God through prayer and living rightly before God. He devoted himself to learning the scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit. He devoted himself to hearing the voice of God through revelation. Because of these things Simeon positioned himself to hear and respond to God when the Holy Spirit spoke to him.