

A Stab of Joy

Thomas Robinson, *Certain Hope, Wondrous Love 2*, December 15, 2013

Luke 2:22-38

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses [Lev 12:6], they brought him [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord [1Sam 1:28] ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord” [Exod 13:12-15]) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons [Lev 12:8].”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was **Simeon**, and this man was righteous and devout, **waiting for the consolation of Israel** [Isa 40:1-2], and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been **revealed** to him by the **Holy Spirit** that he would not see death before he had seen the **Lord’s Messiah** (Anointed, Christ [Isa 61:1]).

²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he **took him up in his arms and blessed God** and said,

²⁹ *“**Lord, now you are releasing your servant,** [Psa 116:15-16]
according to your word, in **peace;** [Isa 57:2]*

³⁰ *for **my eyes have seen your salvation** [Isa 52:8,10]*

³¹ *that you have **prepared in the presence of all peoples,** [Isa 40:5]*

³² *a **light for revelation to the Gentiles,** [Isa 42:6; 49:6]
and for **glory to your people Israel.**” [Isa 46:13]*

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And **Simeon** blessed them and said to **Mary** his mother,

*“Behold, this child is set in place
for the **fall and rising of many in Israel,** [Isa 8:14; 28:16]
and for a **sign that is opposed** [Isa 7:11-14]*

³⁵ *and a **sword will pierce through your own soul also,** [Zech 12:10]
so that **thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.**” [Jer 17:10]*

³⁶ And there was a prophetess, **Anna**, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher [Deut 33:24-25]. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from **the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer** night and day.

³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to **give thanks to God** and to speak of him to **all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem** [Isa 52:8-10]. ”

Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who **brings good news,**...
who **publishes salvation,**
who says to Zion, *“Your God reigns!”*

⁸ The voice of **your watchmen** ...
together they **sing for joy;**
for eye to eye they see
the **return of the LORD to Zion.**

⁹ Break forth together into singing,...
for the **LORD has comforted his people;**
he has **redeemed Jerusalem.**

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the **eyes of all the nations,**
and all **the ends of the earth**
shall see the **salvation of our God.**

Luke 2:10-11

¹⁰ And the **angel** said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you **good news** of a **great joy** that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a **Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**”

Hebrews 12:1b-2

¹ ... Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to **Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for **the joy** that was set before him **endured the cross**, disdaining the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

A Longing in the Temple

We meet a remarkable range of people in the story of Jesus' birth. Elderly couple beyond hope of a child, a girl and her betrothed with a child too soon. Emperor, shepherds, angels. Finally, two remarkable people – Simeon and Anna – watching, waiting, longing in the temple. 40 days have passed, time for the Law's rites of purification. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus enter. Who will this one, announced by angels, meet? High priest? King?

Simeon received a promise, to see the Lord's Anointed King. What did he expect, look for? An anonymous couple with a baby and a cage of pigeons, the offering of the poor? He takes Jesus. His heart leaps for joy. He blesses God. Here is the fulfillment of prophetic promises, Israel's hopes, his own long wait. Release from Watchman duty.

So also Anna, waiting, longing for redemption to come. The temple was fabulous, wealthy, built by Herod, run by Caiaphas, a glory! But they long for something real. They know God and recognize something in this obscure child. Their longing breaks forth in joy.

A Stab Through the Shell of the World

The Angel announced a "Great Joy" for all people. This joy is different from settled happiness. It is something that bursts in, illuminates, transforms. Anticipated by longing, waiting.

Herod's Temple said "fulfillment," this is it. Simeon & Anna knew different. It was Herod's self-glorification, Caiaphas' power base, a fortress to keep God out. Religion often works so.

Religious structures, power, patriotism, academic structures, scientism, many philosophies, create shells to keep God out of human life. The universe is mindless and meaningless.

Our creative minds imagine a vast multiverse without a single creative thought, but us.

"Great Joy" stabs through our shells that practically and philosophically exclude God.

Reality is even more complex and wonderful than our science, politics & religion imagine.

There is not only creative intelligence in the universe. There is surprise. There is love!

This child embodies a depth of reality that takes in all science and humanity and

expands it. Here is the inventor of the quark and quasar and the lover of every person.

A Stab Into the Human Soul

But the Joy that breaks into human life is challenging because we are so complex, broken, wonderful, image of God, capable of demonic corruption and crime, noble, debased. The

Joy is "salvation" for all people. God creates salvation through ages with his people.

It is embedded in the hunger, the longing we feel for fulfillment and meaning that the natural structures and promises of our world never seem truly to meet. We were made for more than this. Even at our best we are broken. At our ordinary...? At our worst...!

The Joy breaks into our world, but more. It pierces through into our souls. As Simeon said to Mary. It is painful. The sword that pierces Mary, kills Jesus. God takes on himself our suffering, pain, sin, betrayal, shame, death. He uncovers and heals our innermost brokenness. He allows a Joy and peace to break out that even our sin can't hide.

Our refrain becomes "Rejoice in the Lord always..." (Phi 4:4). The stab becomes a way of life.