

Monologue: On the Road to Rejoicing *December 27, 2020* Jesus presented in the temple *based on Luke 2:22-40*

This monologue is best presented by an older woman. She can use the congregation as a reference point for the person she is talking to.

Hello. Can I help you with something? I am well acquainted with the temple. How can I be of service? (*slight pause*)

Oh, you heard about the young child who was here the other day. His parents brought him for the purification ritual since he is their firstborn. (*slight pause*)

Yes, he created quite a stir, but I'm afraid they are no longer here. They made their offering and left.

My name is Anna. I was here that day. I am here every day. (*nodding*)

Yes, every day. I have a small room here in the temple, and it serves my needs well. (*slight pause*)

My story? Are you sure you really want . . . ? (*Pause as if being interrupted.*)

Very well, but I'm afraid there is not much to tell.

I came here so long ago it can be easy to forget I once had a life outside these walls. But I haven't forgotten everything. My father was from the tribe of Asher. Asher means "happy one," and we were indeed happy. I was married once. For seven years we had a joy-filled life, but then my husband was taken home to be with the Lord. As a young widow, I was encouraged to remarry, but I knew that was not to be my destiny. So I came here and turned to another whom I loved with all my heart. I turned to God. My life is different from most,

but I am content. I am happy here, and I have purpose. What more can an old woman ask?

My life at the temple is comfortable. I spend most of my time in prayer and fasting. For my age, the Lord has blessed me with stamina and strong knees. It might take me a little longer to get up, but I can still kneel in prayer to my Lord.

But you do not want to hear me prattle on. You want to hear about the child. Yes? As I said before, his parents brought him to the temple for the purification ritual of the firstborn. His mother had two pigeons to offer in sacrifice.

A man I know named Simeon was also in the temple that day. Simeon is a good man, a godly man. He lives a humble life in prayer and worship. He told me once of a message he received from the Holy Spirit—that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. He spends his days quietly and patiently watching for God to reveal himself.

When Simeon saw those parents and the child they call Jesus, his face radiated with joy. He quickly went and took the child in his arms. The words he spoke captured the attention of everyone around him. Simeon praised God, saying, "Lord, as you promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your instrument of salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light to bring your revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."

The look of amazement on the parents' faces mirrored those around them. They were even more astonished when Simeon turned his attention to them and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, to be a sign that will be spoken against and will meet with much opposition. As for you, a sword will pierce your soul. All of this will happen so that the inner thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

As Simeon spoke, my eyes were opened. Suddenly, I saw the great significance of this child and the size of the net he would cast. My heart seemed to expand, filling with happiness. In jubilation, I approached this young family, and laying my hands on the child, I gave thanks to God.

From that day on, I have spoken to everyone who comes seeking and to everyone who looks forward to the redemption of Jerusalem through this miraculous child. I also pray for the child daily. I pray that he will grow in strength and wisdom, and for God's grace to shine upon him for all to see.

Life in the temple is never boring, and I have seen many things, but never have I seen anything as glorious as that child or heard anything as wondrous as Simeon's words. I have been on this earth for a long time, and the road I have traveled is a long one. I have experienced sorrow and pain, but there has also been joy. I have discovered it over and over, and each time I find it, I rejoice for the blessing I have received.

I know you came looking for the child and are disappointed he is not here. Please indulge an old woman and listen to this small grain of wisdom she has learned in her long life. To find Jesus, look for the spirit of God within your heart, and when you feel his light pierce your soul, rejoice, for your salvation is at hand.

Can you do that? Will you?

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Luke 2:22-40

NIV

Jesus Presented in the Temple

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"^[a]), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the

Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."^[b]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss^[c] your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^[d] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ 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.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

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On the Road to Rejoicing Galatians 4:4-7;
Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; **Luke 2:22-40**

One of the greatest theologians that ever lived, Karl Barth, was asked to be a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of a captivating closing lecture, the president of the seminary announced that Dr. Barth was not well and was quite tired. He thought that Dr. Barth would like to be open for questions, but he should not be expected to handle the strain. So he said, "I will ask just one question on behalf of all of us."

He turned to the renowned theologian and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

It was the perfect question for a man who had written literally tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put into print. The students were poised to take down verbatim the premier insight of the greatest theologian of their time.

Karl Barth closed his tired eyes, and he thought for a minute. Then he half smiled, opened his eyes, and said to those young seminarians, "The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

I want to suggest, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever written!

I wish that everybody could read it that way. But I'm afraid that too many people without much thought, just dismiss Jesus. And too many people with lots of thought and logic, and often with their own pain, just dismiss Jesus, because he didn't do what they wanted. And too many people, somehow in the midst of all the beautiful love verses, exclamations of praise, wonder and amazement, only hear the clauses and conditions. And the spelling out

of all the consequences, should any of those clauses and conditions ever be challenged. So we are thankful to the Creator, Christmas comes around once a year to remind us that the Almighty isn't in the business of keeping books and tallying ledgers. And our Savior is not concerned about our status or position in life. If God were concerned about any of those things, then Jesus Christ, Son of God, would never have been born into such disagreeable circumstances as Luke describes.

Instead, Christmas is the culmination and the beginning of the classic love story with all the right ingredients: infatuation, pursuit, risk, drama, surprises, praise and relationship.

Christmas is a **crossing of paths**. Christmas is where we find the Holy God intersecting with humanity! Christmas is our first best meeting with the God who has desired us from the very beginning. If it weren't for Christmas we might never have known the intensity of the love that God has for us. The Almighty Creator choose Jesus his Son deliberately as the way to connect with us, to **cross our paths**.

All of us have intersected with people, **crossed paths** with people who have greatly influenced our lives. For many of us – it's our spouse and parents, a teacher and some long term friends. But if we had been born elsewhere or gone to another school, or not taken that job, or...you would not have intersected. For Rose and I, we **crossed paths** with a minister at one point in our lives, who kept us in ministry. And got me interested in congregational health.

Have you ever asked yourself "what if" questions? What if that person had not **crossed paths** with me? What if I had been born in another country? What if I didn't like this job? What if I had paid more attention in school? All of us would have significantly different lives if we had not connected with some people.

We don't know how Mary and Joseph **crossed paths**. They probably lived in the same village in Galilee. But God choose to **cross paths** with

them. And then there they were, far from home because of imperial rule; a peasant mother giving birth in unsanitary substandard housing. There was no fanfare, no royal delegation. They just laid Jesus in that manger. Counted his toes & fingers. They watched his little face. They listened for his breathing, just like every new parent does. They couldn't stop smiling. This couldn't be anything but true love!

True love accepts the beloved for who they really are. God chooses to love us precisely because we are subjects of the human condition, not because of a favorable bottom line on a social and moral profit and loss statement. Or because of wealth we inherit or accumulate. Or success and position in life. Or race. Mary and Joseph didn't have much to commend them except their humanity. But God choose to **cross paths** with them and to work through them to meet – you and I.

So they went to the temple in Jerusalem, as custom dictated to present him to the Lord. And Simeon, someone we have no clue about, except the Bible tells us he was righteous and devote. He had been told by the Holy Spirit he would see the *consolation of Israel* before he died. So when he was prompted to go to the temple that day, he did, and he **crossed paths** with Jesus and Joseph and Mary. Have you ever wondered what their faces looked like at that moment? Have you even wondered what was going on in their thoughts and emotions?

But what does “*consolation of Israel*” mean? Its a strange phrase. It's clearly to be taken in a messianic sense. Throughout their history, the people of Israel for hundred's of years, suffered greatly. Because of their own sin and because of the oppression of others. In short, they were a people in desperate need of consolation and comfort. The kind of permanent comfort and safety that could come only when the Son of David would arrive from God. They needed a savior to guard them from life's dangers and to provide for the forgiveness of their sin.

Simeon had spent his life waiting for this consolation, for the Messiah to come and redeem His people. He is an example of expectant waiting and hope, as enabled by the Holy Spirit. He had been given a unique promise that he would not die before he saw the Christ - the Messiah - with his own eyes.

When he was an old man, this promise was finally fulfilled when he and Jesus were led to **cross paths**. Simeon marveled at the glory of God in the face of the infant Christ. I wonder how fast his heart was beating? Was Simeon's face flushed & eyes wide open? When he lifted Jesus in his arms and looked into his eyes, he was prepared to die and meet His Creator.

We know Simeon's response when he **crossed paths** with Jesus. He exclaimed, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” What a statement of prophecy, witness, praise and rejoicing!

Of course, Jesus' mother and father marveled at these words. This added to their experiences with Yahweh and their special baby. But then Simeon in his rejoicing, blessed both of them, but looked at Mary, Jesus' mother, and said: “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 a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

All of a sudden this **crossing of paths** doesn't sound so positive. It doesn't sound consoling or comforting. How much did this statement dim their mutual rejoicing? Or did it add to their wonder? We don't know why Joseph wasn't included in Simeon's address, but we do know the prediction, “the falling and rising of many in Israel, a sign spoken against, and a sword will pierce your own soul – too,” all of a sudden changes this happy occasion of

rejoicing. This gift from God became serious. And caused concern.

I think the core phrase here is, “the thought of many hearts will be revealed” in Jesus. In the middle of enjoying a new birth, we have some serious warnings and predictions. **Crossing paths** with Yahweh’s child, all of a sudden has a serious revelation – that clashes with the rejoicing going on. It’s a phrase that reflects so many of the other Christmas texts – including Mary’s Song. People like to hide their thoughts and motives. They work hard to do so. But the person of God in Jesus reveals them.

Today, there is lots of concern about the power and role and invasiveness of technology. People’s past actions and words come back to haunt them – in living color. People lose their jobs because of past tweets or emails. People are embarrassed because of past postings on facebook. It’s difficult for most people to argue with evidence right in front of our eyes. That’s a path most people don’t want to cross.

This phrase, “the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed,” is a really loaded phrase. It’s a threat. It’s a promise. And Jesus doesn’t need technology to help carry this out. God knows our hearts. Over time we get to know each other’s hearts. But the Almighty doesn’t need technological help to know who we really are.

Either we are in love with God’s supreme love story, or we are not. Either we are on the road ready to meet Jesus; either we have embraced the road to repentance; and been walking the road to restoration; plus are open to Jesus’ revelations on the road; and we are fully on the road to rejoicing – or not. What has your **crossing paths** with Jesus been like?

Then there is Anna. We know more about her than Simeon. We know she was old, had only been married for 7 years until she became a widow, and was the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. We also know she lived until age 84. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

She is called a prophet. And it seems she **crossed paths** with Simeon and the family, at the very moment of Simeon’s statements, and joined in by rejoicing and giving thanks to God.

But she went one step further. Anna right away spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. That’s quite a step to take with an unknown baby. To act on the Holy Spirit’s prompting and start witnessing about Jesus.

How often have you **crossed paths** with something and then immediately start telling about it? Maybe a good joke or a product? Or you received wonderful news and had to use your telephone? What goes on in your inner being when a child tells you they are pregnant? What about meeting someone famous and you start looking for people to tell?

But an unknown baby born of country hicks? This was not the first time Anna had met people in the temple presenting their new born for purification rites. So what made Jesus different to Anna when she **crossed paths** with him? We can say obviously the Holy Spirit was at work in inspiring Simeon and Anna.

They were on the road to rejoicing along with Joseph and Mary. May we continue to follow the summons to do the rejoicing we can’t help but do, when we cross paths with Jesus.

Like life itself, the youth group was performing a manger scene that didn’t go quite as planned. Joseph and Mary and all the other characters were in place and ready. They did their parts with seriousness and commitment, looking as pious as they possibly could.

Then it came time for the shepherds to enter. Dressed in flannel bathrobes & toweled head gear, the shepherds proceeded to the manger, which contained a single naked light bulb that was playing the part of the glowing newborn Jesus.

With his back to the congregation, one of the shepherds said to the person playing Joseph, in a very loud whisper for all the cast to hear, "Well, Joe, when you gonna pass out cigars?"

The solemn spell of that occasion was not simply broken by his remark, it was exploded. Mary and Joseph found it impossible to hold back the bursts of laughter. The rest of the cast found it hard to contain their giggles.

The chief angel, standing on a chair behind them was the worst of all. She shook so hard in laughter that she fell off her chair and took the curtained back drop and all the rest of the props down with her. She rolled around on the floor holding her stomach because she was laughing so hard. The whole set was in shambles.

But you know what? The only thing that didn't go to pieces was that light bulb in the manger. It never stopped shining.

Friends in Christ, that baby in the manger is the light of our world, even when our world is in shambles. For in that baby the Divine and the human cross paths. Which calls us to be on the continual path of rejoicing!