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on a card, or in church, don't stop at the crib. See what it's pointing to. It is pointing to the explosive truth that the baby lying there is already being spoken of as the true king of the world. The rest of Luke's story, both in the gospel and, later on, in Acts, will tell how he comes into his kingdom.

## LUKE 2.21-40

### Simeon and Anna

<sup>21</sup>After eight days, the time came to circumcise the baby. He was called by the name Jesus, which the angel had given him before he had been conceived in the womb.

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for them to be purified according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him before the Lord. <sup>23</sup>That's what the law of the Lord says: 'Every firstborn male shall be called holy to the Lord.' <sup>24</sup>'They also came to offer sacrifice, according to what it says in the law of the Lord: 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout, waiting for God to comfort Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup>He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Led by the Spirit, he came into the Temple. As Jesus' parents brought him in, to do for him what the law's regulations required, <sup>28</sup>he took the baby in his arms and blessed God with these words:

<sup>29</sup>'Now, master, you are dismissing your servant in peace, just as you said.

<sup>30</sup>These eyes of mine have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>Which you made ready in the presence of all peoples:

<sup>32</sup>A light for revelation to the nations,  
And glory for your people Israel.'

<sup>33</sup>His father and mother were astonished at the things that were said about him. <sup>34</sup>Simeon blessed them.

'Listen,' he said to Mary his mother, 'this child has been placed here to make many in Israel fall and rise again, and for

a sign that will be spoken against (yes, a sword will go through your own soul as well), <sup>35</sup>so that the thoughts of many hearts may be disclosed.'

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophetess called Anna, the daughter of Phanneel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having been widowed after a seven-year marriage, <sup>37</sup>and was now eighty-four. She never left the Temple, but worshipped with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>She came up at that moment and gave thanks to God, and spoke about Jesus to everyone who was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>So when they had finished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, and was full of wisdom, and God's grace was upon him.

I watched as the craftsman went about his task. He carefully set the lead into the window to be the framework for the beautiful glass he had been staining. Now came the moment: where before was a plain window, now there was a riot of colour and shape, telling a story and making it sparkle at the same time.

Luke has now sketched the outline of a picture. He has placed the lead around the window. What coloured glass is he going to use to fill it in? What story will he tell, and what sparkle will he give it?

The picture is of Jesus as the true world ruler: the Lord, the Messiah, the saviour, the real king of the world instead of Caesar. How easy it would be to fill in this picture in glowing, royal colours, giving us a sense of future glory, world dominion, power and majesty.

Luke does the opposite. He chooses sombre colours; and the more he fills in the picture the more we realize that this is a different sort of kingdom to that of Caesar Augustus. It is indeed what God had promised; but, not for the last time, Luke is warning us that it doesn't look like what people had expected.

In particular, this is becoming a story about suffering. Simeon is waiting for God to comfort Israel. Anna is in touch

with the people who are waiting for the redemption of Israel. They are both living in a world of patient hope, where suffering has become a way of life. It now appears that God's appointed redeemer will deal with this suffering by sharing it himself. Simeon speaks dark words about opposition, and about a sword that will pierce Mary's heart as well.

So this, Luke is saying, is what happens when the kingdom of God confronts the kingdom of the world. Luke invites us to watch, throughout the story, as the prophecies come true. Mary will look on in dismay as her son is rejected by the very city to which he offered the way of peace, by the very people he had come to rescue. Finally, the child who is, as Simeon says, 'placed here to make many in Israel fall and rise again', himself passes through death and into resurrection, taking with him the hopes and fears of the city, the nation and the world.

But if Luke is colouring in the picture with the dark notes of suffering, he is also showing that the kingdom brought by this baby is not for Israel only, but for the whole world. Simeon had grasped the truth at the heart of the Old Testament (which, Luke is careful to note, Jesus and his parents fulfilled): when Israel's history comes to its God-ordained goal, then at last light will dawn for the world. All the nations, not just the Jews, will see what God is unveiling – a plan of salvation for all people without distinction. This will be the true glory of Israel itself, to have been the bearer of promise, the nation in and from whom the true world ruler would arise: 'A light for revelation to the nations, and glory for your people Israel.' This is not the sort of revelation the world was expecting, and not the sort of glory Israel wanted, but true revelation and true glory none the less.

Luke adds yet another human dimension to the story. By the time the first two chapters are finished, almost all his readers will have found someone in the story with whom they can identify. We have met the older couple surprised to have a child

at last. We have seen the young girl even more surprised to have a child so soon, and her husband coming with her to the Temple, offering the specified sacrifice. The next section will feature Jesus himself on the threshold of young adult life. Now, in this passage, we have the old man and woman, waiting their turn to die, worshipping God night and day and praying for the salvation of his people. Luke wants to draw readers of every age and stage of life into his picture. No matter who or where you are, the story of Jesus, from the feeding-trough in Bethlehem to the empty tomb and beyond, can become your story.

In becoming your story, it will become your vocation. Everybody has their own role in God's plan. For some, it will be active, obvious, working in the public eye, perhaps preaching the gospel or taking the love of God to meet the practical needs of the world. For others, it will be quiet, away from public view, praying faithfully for God to act in fulfillment of his promises. For many, it will be a mixture of the two, sometimes one, sometimes the other. Mary and Joseph needed Simeon and Anna at that moment; the old man and old woman needed them, had been waiting for them, and now thanked God for them. The births of **John the Baptist** and Jesus are already beginning their work, of drawing people of all sorts into new worship and fellowship.

## LUKE 2.41–52

### The Boy Jesus

<sup>41</sup>Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem every year for the Passover festival. <sup>42</sup>When he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the feast days were over, they began the journey back, but the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know; <sup>44</sup>they thought he was in the travelling party, and went a day's journey before looking for him among their relatives and friends.