

The Tendency to Tangle

Luke 2:21-40 (Excerpts)

December 28, 2008

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus . . . Simeon took him in his arms and prayed God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have repaired in the presence of all people. Light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Brings birth narrative to a close

Luke starts with notice that J and M journeyed from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, now he reports that they returned to Galilee, to Nazareth...

Mary fulfills what the law prescribes, circumcision and purification....

Anna and Simeon... devout persons... important because they recognize and prophetically articulate what Jesus’ role will be

Primary purpose to declare who J is and foreshadow what he would do...

Circumcision and naming of male child make acceptance into the covenant community....

8th day... confer the name JESUS...

Given not by Joseph but by the angel of the Lord...

Declaring the child’s future role as Savior of all people...

Two further acts required... of devout parents: redemption of firstborn and purification of the mo....

Firstborn consecrated to the Lord... bought back at a price of five shekels of silver... later... service to God...

Purification of mo... ceremonially unclean for seven days... purification for 33 days... 2x for female child...

Not permitted to enter Temple or touch holy object...

Then after 40 or 80 days offer a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove... if not afford offer two turtledoves or pigeons

The fact that they gave 2 turtledoves may underscore the fact that J was born poor
Simeon's blessing Meets in the Temple... blesses.... Response of J's parents... S's blessing of Mary...

Aura of piety illuminates the scene..

Temple, guided by Spirit, parents come to fulfill the Law... words of Scripture echo in S's oracle.... Coming of Messiah...

Blessing from Isaiah: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God....

Just as the Spirit has come upon John, Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah, now Simeon....

Meeting at temple no accident, according to narrator... Simeon was guided by H. Sp...

God's doing

Simeon was prompted to be there by the Spirit....

b. of child; fulfillment of G's promises, consolation of Israel, coming of Messiah all occasions for praising God....

Assurance that a patriarch can die in peace, has seen the fulfillment of God's promises...

Peace occurs 14 times in Luke... where it is both the goal and the result of god's redemptive work in J...

OT prophets looked forward to time of peace on earth...

Here sense of promises fulfilled...

Anna...

Luke is fond of pairing male and female figures... Anna character and piety emphasized, not her words...

Anna prepares reader for frequent references to widows... praises God and speaks of the child... Anna's prophecy matches his... the pious ones declare J is one to bring salvation ... but not all receive...

Matt and Luke: J born in Beth, from Nazareth... at end both have families travel to Nazareth... but in between different

An old man in the temple, waiting in the courtyard, waiting for the answer to a promise

When all at once he sees them, in the morning sunlight, a couple carrying a baby

Mary and the baby come and in her hand five shekels, the price to redeem her baby boy

The baby gently cooing, nestled in his mother's arms, Simeon takes the boy and starts to sing.

Now that I've held him in my arms, my life can come to an end

Let your servant now depart in peace.

For I've seen your salvation, he's the light of the gentiles and the glory of his people Israel.

Sitting in our living room with my one remaining connection with our older generation in our family, uncle at 86, he reminded us that his and my mother's cousin was the wife of the pastor of the first church I served in SD years before I got there.. and John reminded him that that very pastor, my mom's cousin, married his parents!

I do not yet know really why, but I am so excited to preach this sermon today. Last year, I believe it was actually on the Sunday morning after Christmas, as I was getting ready to go to church and to preach a sermon that obviously I had already prepared, I heard a very secular piece on the radio. It was a report on "tangling." That is, the tangling of our Christmas lights. Studies showed that our chains of Christmas decoration lights, though they go into the box neatly, tend to be tangled when we get them out of the box. Well, the research question: when do they tangle? Why? How?

The conclusion—they tangle almost immediately as we put them into the garage! They sit there, tangled, throughout the year.

I immediately thought I needed to preach on this. What? That doesn't make any sense. How on earth can we get any inspiration from the tendency of chains of lights to tangle, quickly? Actually, the study showed that other things tangle, too.... Such as hair...