

Mary's Legacy: Confirmation
Luke 2:21-40

What comes to mind when you hear the words: confirm or confirmation?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines confirm this way: “to establish the truth or correctness of something previously believed or suspected to be the case.”

I believe it is important for us to talk about the confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah today. Each of you will celebrate in some way today the birth of this child named Jesus. Many others will celebrate without really knowing the true reason for the Season. Then, too there are those who want to banish Christmas from public life. We can feel sorry for them, but I believe we need to pray for them and take every opportunity to tell them the message that Jesus is the real deal!

I'm sure many of you have heard sermons and Sunday School lessons over the years spelling out how Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that was to come. I read where a scientist calculated that the odds are one in 14 trillion of one person fulfilling just 48 of the 300 or so Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. And Jesus fulfilled all of them! Today I want to take a look at two other confirmations of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. These come from two very unlikely sources. They also come at a time when Jesus was still an infant and unable to perform any miracles, speak with authority or teach by word and example.

Mary and Joseph bring the baby to the Temple to fulfill the rites called for in the Law of Moses. The first confirmation comes from a man named Simeon. Now this man may be considered a small time player, a minor part in the overall drama unfolding about the baby. But notice what Luke records about this man. First, we see that he was righteous and devout. He was a man who was close to God and who followed the Old Testament teachings as best he could. We also see that the Holy Spirit was on him. We are told that he was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” Now, let's face it. The people of Israel had been waiting a long time for someone to come along and console or comfort them. The Messiah had been promised hundreds of years before, but they were still waiting. Now, we are told that this man, Simeon, was being led by the Holy Spirit to look specifically for this Comforter. Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Wow! That is some kind of promise.

To make this even more interesting, we are told that Simeon was moved by the Spirit to go to the Temple courts at that specific time. Then Mary and Joseph show up and what happens? This old man, a total stranger to them, comes up to them, takes their 8-day-old baby from them, holds him in his arms and begins singing his praises.

In this event, we see three specific things that no doubt amazed Mary and Joseph. First we see that Simeon recognizes Jesus as a gift from God. He says, “as you have promised” and goes on to say that he can now die because he has seen God's salvation. He doesn't know how that is going to work, but he knows who this baby is.

Christmas is traditionally a time of gift giving. But it is important to think about giving gifts. First, if you give someone a gift and they won't accept it, it isn't really a gift, is it. A gift is not a gift until it is accepted. If I offer to give you something and then refuse to give it, it's not really a gift. Also, if I give you a gift and you insist on paying for it, it isn't really a gift. If I offer you what you think is a gift and then ask you to reimburse me for it, it isn't a gift. A gift is given freely as a statement of love and caring about the one to whom it is given.

In Jesus Christ, God has given us a gift. There is nothing we can do to earn it. The value of this gift is far greater than anything we could ever be able to pay. It is free and of infinite value.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Elizabeth Taylor's jewels were auctioned off for a total of nearly 115 million dollars. That is pocket change compared to the value of Christ to the person who accepts Him as their Lord and Savior. And that gift is free!

The second thing Simeon says about the baby Jesus is that He is the Messiah. How did Simeon know this? The Holy Spirit made it clear to him. Remember? The Spirit led him to the temple at just this time when Mary & Joseph came with the baby to fulfill the Law of Moses. The Spirit spoke to Simeon and showed him that this child was the Messiah. That, in itself, would be a strange thing. The people of Israel were looking for a warrior type, conquering Messiah, one who would come and set Israel free from her captives and redeem her once and for all. Only the Spirit of God could show someone like Simeon that a baby was the one who would be the Messiah, the Savior of Israel.

Simeon knew, and began to sing praises to God for revealing to him that this baby, Jesus, was the long-awaited Messiah. In his song, Simeon says, "my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations."

The third thing Simeon points to is that this child will be a light to the entire world. In verse 32, he says, this child that he has seen will be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." Two interesting things stand out in this statement. First, Simeon puts the Gentiles ahead of Israel. This is very unusual, and very telling. The Jews tended to think in terms of the Messiah coming only to set the nation of Israel free. Here Simeon is probably quoting Isaiah 49:6 which says, "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." Also, a few chapters earlier, Isaiah says, "The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The Lord has spoken!" Notice the similarities with Simeon's praise, using the word revelation. God has, in Jesus, revealed His salvation for the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Indeed, Jesus did become the light of the world. People from every nation have come to see that light and have had their minds set free to accept the wisdom of the Lord Jesus. They have been set free to know the forgiveness that can be theirs when they place their trust in Him and confess to Him. His light, which started with a star over a stable in Bethlehem, has become a shining beacon of love, forgiveness and promise across the ages since that wonderful day.

So, you see, as a result of what Simeon has said, we come together to celebrate not just a birthday, but the revelation of the light of the world for all people. That means we must go from here not only rejoicing for ourselves, but doing all that we can to share this good news with everyone we meet. And that means not just today, not just during the Christmas season, but throughout the year. Not only has Jesus come for a select few, not just for the Jews, but for all people. Many do not know how powerful the evidence is that this baby would fulfill all the prophecies of the Messiah, as well as be recognized by this devout and faithful man named Simeon.

So, we see from Simeon a confirmation of who Jesus really was – and is. But there is another confirmation that same day. Luke goes on to tell us about a prophetess named Anna. Now, talk about a devout person! Anna has virtually lived at the Temple since she was widowed. And she is now 84 years old. Luke says, “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” Anna somehow knew that Jesus was the hope of the world, that He was the one who would set people free.

Confirmation: Two more ways that “establish the truth or correctness of something previously believed or suspected to be the case.”

In our text today, there is also a further prophecy by Simeon. He says, “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 (speaking to Mary) a sword will pierce your own soul too.” That’s a pretty heavy thing to tell the mother of an infant. But, once again, Simeon was right on in what he said.

Jesus has become the cause of the rising and falling of many, not only in Israel, but throughout the world – and for over 2000 years. People have chosen to accept Jesus and people have chosen to reject Him. He has been a stumbling block for many over the years. He has been a light that has saved many across these 2000 years – saved them from their sins as well as helped to save them from doing foolish or destructive things to themselves or to others.

Simeon was right when he told Mary “A sword will pierce your own soul, too.” As you may recall, Mary was present at the crucifixion. It had to be extremely painful, her soul must have been pierced, for her to watch her son die a very painful, criminal’s death. Yet, she no doubt knew that His death was for the salvation of the world.

Friends, if you are a believer in what Jesus Christ has done through His birth, death and resurrection, you have a wonderful story to tell. There are many who have fallen because they have not been able to see any confirmation of who Jesus really is. Anyone who studies God’s word, anyone who sees that this one man grew from a humble birth into the only person who could fulfill all 300 of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies, and then learns of these two people who just “happen” to show up at the Temple at the very moment Jesus is brought for fulfillment of the Law of Moses, surely can’t just say all of that is coincidence.

Many years ago, there was a very wealthy man who shared a passion for art collecting with his son. They had priceless works by Picasso and Van Gogh adorning the walls of their family estate. As winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His son had died.

Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season had vanished with the death of his son.

On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hands. The soldier said, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died.

May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you."

The soldier mentioned that he was an artist and then gave the old man the package. The paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man hung the portrait over the fireplace, pushing aside millions of dollars worth of art. His task completed, the old man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given.

The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the pieces of art for which museums around the world clamored.

The following spring, the old man died. The art world waited with anticipation for the upcoming auction. According to the will of the old man, all the art works would be auctioned on Christmas Day, the day he had received the greatest gift.

The day soon arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled that day.

The auction began with a painting that was not on anyone's museum list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" No one spoke. Finally someone said, "Who cares about that painting. It's just a picture of his son. Let's move on to the good stuff."

The auctioneer responded, "No, we have to sell this one first. Now, who will take the son?"

Finally, a neighbor of the old man offered \$10 dollars. "That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it."

The auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice...gone." The gavel fell.

Cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, "Now we can bid on the real treasures!"

The auctioneer looked at the room filled with people and announced that the auction was over.

Everyone was stunned. Someone spoke up and said, "What do you mean, it's over? We didn't come here for a painting of someone's son. There are millions of dollars worth of art here! What's going on?"

The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the Father, whoever takes the son...gets it all."

Puts things in perspective, doesn't it? The message is the same this Christmas. Because of the Father's love...whoever takes the Son gets it all.

Prayer:

Thank You, Father, for the one great gift of Jesus; given as a baby, to know the trials and temptations of all people. But in that gift you have given us forgiveness and life forever with You. As we accept that gift, may we embrace Him with our whole life and offer Him to others. Use us to start a revolution in Kingwood and across this nation bringing people into Your presence to accept that free and priceless gift; and through that step, change their lives forever. In Jesus name. Amen.