Jesus Presented in the Temple
Luke 2: 22–38

DIG: What does the Temple ceremony reveal about Jesus’ parents? In Simeon’s prophecies what was he predicting about the ministry of Yeshua? How did the sword of Simeon’s prophecy threaten Mary’s peace of mind? Of whom does Anna remind you? How does she complement Simeon’s prophecy? What impact would these startling predictions by Shim’on and Anna have on all who were listening that day?

REFLECT: How has Christ brought light to your life? How is He still the cause of the falling and rising of people throughout the world? Did your parents dedicate you to the Lord? How so? If you were not dedicated, how do you feel about that? When has God brought a Simeon or an Anna to confirm something in your life?

Eight days after the birth of Yeshua, Joseph and Mary presented their son for the covenant of circumcision in Bethlehem, which identified Him as a genuine son of the covenant between the L ORD and Abraham (Genesis 17:1–14). At that time they made His name official: Jesus, or YHVH saves. Then, in keeping with the Torah of Moses, they would make the five-mile journey to the Temple in Jerusalem. There, Miryam would offer a sacrifice for her own ceremonial cleansing after childbirth, then she would present her firstborn to ADONAI in recognition of God’s ownership. This simple ceremony consisted, first, in the presentation of the child to a priest in recognition of the L ORD’s ownership.

Then Miryam had to offer a sacrifice as required by the Torah of ADONAI. She would have entered the Temple through the Beautiful Gate to the Court of the Women. At last one of the officiating priests would come to Mary at the Gate of Nicanor (see Nb1 - The Nicanor Gate), and take from her hands the offering that she brought. While a priest slaughtered the doves she was offering on the bronze altar (see my commentary on Exodus Fa - Build an Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze), Miryam stood waiting while incense was burned on the golden altar inside the Holy Place (see my commentary on Exodus Fp - The Altar of Incense in the Sanctuary: Christ, Our Advocate with the Father). Since Mary was not presenting an offering that required her to lay her hands on it, she did not have to enter the Court of the Priests (see Mw - The Diagram of the Second Temple) to place her hands on the slaughter by the bronze altar. There would be a crowd of worshippers behind her in the large square. As she stood at the top of the fifteen semicircular steps at the majestic Nicanor Gate, she could see into the Holy Place.
The Court of the Women (see Nc2 - The Court of the Women) was not just limited to the women. Any Jew who was ceremonially clean could go into this area - men, women and children. Indeed, this was probably the most common place for worship, the women occupying, according to Jewish tradition, only a raised gallery along three sides of the court. Yet only the men were permitted to go through the majestic Nicanor Gate leading from the Court of the Women into the Court of Isra’el. The Court of the Women covered an area 70.87 by 70.87 meters, 5,023 square meters or 16,475 square feet. The great acts of worship took place there on the occasion of the feasts. This place functioned, to a certain extent, as the Temple synagogue in the open court. Therefore the women had free access.128

The first observance was the purification of the mother after childbirth. According to the Torah, a mother was to undergo a purification ritual forty days after giving birth to a boy and eighty days after giving birth to a girl. Since Miryam gave birth to a boy, this event took place when Yeshua was forty-one days old. The purpose of this observance was for her ceremonial cleansing and purification to restore communion with God. When the time of her purification according to Leviticus had been completed (forty days), Joseph and Mary traveled to Jerusalem (Luke 2:22a).

She could not afford a lamb, so she offered a pair of young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering (Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12:1-8). This reveals two important facts about her. First, Mary brought a sin offering because she believed she was a sinner in need of a Savior (see my commentary on Exodus Fc - The Sin Offering). She was not there to be worshiped, but to be cleansed of her sin. Secondly, because they could only afford a pair of young pigeons it showed that Yosef and Miryam were on the poverty level, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (see blow). Today’s Orthodox Jewish women cannot offer a sacrifice, since there is no Temple, but they immerse themselves in a mikveh in partial observance of the purification rite.129

The Roman Catholic Church, however, holds up Mary as an object of worship. She is called: Mother of God, Queen of the Apostles, Queen of Heaven (see my commentary on Jeremiah Cd - They Knead Dough and Make Cakes for the Queen of Heaven), Queen of the Angels, The Door of Paradise, The Gate of Heaven, Our Life, Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, and many others that ascribe to her supernatural powers. All of which are false. The average Roman Catholic acts on the belief that Miryam has the powers of deity.

The doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception” teaches that Mary herself was born without original sin. Pope Pius IX issued the original decree stating this doctrine on December 8, 1954. Side by side with the doctrine that Miryam was born without sin, there developed the doctrine that she did not commit sin at any time during her life. Then, as one link reached out for another, they gave her the attribute of impeccability, which means that
she could not sin, that her nature was such that it was impossible for her to sin! All of this was a natural outgrowth of their worship of Mary, a further step in her deification. Their Mariolatry demanded it! They sensed that if they were to give her the worship that is due of the Lord, she must be sinless. This doctrine did not become official until 1854, more then eighteen centuries after Christ was born of the virgin Miryam, and so it is one of the later doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.130

Isaiah had prophesied: A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1). That meant that the shoot, or the Messiah, would appear only when the house of David had been reduced down to where it was, not in David's day, but in his father Jesse's day. That is why Isaiah mentions Jesse rather than David. He pictures the great house of David as a mighty tree that had reduced to a mere stump. But while it appeared to be nothing but a dead stump, suddenly a shoot will begin to grow and produce life. The point that the Holy Spirit made through Isaiah was that when the house of David had been reduced to poverty again, to what it had been in Jesse's day - then the Meshiach would appear. From Joseph and Mary's economic status it was clear that Jesus came when the house of David had been reduced once again to poverty.131

Two offerings were made for Miryam's purification. As a perpetual reminder that all mankind is born in sin even as David confessed (Psalm 51:5), a mother was deemed ceremonially defiled by the birth of a child, so first a sin offering was made. Secondly, a burnt offering was made for the restoration of communion with the LORD. Payment for the two pigeons was dropped in the third of the thirteen trumpet-shaped collection boxes in the Court of the Women. The sons of Annas, the high priest, supplied the sacrifices after payment was made. Then the Sadducees arranged those women who had presented themselves in the designated place beside the Nicanor gate. There they would be nearest to the Court of Isra'el so when incense was burned on the golden altar in the Holy Place they could see the white cloud of smoke come up symbolizing their prayers. As Mary worshiped there at the Temple in Jerusalem, her grateful heart overflowed with praise to God. She was blessed beyond belief. After the purification ceremony was completed and all stain had been removed from her, then she could present her son to ADONAI for redemption.

The second observance that needed to be performed was presentation and redemption of the firstborn to the LORD (see my commentary on Exodus Cd - The Principle of the First Born). Mary mingled prayer and thanksgiving while she stood there. Then the priest would come to her, and sprinkling her with the sacrificial blood, would declare her cleansed. Her firstborn would then be redeemed at the hand of the priest, with five shekels of silver (Numbers 18:16).132
As it is written in the Torah of ADONAI, the first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to Him (Exodus 13:2). But after giving their firstborn son to the LORD, the only way a Jewish family could get him back was through redemption (see my commentary on Exodus Bz - Redemption). The ceremony of redeeming every firstborn male would remind them of their redemption from the slavery of Egypt by the blood of the lamb on each family’s door frame. So in obedience, Yosef and Mary took the newborn Jesus to the Temple and went looking for a priest for His formal presentation (Luke 2:22b). Two short prayers accompanied this. The first was for the redemption that God commanded through His prophet Moshe: You are to give over to ADONAI the firstborn male of every womb (Exodus 13:12; Luke 2:23), and the second prayer was for the payment of the redemption price of five sanctuary-shekels. After those two prayers, their child had truly been given over to Ha'Shem in recognition of His ownership, and then bought back again.

God’s desires have not changed (Hebrews 13:8). The firstborn of every womb among the Israelites still belongs to ADONAI. There is no Temple in Jerusalem, and five shekels are not paid, but the principle remains the same. Today, Jews still set apart their firstborn males to YHVH. Money is still given on a sliding scale. The rich pay more and the poor pay less. But they continue to redeem their firstborn sons. As believers, it is important to remember that the L ORD Almighty has purchased us, not with five shekels, but with the precious blood of His Son.

As Mary descended the fifteen semicircular steps from the Gate of Nicanor, a sudden heavenly light of joy filled the heart of Shim'on, a righteous and devout man who had grown old waiting for the LORD to comfort Isra’el (Luke 2:25a). He was a member of the believing remnant at that time. The comfort that Luke alludes to here is the main subject of Chapters 40 to 66 in Isaiah (see my commentary on Isaiah Hc – Comfort, Comfort My People Says Your God). That comfort could only come through the Messiah.

Simeon was a careful student of the Scriptures and the Ruach HaKodesh had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah of ADONAI with his own eyes (Luke 2:25b-26 CJB). Prompted by the Holy Spirit that day, he went into the Temple courts. The LORD gave Shim’on the eyes to see, or the ability to recognize the Messiah with a mere glance.133 and when the parent brought in the child Yeshua to do for Him what the Torah required (Luke 2:27 CJB), Simeon, recognized that forty-one-day-old boy as the comfort of Isra’el. His eyes had seen the Messiah.

Immediately, Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God (Luke 2:28): Like Zechariah and Elizabeth before him, Shim’on was moved by the Spirit to declare: Now, ADONAI, as You have promised in Isaiah, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation (Luke 2:29-30; Isaiah 40:5). Simeon was
not speaking English but in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for salvation is *Yeshuah*; the Hebrew word for *Jesus* is almost the same, *Yeshua*. Both come from the same Hebrew root *yasha*, which means *to save*. The only difference is the final letter "h" which is silent. Therefore, in Hebrew the word *salvation* and the word *Jesus* sound the same. In a real way, what he said was not only *my eyes have seen Your salvation*, but *my eyes have seen Your Yeshua*.

Then Shim'on prophesied about two groups who would benefit from Messiah's coming, which *He* had prepared in the sight of all nations (Luke 2:31; Isaiah 52:10). Simeon saw the same two groups that Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, had seen. The first group is the Gentiles, for the Anointed One will be a light for revelation to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6 and 51:4). Zechariah declared that it was the Goyim who were living in darkness and in the shadow of death. Isaiah had already prophesied that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles (see my commentary on *Isaiah Hp – Here Is My Servant, Whom I Uphold*). And the second group to benefit from His coming would be the Jewish people themselves, the glory of Your people Isra'el (Luke 2:32). This is the fourth of four songs recorded in Luke, first by Mary 1:46-66, Zechariah 1:68-79, then a choir of angels 2:14, and finally here by Simeon in Luke 2:29-32.

The child's father and mother (the most natural way of describing Joseph's and Mary's relationship to Jesus) marveled at what was said about Him (Luke 2:33). It was as if their silent thoughts had been an unspoken question, to which Shim'on gave the answer. Mystic as it seemed, both Yosef and Mary knew that his words were prophetic. Simeon's song was an illusion to Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, meaning that the Suffering Servant would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles. Aside from the Great Commission, however, we generally don't see a ministry to the Goyim in the Gospels. This prophecy would be fulfilled in the book of Acts (see Acts 13:47-48, 26:23).

It was as if the whole history of the Messiah upon the earth was passing in rapid succession right before Simeon's eyes. After pronouncing a blessing on Joseph and Miryam, he turned directly to Mary and prophesied something that she probably didn't fully understand until many years later. He said, listen carefully: *This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Isra'el* (Luke 2:34a). How accurate that prophecy would be fulfilled years later. The LORD and His ministry would become a stone that causes mankind to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall (Isaiah 8:14b). The First Coming of Jesus will cause a division among the Jews of the world. There will be those who rise because of Him, or those who believe, and those who will fall because of their lack of faith. Shim'on prophesied that Yeshua would be a sign that will be spoken against and for the nation of Israel that has been true to this very day (Luke 2:34b; Isaiah 8:14). Once again, this concept is started in Luke and completed in Acts. There is a constant division in Isra'el (Acts 14:1-2 and 28:23-24).
Jesus never gave His mother a single moment’s worry over rebellion, bad choices, or running away from God. But that didn’t spare her from worrying or losing sleep over Him. In the Temple, when He was only forty-one-days old, the elderly Simeon set an ominous tone of things to come when he prophesied to Miryam, “And in addition, a sword will pierce your own soul” (Luke 2:35b CJB). These words usually bring to mind the heartbreak she saw at the rejection of her son by the Jewish leadership. But the time when the sword would pierce its deepest into her soul would be when she saw Him crucified. But his words also captured the bumpy road that led from the stable to the cross. Those rare accounts of conversations between Yeshua and His mother (presumably because Mary told her story to the other Gospel writers) are weighed down with love, but riddled with pain. Jesus’ remarks always caught His mother off guard and left her pondering His words, trying to figure out what He meant, and to sort through the implications. Exchanges between Yeshua and His mother are memorable and record the steps of Mary’s journey from a mother to a disciple.136

Then Simeon also prophesied that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed (Luke 2:35a). Indeed, the thoughts of many hearts were and are revealed through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As He Himself said: Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be members of his own household (Matthew 10:34). He makes you choose sides. You can’t sit on the fence with Him. As a result, in that way Shim'on said that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed.

Coming up to them at that very moment was a prophetess named Anna, who spoke the Word of the LORD. For a Jewish woman the visit to the Court of the Women was a highpoint. She could not approach any further, unless she presented an offering that required her to lay her hands on it and go to the slaughter at the bronze altar. She may have taught the TaNaKh to other women, or she may have simply had a private ministry there in the Temple complex offering words of encouragement and instruction from the Hebrew Scriptures to other women who came to worship. Nothing suggests that she was a source of revelation, or that any special revelation ever came to her directly. Even her realization that Jesus was the Messiah seemed to have come from the revelation given to Simeon and subsequently overheard by her. Nevertheless she is called a prophetess because it was her habit to declare the truth of God’s Word to others. That gift for proclaiming the truth of God ultimately played a major role in the ministry she is still remembered for.137

Only five women were ever referred to as a prophetess. First, there was Miryam, the sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20). She led the women of Israel in a psalm of praise to God about the drowning of Pharaoh and his army (see my commentary on Exodus Cl - The Song
of Miryam). The simple one-stanza psalm Miryam sang was the substance of her only recorded prophecy (Exodus 15:21).

The second prophetess in the TaNaKh was Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth (Judges 4:4). Of all the judges who led the Jewish people before the monarchy of Isra’el was established, she was the only woman. In fact, she is the only woman in the entire Bible who ever held that kind of leadership and was blessed for it. Adonai seemed to raise her up as a rebuke to the men of her generation who were paralyzed by fear. She didn’t usurp their power, but ruled in a maternal role, while men like Barak were being raised up to step into their proper roles of leadership. She received instructions from the Lord (Judges 4:6), so it seems that she received revelation from God, at least that one time.

Thirdly, there was a prophetess named Huldah (Second Kings 22:14-20). She received a word from Adonai for Hilkiah the priest and others. Nothing else is known about her. She is mentioned only in Judges and a parallel passage in Second Chronicles 34:22-28.

Only two other women are called a prophetess in the TaNaKh. A false prophetess named Noadish (Nehemiah 6:14), and Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3), who was called a prophetess only because her husband was a prophet. None of these women had an ongoing prophetic ministry like Elijah, Isaiah, or any of the other prophets. In other words, there is nothing anywhere in the Bible to indicate that any of these women ever held a prophetic office.

Anna was the daughter of Penuel of whom nothing else is known. And she was of the tribe of Asher. This is one of the supposed so-called “lost” tribes of Isra’el. But obviously she wasn’t lost, she was right there in Isra’el. The truth is they were never lost. No doubt, a small portion of the northern ten tribes likely drifted off to lands unknown, but the Bible does account for the vast majority, who went through a sifting process whereby the faithful were absorbed back into Judah. After the northern Kingdom of Isra’el broke away from the southern Kingdom of Judah, the books of Kings and Chronicles repeatedly tell of many from the northern ten tribes defecting to the south well before the Assyrian assault on Samaria in 722 BC. Many were still loyal to Jerusalem as the center of worship and pilgrimage, rather than the rival temple set up on Mount Gerizim. Others believed the true successor to King David was in Judah, while Israel’s kings were falling into apostasy. These defections increased whenever civil war erupted between the divided kingdoms. For instance, Second Chronicles 15:9 says that large number had come over to him [Judah’s King Asa] from Israel when they saw that Adonai was with him (Second Chronicles 11:13-17 and 19:4). Also, when the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity they did not only come from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, they came from all twelve tribes. Asher was supposedly one of those ten “lost” tribes, and yet Anna was a representative living right in Jerusalem.
By the time of Jesus’ birth Anna was very old. The Greek text is unclear about her exact age. It literally reads: *this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years.* It could mean that she was a widow for eighty-four years, but more likely, the Bible is saying that she was an eighty-four-year-old widow. She had evidently lived with her husband for only seven years until she became widowed (Luke 2:36-37a). Like Simeon, she also recognized Messiah when she saw Mary’s baby Boy. Normally, she never left the Temple compound, but stayed worshiping night and day, fasting and praying (Luke 2:37b). What would she be praying for? No doubt the very same thing that Shim’on had been praying for, the redemption of Isra’el and Yerushalayim through the coming of the Messiah. But coming up to them at that very moment she realized that what she had been praying and fasting for was right there in front of her wrapped up in Simeon’s arms.

Immediately, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38 and Isaiah 52:9). The imperfect verb tense signifies continuous action. It literally meant that she continually spoke about Him to all. She had good news and she could not keep it to herself. This became her one message the rest of her life.\(^ {139}\) She could finally leave the Temple compound. After that, she went out and told the believing remnant, or those who were looking forward to it and believed in it, that the coming redemption of Isra’el and Jerusalem was at hand. The Messiah had been born and she had seen Him.\(^ {140}\)

The only people in Isra’el who did recognize Jesus at His birth were humble, common people. The magi (see *Av - The Visit of the Magi*), of course were foreigners and Gentiles, and they were rich, powerful and influential men in their own culture. But the only Israelis who understood that Yeshua was the Messiah at His birth were Yosef and Miryam, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna. To the world, all of them were basically nobodies. All of them recognized Him, however, because they were told who He was by angels, or by some special revelation. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke records all of their accounts in succession, as if he is calling multiple witnesses, one at a time, to prove his case.\(^ {141}\)

The people we encounter in this file are models of Jewish faithfulness. They were the believing remnant of Isra’el awaiting their Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth were of the tribe of Levi, righteous and devout, anxiously awaiting Israel’s salvation. Simeon purposed that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah of ADONAI with his own eyes. Anna was a model of Jewish piety, a widow devoting herself entirely to worship, fasting and prayer. Luke’s purpose is to introduce us to the faithful remnant of the people of God, waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises ADONAI has made to them.\(^ {142}\)