# Luke 2:22-40 The Voice (VOICE)

**22**After Mary had observed the ceremonial days of *postpartum* purification required by Mosaic law, she and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. **23**They were fulfilling the Lord’s requirement that “every firstborn *Israelite* male will be dedicated to the Eternal One as holy.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A22-40&version=VOICE#fen-VOICE-24253a)]**24**They also offered the sacrifice required by the law of the Lord, “two turtledoves or two young pigeons.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A22-40&version=VOICE#fen-VOICE-24254b)]

**25***While fulfilling these sacred obligations at the temple,* they encountered a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was a just and pious man, anticipating the liberation of Israel from her troubles. He was a man in touch with the Holy Spirit. **26**The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Anointed One. **27**The Spirit had led him to the temple that day, and there he saw the child Jesus in the arms of His parents, who were fulfilling their sacred obligations. **28**Simeon took Jesus into his arms and blessed God.

**29Simeon, said:** Now, Lord *and King,* You can let me, Your humble servant, die in peace.
**30**    You promised me that I would see with my own eyes
        what I’m seeing now: Your freedom,
**31**    Raised up in the presence of all peoples.
**32**    He is the light who reveals Your message to the other nations,
        and He is the shining glory of Your *covenant* people, Israel.

**33**His father and mother were stunned to hear Simeon say these things. **34**Simeon went on to bless them both, and to Mary in particular he gave predictions.

**Simeon said,** Listen, this child will make many in Israel rise and fall. He will be a significant person whom many will oppose. **35***In the end,* He will lay bare the secret thoughts of many hearts. And a sword will pierce even your own soul, Mary.

**36**At that very moment, an elderly woman named Anna stepped forward. Anna was a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for seven years *before her husband died* **37**and a widow to her current age of 84 years. She was *deeply devoted to the Lord,* constantly in the temple, fasting and praying. **38**When she approached *Mary, Joseph, and Jesus,* she began speaking out thanks to God, and she continued spreading the word about Jesus to all those who shared her hope for the rescue of Jerusalem.

**39**After fulfilling their sacred duties according to the law of the Lord, Mary and Joseph returned *with Jesus* to their own city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. **40**There Jesus grew up, maturing in physical strength and increasing in wisdom, and the grace of God rested on Him.

So it’s the Sunday after Christmas, we are barely emerging from our food comas and what-day-of-the-week-is-it-mentality. I don’t know about y’all-but the time between Christmas and New Years is just several days of being in a mental fog. Instead of thinking about our to-do list, we spend time with cherished friends and family. Its that rare time of year when we actually take a bit of a break.

But Sunday has arrived, and so we dive into this story that is continuing our Christmas narrative. This story takes place forty days after Jesus’ birth. And the time has come for Mary and Joseph to follow Jewish law.

According to Jewish law, a woman had to wait forty days after giving birth before she could enter the temple (a sort of church maternity leave) and she had to bring a sacrifice. And if it was a firstborn son, they had to dedicate him to the Lord. Mary and Joseph bring two turtledoves, which is the tiniest detail that can be overlooked. Bringing two turtledoves signified the offering of the poor. It wasn’t much, but it was what they had.

This scene shines the spotlight on two age classes that are often forgotten or swept over: the very young, and the very old. We have one and half month old Jesus in the temple, the central hub for his family’s religion. And then we have the characters of Simeon and Anna. Both are extremely devout and pious people, and both have been waiting a long time to see the redemption and hope of Israel that they have been promised.

It’s the character of Simeon who really stands out to me. And he greets Joseph and Mary and seems to know instantly who the infant is in their arms. He sweeps him up and says,

Now, Lord *and King,* You can let me, Your humble servant, die in peace.
**30**    You promised me that I would see with my own eyes
        what I’m seeing now: Your freedom,
**31**    Raised up in the presence of all peoples.
**32**    He is the light who reveals Your message to the other nations,
        and He is the shining glory of Your *covenant* people, Israel.

After reading this, we’re thinking, alright Simeon, that’s right! Continue the joy of Christmas! This great light has been born! A great light that reveals God’s message to all nations!

Joseph and Mary are amazed of course. They are still trying to wrap their heads around the fact that their son is God in human flesh. And here comes this man in the temple who they don’t know who recognizes it right away. They are stunned.

But then Simeon takes a turn. He turns towards Mary and gives her some of his prophetic predictions. I imagine Simeon saying this part in some kind of trance. For any harry potter fans out there, I think of that the scene with Professor Trelawney where she brings forth the prophecy in a trance. It’s a somber, dark prophecy that Simeon brings, a prediction full of truth and hope, but also foreboding.

First, Simeon seems to ask that God let him die. His life’s purpose has been fulfilled. He can now face death courageously, because the one thing he’s been waiting for has arrived. But announcing this at the beginning of a long speech with a baby in his arms is just a tiny bit strange.

And then he speaks to Mary, whose facial expression slowly turns from a smile into a confused expression.

“Listen,” Simeon says. “This child will make many in Israel rise and fall. He will be a significant person whom many will oppose.”

Mary is intently listening, but she’s starting to feel uncomfortable. Simeon continues, “*In the end,* He will lay bare the secret thoughts of many hearts. And a sword will pierce even your own soul, Mary.

Simeon’s song is a song of joy, exhuberance, and at the same time, kind of apprehensive and depressing and inappropriate.

I think I hear the Debbie Downer music from Saturday Night Live when he’s talking. Like cmon dude, do you have to bring that up right now? You have to tell the mom that one day she too will experience pain like a sword piercing her soul? If I was standing there, I think I would have asked or thought very strongly, what is wrong with you? Why you gotta say it like that?

This passage is just kind of weird. Mary and Joseph arrive to the temple with a tiny infant in their arms. They are there to fulfill the Jewish law that they follow. They are proud and overjoyed to show the world their son, and dedicate him to the Lord. Almost instantly, Simeon, a guy they don’t know, sees this little child and knows that is Jesus, the Messiah he’s been waiting for. And this strange man goes up to them, takes Jesus into his arms, and begins spilling prophecy about this little child. And it’s a strange mix of seemingly talking to God while holding Jesus, talking about his own death with a small child in his arms, then joyously praising God for the redemption of Israel, and ending his prophetic speech on a dark note by warning Mary that this child will bring challenge and pain to her and the nation of Israel.

Thankfully Simeon is interrupted by Anna, a widow who has spent her entire life in the temple, fasting and praying, just waiting for the good news that Israel has been waiting so long for. She immediately starts witnessing and spreading the news that the Saviour of the world has arrived. She is overjoyed that the day she has waited for has finally arrived.

But Simeon. Simeon is just a bit strange. Mary and Joseph probably went home pondering Simeon’s words and wondering what on earth he meant. They were probably a bit worried over what he said.

In an article titled “The Oddest Christmas Carol,” David Lose says that’ ‘Simeon's words are regularly said or sung at the end of a funeral.’

And David Lose continues on to say, “And yet each time I hears these words, I grows strangely uncomfortable…. And so I wonder, why does Luke record this strange scene and song. Why would he move from the beauty and light and joy of the nativity straight to Simeon's morbid request for death?”

Depending on how you were raised, you may or may not feel permission to call a Biblical text odd. It almost feels like you’re criticizing it, or demeaning its value. In our day and age, the label of weird, odd or bizarre often comes with negative connotation.

But why is that? When did the label of odd and weird get such a bad reputation? Why do we feel like we’re criticizing a holy text when we say it’s a bit strange? And why do we feel disrespectful when we say Simeon’s timing is a bit off?

Perhaps it’s just the world where we live, a world where we have to be suspicious of any odd behavior. It’s an unfortunate time where we know so much about the bad that can and has happened, that anything out of the ordinary is immediately put into a negative category.

We often say something is weird or strange when we don’t have an explanation for it, or if its something we just don’t understand. When our computers act up and we don’t know why, we say, that’s weird. When the haunted sink faucet in the womens restroom goes off without anyone in front of the sensor, we say that’s weird. If a man named Simeon stood up and started giving a dark prophecy in this room, we would probably think that’s weird. And a lot of the world that doesn’t celebrate a religion or believe in a divine being probably look at us worshipping and say, that’s weird!

Not every time, but quite often, “weird” and strange are often lumped into the same category as creepy. Unexplainable UFO sightings. A sighting of Bigfoot in the woods. Any episode of Stranger Things. But I think this association is terribly off-base, especially when it comes to labeling people as weird.

When I was a child, a teenager and a young adult, I was called weird a lot. I don’t remember any of the reasons why. I was just kind of an odd kid. I still am in some ways. My sense of humor can be out of left field sometimes. And I tend to make odd noises when I get frustrated. And if you’re lucky enough to see the outgoing side of me when I’m around my family, you might call me odd too.

But being called weird when I was younger was one of the worst things anyone could say to me, and at the time, it really got to me. I cried several times over the word weird. And it often came from people who didn’t know me very well, and people who didn’t care very much about my wellbeing.

I hated being called that, because to me, weird was something bad. Weird meant that I was an oddball, that I didn’t fit in, that I didn’t have any friends. It meant that someone didn’t like me. It was one of the greatest insults you could throw at me.

At some point during my life, I decided to turn weird on its head. I had gotten really tired of the power and hold that this word had on me.

I decided that weird was a compliment. Because weird meant that I was limited edition. Weird meant that I was embracing how God made me. And rejecting the label of weird being a negative thing meant that I was rejecting that little box that society tries to put me in. The box of normal behavior, the box of the right way to act, the right things to like, the right thing to believe. The right way to look. uy

It meant that I was more like my comedian heroes, like Jim Carrey, Kirsten Wiig, and Robin Williams, who made their careers by tapping into their bizarre side. And I came to realize that being odd or weird was just how I coped with how serious and stressful life can be. I needed to laugh a little at a weird joke or dance around for no good reason, or do anything illogical just to shake off the seriousness.

So I got a bumper sticker on my car that says “weird is good.” It reminds me that weird isn’t as bad as our society says it is. Weird is cause for creativity, for looking at things a different way, for showing a different perspective. Or in Simeon’s case, preaching the Gospel.

God uses the weird and bizarre all the time. Because that’s often what gets our attention. But also- God just loves the weirdos. God lifts them up and uses them for the greatest of tasks. Because when God looks at a person, God doesn’t see their oddities. He sees their gifts, their unique skills, their given calling. God sees what makes you stand out. And God loves every part of you that you think is weird.

So despite his lack of social cues and Debbie Downer prophecy, Simeon, the oddity in the temple, was right. This crazy prophet was right! And despite Simeon’s weird behavior, he had several important points, points that if we look past the oddity, were really really significant.

When he held Jesus in his arms, with tears streaming down his face and telling God he was ready to die, he was accepting death courageously. Because for Simeon, death doesn’t have the final word. Death does not mean the end. And he knew he was holding the tiny one who would one day demonstrate that on the cross.

And there was something far more important in this scene than maintaining social politeness. This was something Simeon had waited and waited for, and it didn’t matter if his parts of his prophecy were a little dark and foreboding. Jesus had arrived! The world was about to change- and for some people, Jesus’ arrival would be the best thing to happen to them. Those who had awaited years for some relief from their burdens would be lifted up. Lepers would be healed, and the blind would be able to see again. Fishermen would become disciples. Tax collectors would be welcomed into homes and forgiven. Demoniacs would be cured. They would be called beloved, redeemed children of God.

And Simeon was right about Mary and anyone would know Jesus intimately. These people close to Jesus would feel immense pain on as Jesus suffered and died on behalf of humanity.

And for others, perhaps those who didn’t feel the need to follow God’s laws or morals, it meant that their world was about to be turned upside down. For these people who weren’t ready to see how the Gospel would be lived out, weren’t ready to learn how God commands Israel and all of us to help the oppressed, to care for the widows and the orphans, to remember the forgotten, to give up some of what you treasure most for the greater good, and forgive those who hurt you. As Joy Moore says, “Jesus [will] repeatedly condemn those who attempt to flaunt their holiness before God without hospitality toward neighbor.” Those people who weren’t ready to hear the Gospel message and live it out, well Jesus’ arrival meant that the status quo was about to be changed.

So Simeon, the prophet who had some odd things to say at a baby dedication, Simeon was right. Most importantly, Simeon didn’t care if he stood out. He was preoccupied with something far more important. Jesus was in his arms, the very person who would bring salvation, redemption and the good news of the Gospel to all. So if you’re ever feeling down because you don’t fit in, or because someone decided to label you as weird, remember that God uses the weird and the odd to bring a wonderful, truth-bearing message. Remember that you’re limited edition. There’s no one else like you. Embrace it. Amen.

Benediction

Now as you go, may you rest in the knowledge that God loves everything that makes you “you”, even the parts that may be a little odd. May you remember that God can use you to bring good news. And may you not be so distracted about blending in with everyone else that you forgot to look, and see Jesus in your midst. Amen.