

### Malachi 3:1-5

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

<sup>5</sup> "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

### Luke 2:22-40

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 <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"<sup>[a]</sup>), <sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: <sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss<sup>[a]</sup> your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.<sup>[a]</sup> She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

**Sometimes**, when we read a passage of the Bible, it is easier to find the significance if we plunge ourselves into the day, into the time, and see what it meant to the people then. To do that today, let's time-travel back 2024 years to Jerusalem...

Simeon woke with the bright rays of dawn. He pulled the blanket from himself, propped himself up on an elbow, and creaked to his feet before pulling his mat from the floor. A cup of water, a hunk of bread, grateful eyes extended up to heaven in thanks, before slipping sandals on his feet and stepping into the street.

The brightness dazzled him, as always — the bright clear sun flashing off the limestone walls and paving of the whitest of cities. The streets were crowded and narrow as he made his way north from his small space in the city of David, towards the temple.

Simeon greeted some people as he passed by, using his stick occasionally to assert his path through the crowds and stalls. Words of thanks to the Lord passed across his lips as much as anything.

He always went to the temple. Old people can form habits, especially the widowed — his life had been stripped of all that he now thought superfluous. He was friendly, but did not meet much with friends. He ate little and was supported by his sons. What was he to do with his life? His greatest pleasure was in the Lord God. He would go to the temple and sit in the courts and pray and watch and hope.

“I’d rather be a doorkeeper and only stay a day...” he sang half under his breath.

All of life came to the temple... all good life that was, he corrected himself, as he caught sight of a Roman guard. But no, he corrected himself again — he would not judge this Roman guard, not *this* one. He did not know the man, he did not know his heart. That was for the Lord to judge. All he knew was that the occupation was a sore on the face of Israel, a long-standing ugliness. So long standing! More than 500 years had passed since Nebuchadnezzar had taken his people into exile, and though they were in the holy city, though they walked these streets and a temple stood on the mount they all knew that this was not their city, and it was not God’s city — it was Caesar’s city.

How Simeon longed for the day when the Romans left, and the Lord himself ruled! How he longed for the messiah to defeat their enemies! How he longed for the consolation of Israel, for justice to fall, and righteousness to have its sway.

But Simeon *hoped*. He hoped like no one hoped. He had counted the years from Daniel 9 and he *knew* that the Messiah was coming. He felt it. More than that, he had known God’s word spoken to him in his heart of hearts — he *would* see the Lord’s Messiah when he came. All that stood in the way of hope and happiness would be defeated. Not just for Israel, but for all people! The Lord was not a small god, but a great, glorious, loving God whose goodness filled the world. His light would shine first on the Jews, for so he had promised, but he knew that as Israel was to be the light of all the world, so God’s messiah would light the light and shine in the darkness, and burn away all the corruption, so that one day all the world would be the Lord’s, and everything in it!

When the anointed one, the son of God, the son of David, hameshiach came, the world would be wholly new, he believed. A new political order, the stars would fall — not literally — but the world would be made new again. New creation! The grave would give up its dead, the valleys raised up, and the mountains laid low. Streams of living water would gush from the temple.

That was why he was there.

Simeon entered the massive courts of the temple, wondering again (despite familiarity) at the great stones and the majesty of this palace of God, dominating Jerusalem. He saw the people coming and going, the sellers of doves and lambs. There was Anna, as faithful as he. And he watched and prayed.

Later in the morning a young couple entered, bringing their child, their first born: come to buy him back from God, and to make the purification for his mother. Simeon saw them and he couldn't keep his eyes from them. It was as if they glowed. He knew this was only in his eyes, not for others, but he *knew*. The Lord was telling him. He had to see.

Before he knew what he was doing — with bright eyes and joyous grin — he had the baby in his arms to the surprise of the parents. He looked and *knew*.

“Sovereign Lord,” he announced for all to hear. “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.”

And he returned the child to the parents. “What is his name?” he asked, tenderly.

“Yeshua,” replied the man. He is “Yeshua”.

Again Simeon grinned from ear to ear. “He will save his people!” he added before turning solemnly to the mother and saying: “Yevarekheka adonai mitziyyon; the Lord bless you from Zion... 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.”

Even as he was speaking, Anna, dear Anna came up and also doted on the baby — proclaiming thanks to God, before then looking away and calling people over — “here is the redemption of Jerusalem!”

What a stir they made. A good stir — here was hope, hope in child form — shouldn't everyone know? But of those they called over, who understood? None, really — but the mother. She knew.

For Simeon, returning home later that day, full of praise, it was as if the skies had been shaken, and the graves split open — the world was changed forever for him. He was ready to die of happiness. Surely everyone everywhere for all time would share in his joy? Surely, though evil still lived and plotted, the world would be changed from glory to glory, because God's king — David's son — had been born, and no one could lose hope ever again. Could they?

Amen.