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**Title:** Christmas Promise

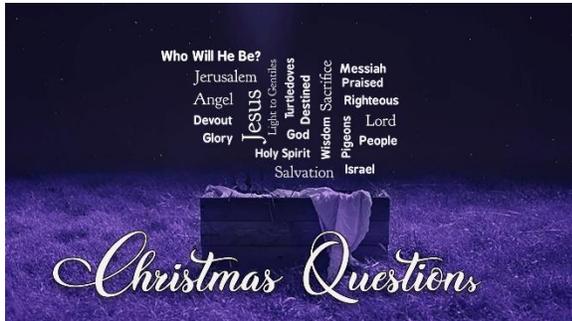
**Preaching:** Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 42:1-6](#)

**Text:** [Luke 2:21-40](#)

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Ann & I picked up some new habits during the pandemic. You likely did too. One of them was watching, on a regular basis, Jeopardy. I've talked to several of you who mentioned the same thing. We watched it occasionally in the past. But when our schedules changed and we were staying in place, we became daily viewers. Then, over

the last few months, we watched along with many Americans, the final broadcasts of Alex Trebek. He faced with incredible grace his pending death. He will be forever an inspiration, not just for dying, but for living, for his kindness and genuine warmth which he always showed contestants and us as the audience.

I'll admit to liking the shows that had a Bible category; it made me always feel smart. I've created one for us today because our passage reads like a jeopardy quiz, with answers that could be followed by questions. There is a reason. Luke is completing his birth narrative with Christmas questions, making sure we know who Jesus will be. If we were playing jeopardy, I think that would be the category. "Who will he be? To lead you through the passage, I've made up five boxes, just like on the TV show.

The first answer, which would be a \$200 box, reads, "After eight days." You probably think this is easy because of the way the opening verse reads What is "...time to circumcise the child?" But that's the wrong answer for the category. Remember, it's "Who will he be?" The right question is "Who is "... called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21b).

It seems odd that Jesus was born Friday and now eight days have passed. But just wait. Time is going to fly in this passage. After 8 days pass, circumcision did take place. The answer was technically correct but it didn't include the naming part of the ceremony which speaks to the category.

As part of prescribed Jewish ritual, good, faithful parents like Joseph and Mary would invite everyone to their home. All the aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas, brothers, and sisters. The rabbi then came to the house and as the service began, asked, "How shall this child be named?" Joseph would have said, "His name shall be Yeshua or Joshua." In Greek, Jesus. It means, "The one who saves and delivers." It was a very common name in the first century because many hoped that their son might be the "one who saves and delivers." As soon as Joseph said Jesus' name, the rabbi circumcised Jesus. With his howl and cry, the sign of the covenant between God and the Hebrews was renewed. Luke is answering the question, "Who will he be?" He will be blessed under the covenant and hopefully, the one who saves and delivers. All that from the first verse. You might not have realized that Luke was saying all of this but first readers would have understood.

Let me give you a second answer which would be on Jeopardy, worth \$400. The answer: two turtle doves. You might be tempted to say, "the second day of Christmas" and of course you'd be right again, but also wrong. That question fits the category of the twelve days of Christmas. That isn't the category. The category is "Who will he be?" The question is "Who is "...purified according to the law of Moses and presented to the Lord." (Luke 2:22)

If you thought we were ahead of the story at 8 days, given that Christmas was on Friday, as I promised, time flies. With this answer and question, we are forty days out from Christmas. Luke wants us to know that Jesus grew up in a Jewish family that meticulously observed the Law of Moses. Five different times in this story, he tells us that they did everything required under the Law. This is important because later in his ministry, Jesus would be criticized for coming to abolish the Law.

At 40 days, they go to the temple because it was required, not for Jesus but for Mary, for the purification of the mother after the birth of a male child. The ritual called for the sacrifice of a lamb and a pigeon, except in hardship cases of poverty, then two pigeons or doves would suffice. Luke is answering again the question, "Who will he be?" He'll be a poor but faithful, law-abiding Jew. <sup>1</sup>

Moving down the board, the answers reveal harder questions, don't they? This is no different. In the next box, the answer that comes up is "...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32) You could say "Who is Jesus" and be right but wrong again. The idea behind Luke's passage is to flesh out who Jesus will be. The answer is "Who is 'the child destined for the falling and the rising of many....'" (Luke 2:35a) We hear this from a man named Simeon both our answer and question.

Simeon is an old man looking for the Messiah. He's been looking a lifetime and he looks specifically in the Temple because Malachi 3 says that the Messiah will "suddenly come to his Temple" so that is where Simeon hangs out. Like a paparazzi hoping to catch a glimpse of a celebrity, he's there waiting. Luke says that he has the right credentials to be a "Messiah-watcher" because he is both "righteous and devout." It doesn't get any better than this. <sup>2</sup>

You heard what happens. Mary, Joseph, and the baby come in and Simeon sees them. But he's not looking for a baby. He's looking for a handsome warrior like David, riding in on a horse or for someone coming on a cloud of glory. Strangely, he is drawn to this baby. Simeon goes over to Mary and says, "Let me have your baby." Can you imagine the anxiety Mary experienced? Young mothers never, ever like strangers, particularly old strangers who can barely hold themselves up, asking to hold their babies. It is an unrecorded miracle that she gave Jesus to him. But she does. Simeon holds the baby, looks into his face, and smiles, and Simeon, the expert witness says "This is the one we have been waiting for. He is here. The Messiah has come." He is "...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people of Israel.'" (Luke 2:32).

Luke says that Joseph and Mary were amazed by what Simeon said. Why? After all, they had visits from angels, shepherds, and kings, why be amazed? Why else than what Jesus will be is simply amazing. Over and over again, year after year, I'm sure they were amazed.

Simeon himself was amazed. The Messiah he was waiting for was very different than the one who he held in his arms. He knew it and immediately saw all the implications. This Messiah, this Savior, Jesus would be controversial, "a child destined for the falling and rising of many." He saw with clarity and he saw also what was ahead for Mary. Simeon turns to Mary and says, "What happens to him is going to break your heart. It will pierce you like a sword in your soul."

Luke doesn't tell us how Jesus is given back. But I think I know. I think Mary grabbed him immediately out of that old man's arms, the second he delivered that awful news. It must have pierced her soul right there in the temple. Who will he be? The Messiah, a glorious light, but heartache for many, especially you, Mary. Simeon leaves the stage but surprisingly, there is still someone who will offer another answer to the question, "Who will he be?"

The answer is "Consolation of Israel and Redemption of Jerusalem." The question is "Who is "my chosen, in whom my soul delights" (Isaiah 42:1a) The one who answers it is Anna, a prophetess. Like Simeon, she hangs around the Temple, and like Simeon, she is old, really old. Luke says she has been a widow for 84 years after having been married for 7 years. If she married early, say 12 or 13, she could be well over a 100. She watches what takes place with Simeon. She hears what Simeon says. She agrees that he is the consolation of Israel and adds to it. He is also the redemption of Jerusalem. Jerusalem and with it the temple, represent the whole of Israel's hope before God. God is leading Israel to the Messiah as promised by the prophet Isaiah. He is the light to the nations. He is the "child given, a son born for us." Anna knows that Simeon is singing out of the Isaiah songbook and quoting Isaiah 42 which announces that this child, this son, is the one that God says "...is my chosen, in whom my soul delights" (Isaiah 42: 1b). Anna glorifies and praises God for who Jesus is, God's chosen, the consolation of Israel, and the redemption of Jerusalem. Who knew that a simple trip to the temple would reveal so much about Jesus?

After the encounters with Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph are left standing in the middle of the temple, holding baby Jesus, amazed. But we are left one with more box. The category, "Who will he be?" isn't complete and the last box is the most valuable, it's the \$1000 question. And in fact, I think it is a double jeopardy box. You can bet everything on it and should.

The answer is "depart in peace." The question is a tricky one. Is the question "Who is Simeon?" It's partially right. He is the one who says, "depart in peace." Simeon, realizing that in holding Jesus he is holding the Messiah says "I can depart in peace because God made good on His promise that I would see the Messiah." But it doesn't fit the category. Who is Anna is another way to answer. She too departs in peace as soon as she bears witness. But she too doesn't fit the category. And neither do Joseph and Mary even though they also depart returning to Galilee.

Remember, the category is "Who will he be?" The question behind the answer, "depart in peace" is this. Who is "your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples," (Luke 2:31) Salvation, prepared for all people. Just like all of the other previous questions by the characters of Christmas, ultimately this question is personal. It is a question you should ask and answer yourself. And if you do, it should give you hope. Who will he be? He will be our Messiah, our Savior, "our salvation prepared for all peoples. All people include Simeon and Anna, Joseph and Mary, and you and me. We can and will depart in peace. I for one, like Joseph and Mary find that amazing.

So while the baby is still young, 2 days, 8 days, or 40 days old, you take your pick, I invite you to take him in your arms. Embrace him the way old Simeon did. Give thanks the way Anna did. Answer the question. Who will he be? He is our salvation, prepared for all people. He is my salvation, prepared for me. Own that, claim that and you will depart in peace not just now, but then, when you finally depart, it will be in peace.

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<sup>1</sup>Luke, Fred Craddock. Interpretation. p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Simeon's Song. Mark Trotter. Retrieved by subscription at Sermons.com.