



**Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 2:22-40**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (February 2, 2025)**

Of the four gospels, only Luke and Matthew tell us about Jesus before his public ministry, and their stories don't agree!

Matthew speaks of Joseph's dreams, Jesus' birth, the visit by the Magi, and the murderous extermination of infants by Erode. Luke recounts the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, her visit to Elyizabeth, the census and the travel to Bethlehem, Jesus' birth, the visit by the shepherds, his circumcision on the eight day, the Presentation in the Jerusalem Temple, the family's return to Nazareth and, finally, the family's adventure with 12-year-old Jesus lost and found in the Temple.

What made the story of the Presentation important enough for Luke to include it in his Gospel?

Luke certainly recalls Malachi's prediction of the Lord coming to the Temple. God's presence will be overwhelming: "Who will endure? ... Who can stand? ... Like a refiner's fire ... he will purify the descendants of Levi." This is definitely a good news/bad news vision.

And yet, Luke describes Jesus' first appearance in the Temple far more gently. Luke combines the ritual for Jesus' dedication to God<sup>1</sup> with Mary's ritual purification 40 days after giving birth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 13:2.11-16

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 12:1-8

Thus, Mary and Joseph sacrifice two pigeons, which constitute a poor person's offering.

At least one insight comes to mind: Mary, the favorite of the Lord among women, and Joseph, the righteous, operate according to the Law of Moses. Luke tells us five times (of the total nine mentioned in the whole gospel)<sup>3</sup> that they fulfill what is prescribed. The structure of the Law is a container for faith and a means to express it.

This is a clue for us: both in high moments and in times of sorrow or dry spiritual spells, leaning on the structured routine of Law/Ritual/Community/Worship supports us in our faith.

Desiring a deep relationship with the Lord must come from our heart and not be dictated from above or outside of us. Faith is an inside job. However, we cannot rely solely on ourselves: we also need an external supportive structure that can train and guide us. By ourselves we may enjoy an extravagant and exuberant faith but also fool ourselves into egocentricity: I need others to keep me humble, on the straight and narrow. We are saved together.

At the Temple, Luke introduces another character: Simeon, a "righteous and devout" Jew who "was looking forward to the consolation of Israel." Luke tells us that Simeon is *expectant*. This is the attitude of those "positively disposed and open to God's visitation."<sup>4</sup> This disposition is possible because "the Holy Spirit rested on him."

By introducing Simeon, Luke weaves his very own Epiphany. Just as the nations rejoice and come to worship Jesus through the Magi according to Matthew's account,<sup>5</sup> Luke's Simeon

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:22.23.24.27.39; 10:26; 13:16-17; 24:44

<sup>4</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, Luke, p. 54

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 2:1-12

recognizes Jesus as the “light for revelation to the gentiles, and the glory (Shekinah, or the glorious presence of God) of your people Israel.” (v. 32)

Simeon is finally content and declares that he can now die in peace for his eyes have seen the salvation intended for all the people. (v. 31)

Simeon's moment was the culmination of generations of longing and anticipation. Many through the centuries had hoped to see what Simeon saw. Many had known about that glorious day when the Messiah of God would come and bring liberation to afflicted people. Many have lived in anticipation day after day, month after month, after years, after centuries, waiting for God to finally fulfill the promise, rescue them from their misery, and explode with vengeance, bringing God’s justice upon their enemies.

The people of Israel had a choice: they could feel distraught at the delay of the fulfilment of God’s Word after so many centuries had gone by and so many nations had trampled over their head; they could have discarded the notion of a divine Savior and taken matters into their own hands; or they could stay rooted in Scripture that speaks directly to this challenge.

In fact, it is in Scripture that we read that God “gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isaiah 40:29) and reassures us to be strong and courageous, reminding us we are never alone.<sup>6</sup>

Simeon has chosen to trust and remain faithful like many other people. His eyes have seen plenty of tragedy and destruction in

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 40:31; 41:6-10; Psalm 27; Psalm 46; Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 10:28; 28:20; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:6-7.13

his lifetime. Now they see the salvation of the Lord. Now, he can sing: “Lord, let your servant go in peace...” (v. 29)

What have your eyes seen in your lifespan? How was God at work?

Simeon has a blessing for Mary and Joseph and then feels moved to let them know that Jesus will be a divine sign to be received or rejected:<sup>7</sup> when the Truth of God confronts us, we can embrace it or create an alternative reality to keep on deluding ourselves. Jesus will not be obvious to all, nor accepted by all. He will be a sign of contradiction.

Simeon's prophecy indicates that there will be division, and the road ahead will be full of violent opposition. Many will rise and others will fall (see also Luke 1:51-53) and Mary herself will know desolation and trauma.

At this point, Luke brings in another character, Anna. Just as Simeon is moved by the Spirit to go to the Temple and *happens* to see baby Jesus and his parents, Anna *happens* to come to the Temple and overhears Simeon's prediction.

Do things happen by chance? How is our life different when we choose to let God be God?

Anna represents all who would accept Christ. A prophet herself, she foresaw what this child signified. Unlike Simeon who spoke directly to Jesus' parents, she "spoke about the child *to all* who were hoping for God's future." She appears to be the first evangelizer according to Luke. And then, she is gone.

Israel waited for centuries. The faith of the Church goes back centuries. Let us stay steady and trust the Lord. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> A stumbling block: see Isaiah 8:14-15 and Luke 20:17-18