



Luke 2:21-40
The Life of Christ
Dedication

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As we kick off a new year and a new decade, we also begin a new sermon series this morning. This series will not last the whole decade or even the whole year – though I make no guarantees that the sermon on any given Sunday won't feel like it lasts a whole hour even if it's more like 25 minutes. 😊 And in this series we will pick up with Jesus' life after the Christmas event, and simply continue looking at who Jesus is and what it means to be His disciple. We will look at some of the significant events, and teachings of his life, right up to his death and resurrection, and what these things mean for us today. So this series will take us to Resurrection Sunday, more commonly called Easter, which is on April 12th this year.

Scripture reading here – Luke 2:21-40.

So, we've just celebrated the birth of Jesus...we've ended one year and begun a new one...ended one decade and begun a new one, and last Sunday Rob Mathis preached a message that helped us answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?" What a great question to consider as we enter a new year and a new decade. And to help us answer that question, Rob looked at 1 Peter 2:9, "**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**" So we're called to be a part of God's kingdom, to be His people, to proclaim to the world the great thing he's done through Jesus that brings us out of darkness and into the light. That's our purpose as Jesus followers. And I want to build on that and ask another question today:

What does it take to do live into that calling (purpose)? Well, this morning we see several people who are examples of being called and what it takes to live into that calling. If you're wondering what it takes to live into the plans God has for you to live out your calling to be actively living by faith and participating with God in His Kingdom work – both individually and together here at Rose Hill – we see a huge piece of it in today's passage.

So the verses prior to where we read a moment ago were some of the ones that we read Christmas Eve: about the shepherds going to see Jesus. And verse 20 closes that out by letting us know that the shepherds returned to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen.

The very next verse – 21 – tells us that at the end of 8 days Jesus was circumcised as is the Jewish tradition, and at that point is given the name of Jesus. Now, as we go through this series looking at the life of Jesus, we will begin to have more and more of a focus on Jesus and who he is. But at this point he's still a baby – 8 days old in this verse – so there's no teaching, no miracles, no interaction with people. Everything we learn about Jesus and who he is comes from what others have said about him – the angels, the magi that Matthew tells us about, and so forth. So the focus of the story is naturally more on the people around Jesus. And that continues today with Jesus' earthly parents – Mary and Joseph – Simeon, and Anna. We can look at their response to God's call upon their lives, and their response to Jesus and learn from them about what it means for us to live in response to God's call and in relationship with Jesus.

Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated. In fact, if you have a Bible with the added sub-titles in it to help you navigate around your Bible, you probably have a subheading before verse 22 that says, "Jesus presented in the Temple" or something like that. And in fact we see in verse 22 that that is exactly what they did. This is what you and I would probably call "dedication." They want to dedicate Jesus to God's service, and ask God's blessing upon him. **But here's what we learn about Mary and Joseph and their response to God's call on their lives: *They are the ones who are dedicated.*** Jesus may be dedicated in a ceremonial thing at the temple...but it is Mary and Joseph's own dedication that makes that happen.

We see it throughout this passage that they are deeply committed to their faith. No fair-weather fans of God here...no participating in their faith as it fits their schedule and their budget. They are dedicated. Look at all that they do here in this passage that is an expression of their dedication to their faith: They have him circumcised on the 8th day; They brought him to present him to God in the Temple; Mary went through a post-birth purification ritual; as a

part of that ritual they offered a sacrifice to God of a pair of turtledoves. Verse 39 summarizes it by letting us know that they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord. And all of these things that they did are in fact articulated in the Old Testament in the first few verses of Leviticus 12.

And in all that they do here: **We see their own dedication to their faith and to God's call upon their lives.** They don't seem to be resting on their laurels or taking things easy. In fact, nothing has been all that terribly easy for their lives in the 9 months or so leading up to this point. There's a little clue here that that they certainly weren't able to just purchase their ease and comfort. The first few verses of Leviticus 12 asks for a lamb to be sacrificed at the purification ceremony, unless one can't be afforded, in which case a couple of turtledoves or pigeons may be sacrificed instead. So we see that they couldn't afford a lamb, and the irony cannot be lost on us that this is true even as they gave birth to and raised up the Lamb of God, Jesus. But this tells us that they are not rich – they can't buy their way out of the challenges of life – they're probably "below average" on the income scale, and yet that doesn't stop them from being dedicated to God's call upon them. They are dedicated to God and their faith, even with the challenges that they faced.

Then we get to Simeon, who Luke tells us is "righteous and devout" (v. 25). So we don't need to draw the conclusion ourselves: Luke has done it for us. This is not to say he's perfectly righteous as Jesus is. Remember, that's the gift that Jesus offers (as we saw on the second Sunday of Advent in the message then), as only he lives the perfectly righteous life. But nonetheless, Simeon stands out in comparison to others. Luke also tells us that he is devout. In other words, he's dedicated. Based on what Luke tells us about him and based on what Simeon says, we have painted for us a picture of someone who's been given orders by someone from above (like a supervisor) to stand guard at a post until an appointed event, at which time he's dismissed from his post. And the appointed event is to see the Messiah.

So when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple, Simeon is there, and the Spirit lets him know that this baby is the Christ, the Messiah. Verses 29-32 are Simeon's acknowledgement to God that he has completed the call upon

his life, and he can depart in peace. Although we're not told Simeon's age, we get the impression that he's older, almost as though God has kept him alive for this moment. Regardless, **Simeon is a beautiful example of living into our purpose with dedication and trusting God for the future when that purpose has been accomplished.** Luke describes him as "devout" and we get the sense throughout these verses that he has been consistently on the watch, sensitive to the Spirit's leading, looking for the Messiah. It's been an ongoing thing for him that he has been consistently dedicated to.

Then along comes Anna, who Luke says was a prophetess. We know even more about her than we do about Simeon: that she is the daughter of Phanuel, and of the tribe of Asher. She was married, her husband died after just 7 years of marriage, and she's been a widow ever since, and she's now 84 in this passage (or perhaps even 102 or so depending on how the 84 years is translated/interpreted – either as her age, or the number of years since her husband's death). Regardless, she's up there in age. **And in her, we see maybe the greatest dedication of all of these people here: Luke tells us in verse 37 that "She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying" (Luke 2:37).** So she either lived there on the premises of the temple, or perhaps in a house very nearby. Either way, we see her dedication to God quite clearly as she spends each day in prayer and worship at the Temple. She was the original "church lady."

So let me briefly share a couple of things from these people's lives that we can draw out. Let's start with Anna. **Anna shows us that you're never too old to stop being dedicated to God and serving Him in some way.** She's at the Temple – what you and I would call the church building – every single day, spending time in prayer and worship. This highlights for us the importance of prayer and worship, and also highlights for us that staying engaged with God in ministry in some way is something we all can do regardless of our age. Are you feeling too old to stay dedicated to living out your faith? Anna shows us that staying dedicated is possible. It doesn't mean you have to go to the church building every day...but we can all spend time in worship and prayer wherever we are. And like her, we can be open to God's leading for new ministry opportunities that present themselves. We see that in her life, as she becomes a prophetic evangelist for Jesus, telling others

about the redemption that he has come to bring. So she spends time in prayer and worship but when the opportunity comes along to be outwardly focused about Jesus as well, she doesn't shy away or let her age deter her. She is, perhaps, the oldest evangelist in the New Testament. She is an inspiring example of dedication.

Second, we can let the prophetic word from Simeon speak into our own lives and help us get a sense of our own dedication. Unlike Anna, Luke does not say that Simeon was a prophet, but he gives a prophetic word to Mary. He in verse 35 he says that Jesus will be a sign that is opposed, “so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” We might associate “thoughts” with the head more than the heart, but the point is still made. What are our thoughts about Jesus? What is our heart condition in regards to him? What is our dedication to Jesus? I don't mean to kick off 2020 with guilt-inducing word here, if your dedication to Jesus is lacking...but the start of a new year is a good chance to let a prophetic word like this speak to us as well, so that we might honestly assess our lives and our faith, and make sure we are as dedicated as each of the people we read about here. Are we dedicated to God's calling upon us to live out our faith – together as a church body here at Rose Hill, with our families or others with whom we may be in more daily contact with, and on our own as well?

There was a boy who once got a dollar bill for his birthday. He immediately began to make plans to invest the money in an ice cream sundae with all the trimmings. The party guests were a somewhat pious group, and someone suggested that he should give part of the dollar to the poor. “I thought of that,” admitted the birthday boy, “but I think I'll give it to the ice cream man instead and let him give it to the poor.” Obviously, “dedication” is more than just financial decisions about how we do the Lord's work, but that's a part of it, and maybe the one where we struggle the most to be truly dedicated. So how dedicated are we in our finances...as well as in our time, in our relationships? Are we hoping someone else will take care of that – like the boy and his dollar? What does Jesus reveal about the thoughts of our heart, about our attitude toward God? Having an honest assessment spurred by a prophetic word like Simeon's is an opportunity to get on track, to re-dedicate ourselves and really make 2020 a great year of living a dedicated life for

Jesus.

Then there's Mary and Joseph, who stayed dedicated to God and their faith in spite of a variety of challenges. In spite of their meager financial position, in spite of the challenges they faced as newlyweds – and new parents – and in spite of the suspicions people would have about their pregnancy...they didn't waiver in their dedication to God. They didn't pull back from the community of faith or from God himself – they were active and engaged with their time and participation in the faith community, as we already noted. They stayed dedicated.

So in this passage today, we see three examples of people who were dedicated to their faith – responding to God's dedication to them as revealed in Jesus Christ. They lived out their faith: and the ways in which they did are inspiring. As we begin a new year and a new decade I invite you to consider their dedication, and then consider your own. And of course, their dedication pales in comparison to God's dedication, which is our ultimate source of inspiration, and the one to whom we respond. But seeing other humans, no different than you or I are, and getting a glimpse of their dedication, is a reminder to make 2020 a year in which we are fully dedicated to what God is doing in us and through us. These people are not Captain America or Wonder Woman or some other unrealistic, fictitious character we could never actually be like. These are real people whose dedication we can emulate. So may this be a year of dedication to God and his calling upon our lives here at Rose Hill, and in all facets of our lives – from newborns to the elderly.... May we, with great dedication, live into the calling to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Let's pray...Amen.