

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 upon him. [26] It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [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:

LK 2:29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you now dismiss your servant in peace.  
LK 2:30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
LK 2:31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,  
LK 2:32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."

LK 2:33 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."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, 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. 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.

ISA 52:8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.	[8] Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices They shout joyfully together; For they will see with their own eyes When the LORD restores Zion.
ISA 52:9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.	[9] Break forth, shout joyfully together, You waste places of Jerusalem; For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.
ISA 52:10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.	[10] The LORD has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God.

### Simeon and Anna: The Watchmen of Israel Luke 2:25-38, Isaiah 52:8-10

Do you ever wonder what Old Testament saints knew of Jesus Christ? So often we hear that the content of their faith was radically different from our own. We hear that these saints trusted God by faith, but they didn't trust the Son of God by faith, because they didn't know about him. In a strange way, it is almost like we believe that Adam, Abraham, Moses, and every other OT believer were not Trinitarians, but Unitarians. Even worse, it is as if we think that this is acceptable because Jesus Christ had not yet come in the flesh.

What was the hope of believers in the Old Testament? Who was the content of their faith focused upon? Interestingly, there is a Christmas season story in Luke that provides one of many clear answers to this question. There were watchmen set in Israel. And they were doing what watchmen do. They were watching. When we understand what the watchmen of Israel were diligently and patiently waiting for, it increases our faith, for we too are called to watch. And this ought to give us great hope as we know that we too are diligently and patiently waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ - not to be born, but to return and to finish what he began two thousand years ago.

Let us begin 700 years before Messiah was born. Isaiah proclaims, "Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices. They shout joyfully together, For they will see with their own eyes When the LORD restores Zion" (Isa 52:8). This text of Isaiah is part of the larger Servant text of Isaiah 53, which is so transparently Messianic. Yet, though Isaiah 53 is about the

death of Christ, as we will see from Luke, [Isaiah 52:8-10](#) is a prophecy of *the birth of Christ*.

Sometimes I think we have a tendency to read the Bible as isolated tidbits or interesting factoids. You must beware of this tendency in your own reading of Scripture lest you lose the Son in a maze of "Jeopardy" questions and trivial pursuits. When you are reading the Bible or hearing it taught or preached, you must take the time to ask how that text of Scripture interprets or is interpreted by other Scriptures. When you fail to do this, you miss out on the rich and beautiful tapestry that is biblical history and revelation. The Christmas story is one of these places that we often miss out on though ironically it is probably the best known story in the entire bible.

Isn't it interesting how the birth of Jesus Christ can be (and *is*) celebrated and sung about by pagans? Why do you suppose this is the case? If a pagan hates God and if Jesus is God, then why does his birth not offend them? It is because the birth of Jesus Christ by itself is perfectly harmless - like an infant lying in a manger - to our sinful, rebellious defiance against God. As the culture sings and hums Christmas carols, it demonstrates just how piecemeal its choice of believing truth in the bible really is. If it doesn't cause us harm, then we will believe it. Babies cause us no harm, therefore we will sing about it. Yet, the baby who grew up to call Pharisees white washed tombs, who forced many followers to turn away because he taught predestination, who said he is the only way to the father - this is a Jesus that we won't believe in because it makes us mad. This is the attitude of the culture.

Many in Israel had exactly this sort of mentality when it came to Christ. In fact, Jesus came to the children of Israel and so those I have just mentioned were nearly all Jews! But not all Israelites were secularists or political zealots looking for a political king. In Israel there were watchmen! God made sure of that. And they were watching for someone very different than Alexander the Great of Israel or helpless babies who would never grow up.

## **WATCHMEN**

Let us take a moment to consider a watchman. There are lots of them in the Bible. The primary watchman is of course the God who watches us ([Gen 16:13](#)). God's watch is never idle. He never sleeps on his watch. His watch entails his presence ([Gen 28:15](#)), his provision ([Gen 28:20](#)), his deliverance ([Ex 3:16](#)), his seeing us safely through the wilderness ([Deut 2:7](#)), and his protection from enemies ([Ezra 5:5](#)). As a gardener sees to a vine or a shepherd watches over his flock, So God watches over his people. Proverbs says, "[the eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good](#)" ([Prov 15:3](#)).

God has provided many human tasks that teach us about how we are to watch or be on the lookout for certain things. In ancient times the primary one was for a soldier to keep vigil during the night on the wall that guarded the city. If he fell asleep on the job, he would perish. So it was not a task to be taken lightly. Keeping watch in this way must have been quite difficult, especially in times of apparent peace. Long nights, constant dark, rare interruptions, and South American coffee beans thousands of miles away must have made most nights woefully boring. Nevertheless, the job was of the utmost importance, for without the watchmen, the city could not prepare for attack. Indeed, they may have even been surprised and overtaken in an instant.

The bible commands his people to be watchmen like this. You will remember that the **disciples were rebuked for not keeping watch** with Jesus in the garden because they are thereby exposing themselves to temptation (**Mt 26:41, 69-75**). Jesus said, "**Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.**" And Paul commanded, "**Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted**" (**Gal 6:1**). God warned his people never to forget what he had done for them during the exodus and what he had taught them in the law. He uses the idea of a watchman. "**Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them**" (**Deut 4:9**).

**The wicked also keep watch.** You see, they are not idle in their sin, but rather watch alertly for places and times in which they may commit their sin in secret. "**The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed**" (**Job 24:15**). And, "**[The wicked] lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims**" (**Ps 10:8**). May it not be so with us, brothers and sisters, but let us heed the warnings to watch ourselves.

But as much as we are to watch after our own souls and the souls, we are also to watch for the Lord to Return. The same was true before the first coming of Christ. And this is one of the reasons that we know that True Israel has always waited for her Saviour, not just some spirit in the sky but a real person.

**The prophets were the primary watchmen of Israel.** "**Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me**" (**Ezek 3:17**). This same task is given in the New Covenant to the church in the form of your Elders and Pastors. "**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood**" (**Acts 20:28**, cf **Heb 13:17**). We are told that God commands these watchmen never to rest, until the **light of morning comes**. "**I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest**" (**Isa 62:6**). They watch out for dangers (**Hos 9:8**), for wolves that attack the sheep (**Acts 20:29**); for signs of deliverance (**Mic 7:7**). They watch for false doctrine and for their own lives (**1 Tim 4:6**). And they are in perpetual prayer for the people, even when nothing but the routine seems to be taking place. "**Watchman, what is left of the night? Watchman, what is left of the night?**" The watchman replies, '**Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again**'" (**Isa 21:11-12**).

But when deliverance does come, the prophetic watchmen are the first to lift up their voices and shout for joy. "**Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes**" (**Isa 52:8**). And this is where we return to our text.

Where Isaiah is general in his prophesy of watchmen singing and shouting for joy at the deliverance that comes in the form of the God-man, Luke is specific. **Luke 2:25-38 is a divinely inspired commentary and fulfillment of Isaiah 52:8-10**. Many signs point to this. He names two watchmen that directly fulfill Isaiah's last days prophesy. **Both are prophets,**

which is what all OT watchmen were. **There is a man and there is a woman: Simeon** - who in this text prophesies about the future of the baby and **Anna** - a righteous and devout woman and an 84 year old, widowed **prophetess** who **never left** the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. It is important to note that she never left, for the watchman never leaves his post either.

**Both texts occur in Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, the holy city of God. "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon" (Luke 2:25). "[Anna] never left the temple" (which was in Jerusalem) (Luke 2:37) and she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (2:38). In like manner, Isaiah tells us, "the Lord [will return] to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Shout joyfully you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted His people, he has redeemed Jerusalem" (Isaiah 52:8-9).**

That's nothing very special, for most of the Bible takes place in some way around Jerusalem. Yet, it is no mistake that Jerusalem is so important for Luke to mention in his narrative. Isaiah mentions it three times! And Jesus was born in *Bethlehem*, not Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary had gone to Jerusalem in order to fulfill the requirements of the law concerning the boy. So Jerusalem and the temple signal to us that this baby is coming in the midst of God's special presence on earth.

Next we notice that **Simeon and Anna were actually waiting for Christ to be born**. This is what a watchman does. Anna immediately upon seeing the Christ child **"gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38)**. Likewise Simeon was **"waiting for the consolation of Israel" (2:25)**. As we have seen, this is exactly what a watchman does. He stays awake all night long, waiting and watching for the sign of the coming of either friend or enemy. Upon seeing the sign, he then shouts from the wall the appropriate message.

Thus, as good watchmen, Simeon and Anna did not keep their mouths shut. Instead, they spoke loudly and heralded the good tidings aloud. Simeon **"took [the baby] in his arms and praised God" (vs 28)**. He **"blessed mother, father and child" aloud (vs. 24)**. And he **spoke against many in Israel**. Likewise, Anna also **gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all" (vs. 38)**. This is what Isaiah had said they would do!

The tidings that were spoken were not ordinary tidings. They came from the mouth of God's special watchmen. They were specific to the meaning of the coming of this baby. They knew through divine knowledge alone that this baby was the special baby of the OT. He is called by various names in this part of Luke's account. He is the **"consolation of Israel" (vs. 25)**. He is **"the Lord's Christ" (vs. 26)**. He is **"the child Jesus" (vs. 27)**. He is **"[God's] salvation" (vs. 30)**, a **"revelation to the Gentiles" and "glory for Israel" (vs. 32)**. Anna adds to his name by calling him **"the redemption of Jerusalem" (vs. 38)**. Who would ever suspect any of this from a baby born in stinking stable to a man who was very poor and a woman who was of no special outward account?

These names of Messiah are not ordinary, random names. They are tied particularly to Isaiah 52! Simeon looked forward to the consolation of Israel, or as Isaiah has said the **"LORD's comfort to his people" (Isa 52:9)**. Isaiah says this person **"redeems Jerusalem"**

(See Anna - vs. 52:9, cf Luke 2:38). And he is the "salvation of our God" for "all the ends of the earth" (Isa 52:10).

You might be reading Isaiah 52:8-10 and think that I am stretching the meaning of Luke here. After all, where do these three verses mention anything about a baby or even a man? Perhaps this text is only about the later invisible redemption of the nation from the hand of Babylon? (Indeed, those who fail to see Christ always look for other fulfillments to prophesy. They see in shadow and type a reality that is never full and so in their own blindness, trip over the rock of stumbling.) The answer is clearly seen in the context. For this text begins the greatest of the *Servant Song* passages. Isaiah 52:13 (only 3 verses from now) begins, "Behold, My servant will prosper. He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted."

Then, in a couple more verses it says, "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" (Isa 53:1). In their own announcements to those who were waiting with them, Simeon and Anna fulfill the prophecy that all who later take up their trumpet also fulfill. "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7).

This announcement concerned what this little baby would one day do, and it greatly reveals the type of faith through Mary and Joseph that you need if you want to see this baby for who he really is. Let us first see what this baby is said to one day accomplish. It is very important to do this, not only because Luke gives us this message here in this Christmas season story, but because the Bible never sees one event of redemptive history in isolation of all the rest. There are no brute, uninterpreted facts in the Bible. All facts in Scripture are *covenantal* facts, redemptive facts interpreted for us by God himself. They are all interrelated facts. So even here, though this is the Christmas story, we also have Easter and the church and the Second Coming and many other things spoken about. You may think of it this way. Christmas without Easter and the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (brute isolated facts that we are allowed to interpret in any way we see fit) is a bit like Rolls without Royce or Ben without Jerry or Colorado without the United States. Think about this next time you sing a Christmas carol. Let your mind ponder the infinite knowledge and understanding of God, who has conceived so great a salvation for his people.

Isaiah clearly says, "in the sight of all the nations, all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God" (Isa 52:10). It is no wonder then that Simeon gives his inspired commentary/fulfillment of this passage when he prophetically sings, "dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people" (Luke 2:30-31). Again, the parallel are beyond dispute.

Simeon continues Isaiah's thought as he sings "[Jesus is] a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (2:32). For Isaiah saw the same thing: "all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God" (Isa 52:10). But he also said "the LORD has comforted his people (Israel)" (52:9).

Who are these people of God? Who is Israel? It is the church, composed in the New Testament of Gentiles and Jews. This is Isaiah's point. It is the same point made by Paul in

Romans 9:6 and Romans 11 when he quoted from other parts of Isaiah. Remember, Simeon was waiting for the "consolation of *Israel*" (Luke 2:35). But a moment later he shouts for joy that this boy is to be a "light for revelation to the GENTILES and for the glory of your people *Israel*" (2:32).

Redemptive history is coming into full light. It is coming into the world through the womb of a woman. Through Mary's baby, the people of God expand to include that which was promised to Noah's son Japheth and later specified to Abram. God told Japheth "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen 9:27). To dwell in the tent of Shem is to live under the covenant that God would make with Shem. Japheth is the father of Gentiles. Shem is the father of the Jews. The blessing given to Shem was "Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem" (Gen 9:26).

Abraham would later come through *the line of Shem*. With this in mind God promises to the old man "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17:4-5). How often we (and the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day) forget the significance of the change in name from Abram to Abraham. Abram means "exalted father." Abraham means "father of many" and those 'many' are said in the text to be many *nations*.

Though this message may get old to you and I, because for 2,000 years Gentiles have now been welcomed into the covenant without having to become Jews first, it was a marvel to the time of Joseph and Mary. Is it any wonder that we are told, "the child's father and mother marveled at what was said about [Jesus]" (2:33)?

This marveling was not out of bewilderment and confusion, as if they didn't understand what was being said about the boy. Rather, to quote John Calvin, "they were not astonished at it as a new thing, but they contemplated with reverence, and embraced with becoming admiration, this prediction of the Spirit uttered by the lips of Simeon"<sup>1</sup> In their marveling, they demonstrated pure faith without any sight of earthly circumstances to prove what was said.

This marveling continued, as the words of Simeon were aimed directly at the blessed virgin. To Mary he says, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel," Simeon says, "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" (Luke 2:34-35). Do you see how even here at his birth, the rest of Christ's life must be taken into account? It is not just a helpless babe that Simeon holds in his arms. This is the great rock who dashes men into pieces. It is the giver of life who raises them from the dead. Simeon knew this both from divine revelation from the Spirit (2:25) and from reading the OT by faith! For this is repeated news of the prophets. Anyone with eyes to see would have known this to be the case.

This, then, is what Christmas must be about for a Christian. **The baby is born - to be a king.** "The Lord will lay bare his holy arm" (Isa 52:10). It is a man's strength and might that is

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, Commentaries on Luke 2:22-32.,

symbolized in a bare arm. Thus, in the sight of all nations, God will display his might and strength - his "bare arm," and we will see the salvation of our God.

At first, the strength of the Lord comes in the form of a poor, helpless baby - born in humble circumstances. This is surprising to those who are looking for worldly might and power. But the kingdom of God does not come with observation. It cannot be found in political pacts, land grabs, economic strength, or military might. This is what makes the birth of Christ so offensive both to those wanting a great national king - he was born in a dung filled manger? And to those who do not want anymore than the innocent baby Christ.

The power of the Lord, though, does not stop with a baby born in a barn. The consolation of Israel, it is foretold even here at his birth, will cause division, ruin, and *resurrection* - even to those closest to him. Mary is told "a sword will pierce your own soul too." That's probably not the sort of words that you want to hear a complete stranger speak to you when you have just given birth in the most miraculous way that any human will ever know.

But Simeon is here preparing the earthly parents of Jesus for things to come. With these words, God helps Joseph and Mary to progress in the knowledge of Christ. Mary is given important words to comfort her and to prepare her in the days to come, when her beloved firstborn son would himself be pierced on the cross. But there is more here. For Simeon has predicted that Jesus is destined to cause many to fall and many to rise and he will be greatly spoken against.

As Simeon speaks, he is preparing to die. This old man had been promised that he would not die until his eyes saw the redemption of Jerusalem. Thus, Simeon represents all of the watchmen of Israel. And as he dies, so dies the long watch that they took up. The words of **Romans 13:11** ring louder now than ever, "[this is] the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here." The long line of prophets are about to come to a halt.

Yet, the church remains. And here Anna comes into the story. While Anna was a prophetess, having the same access to the secret knowledge that belongs to the prophets, she does not represent the prophets in the same way that Simeon does. Rather, she represents all the faithful in Israel who stand by with the watchmen also keeping watch. As Luther said, "Anna signifies those who stand by and hear the message assenting to it and applying it to themselves"<sup>2</sup>

The old woman speaks to the young women (Mary) who signifies a transition between covenants. The old way with its worship, shadows, and covenant community is on the wane. The young bride- the church - as seen in the person of Mary is entering the prime of life. And the church still needs watchmen! It needs those who will proclaim the good news to others until the dawn finally comes!

Anna did not hold the baby up and predict anything about him. But she was waiting for her chance to see him nonetheless. Why? Because she understood and knew her Scriptures,

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<sup>2</sup> Luther, Complete sermons vol. 1, 283.

even as Simeon had. Do not these two people prove that believing Jews have never been Unitarians? Believers in all ages have looked forward to the seed of Eve who would crush the serpent. "Even Abraham rejoice to see Christ's day; and he saw it, and was glad" (Jn 8:56).

And so the account of Anna says that she "came up" to the baby, probably to see the one that Simeon was holding. Her vigilant watch had born forth its fruit. She was rewarded with seeing the redemption of Jerusalem. And so she loudly proclaims to everyone around her a great thanksgiving to God. And she spoke of Him to all those who were looking for Christ. So even Anna and Simeon were not the only one's looking forward to the birth of this child. They knew how to read the signs of the times. And though they did not know for certain that the baby would come in their lifetime (only Simeon knew through a direct revelation from God), they still kept watch and were not surprised when the boy came.

The birth of Christ proves that the watchmen of ancient times would not fail in their watch. Dear friends, the baby grew up. And he died for the sins of the world, causing many to rise and many others to fall and stumble over him. But God raised him up from the dead. He is alive, but we see him no more because he has gone into heaven in front of many witnesses. It takes faith, even as it did those years ago to believe this - though it is entirely rational and provable. Faith is not believing that which is absurd. It is believing that which God has revealed.

But Christ also has promised to come for us again. And so we continue to watch, even as the prophets of old did. Joseph and Mary show their faith by believing the prophets. Simeon and Anna show their faith in their words. We show our faith by waiting patiently for our Christ to return. Thieves will come to steal your faith and your trust in God. Jesus commanded in the Olivet Discourse these words, "Be on the alert (WATCH), for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (Matt 24:42-44).

In one word Jesus sums up your duty. "Watch." The Psalmist says, "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning" (130:6). We began this story with one virgin. Let us end with ten. "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. "But at midnight there was a shout, `Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. "And the foolish said to the prudent, `Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' "But the prudent answered, saying, `No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. "And later the other virgins also came, saying, `Lord, lord, open up for us.' "But he answered and said, `Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matt 25:1-13).