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If someone asked me, *Why did you choose these four songs of Zechariah, Mary, the Angels and Simeon*, my spontaneous response would be, *Having prayed about it, it was the right choice. A better reply might be, Christmas is a joy-filled season! These songs fit the joyous mood of the season!*

Zechariah burst into song when God answered the prayer, he and Elizabeth had most likely stopped praying about *if it is physically not possible for us to have a child, what can God do?*). Mary burst into song when she realised, of all women in the world who could have carried the Messiah, she was *The Favoured One!*¹

The Angels burst into a song of high praise (*probably one they sing continually before God*), when the Christ-child was safely delivered to us.

So, eight days after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary travel from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, a 6-mile journey which would have taken half a day's travel or more) for His circumcision and naming; Then, 33 days later, they travelled to Jerusalem again, *when it was time for their purification*², a ritual of cleansing by water to prepare oneself for worship, a ritual which Jesus' cousin John used to **baptise** people and cleanse them of sin, in preparation for worship of the coming Messiah.³

Luke mentions such details so we don't miss the piety of Jesus' family, people of modest means, who were faithful to God and kept His Law.

Today, we read the closing song of Luke's birth narratives, sung by old man, Simeon. He sings a very personal song of joy, of ancient hopes realised, foretelling the upheaval of culture, the ending of deep divisions, and the stunning truth about ourselves, when Jesus draws close to us.

Not much is known about the person Simeon except the few lines we have in Luke 2. We know he lived in Jerusalem, and that he was **righteous** (i.e., he

¹ Luke 1:28

² Luke 1:22

³ Luke 3

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obeyed and kept the Law of God), and **devout** (i.e., was faithful in his personal relationship with God).

This describes the perfect relationship we can have with God - to obey His Law, and to be faithful in our relationship with Him by spending time in prayer, in conversation with Him. Religion teaches us, it is sufficient and necessary to obey the Law, no matter how absurd and demanding, for that is how you earn God's favour and that's **all** that matters. Throughout history, God repeats His preference, *I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, and I want you to know Me more, than I want your burnt offerings*⁴, but we don't seem to hear Him pleading.

Simeon was a man of this character, **righteous** and **devout**. Luke tells us two more things about Simeon: *He was waiting for the consolation of Israel* i.e. he held God to His word/promise, that He would rescue the people of Israel from the trials and challenges of living under oppression.

The second thing Luke tells, Simeon submitted himself to the **instruction** and **direction** of the Holy Spirit, who assured him, *he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ*.

Simeon's relationship with God was so intensely personal, on the day in question, the Holy Spirit directed him to the Temple, and Simeon obeyed.

Now imagine the scene: Joseph and Mary, she holding Jesus, walk into the Temple complex, and a man they don't know, walks up to them and takes the baby in his arms. If that happened today, that man would be surrounded and overpowered almost instantly. Mary may have had a moment's panic and Joseph set himself *en guard*, but Simeon's face would have glowed with joy, and might well have provided some comfort to the worried couple! Cradling the Christ-Child in his arms, Simeon sings!

The first word he sings is, **Now, Master... Now** is an emphatic word, a determined declaration that a dramatic and decisive change has taken place;

⁴ Psalm 50:8; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51:16; Psalm 40:6–8; Isaiah 1:11–31; Jeremiah 7:21–23; Hebrews 10:4–10

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the long-awaited, much-anticipated **promised** moment is **now!** *Now Lord! May I be released from my duty to watch for and anticipate Your Messiah?*

Picture a soldier sent on night patrol to watch for the dawn. Through the night, straining his eyes, he scans the darkness for the first glimmer of light. At last, tired and exhausted, he sees a thread of light across the horizon pushing back the night. Weary but obedient, he reports to his commanding officer, "**Now** Lord, You can dismiss Your servant in peace, according to Your word."

But this is no ordinary moment. It is a decisive moment for Simeon, and the whole world.

In all this grand universal work of God, don't miss the point that was very personal to Simeon: *my eyes have seen Your salvation (I am a witness of Your promised saving love)*. What gave Simeon peace to face his death was that he himself had seen the one and only Christ. He looked at the 40-day old infant cradled in his arms and believed *without ever knowing how it would all end*, the longed-for Deliverer of the Jewish people who would restore God's glory to Israel, had arrived!

This Christmas, as you look at the hundreds of greetings cards arranged across your home, many will no doubt carry a picture of an infant in a cradle. Ask yourself this question, *Do I **REALLY** believe, God fulfilled His promise to restore me into a relationship with Him, through the baby in the cradle? If I do believe this, what stops from enjoying a deeper relationship with God?*

Simeon goes on to inform Mary, four things about her Son. **First**, her Son will be responsible for the downfall of the haughty and the arrogant, who have no time for anyone but themselves. **Second**, her Son would be Salvation for the meek in heart and humble in spirit. **Third**, her Son would be fiercely opposed in the future, and **fourth**, Mary would face unprecedented sorrow.

Imagine yourself a mother (and father, because Joseph was in earshot and heard his message too!), receiving a prophetic blessing that was not comforting, rather quite disturbing!

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Changes taking place in our society, government and parliament are staggering! The celebration of Christmas has increasingly very little to do with **Christ**. Simeon's prophetic words are very true: God comes to us as His Son, to challenge the very foundation of what we believe. The first two humans were challenged with the question, **Did God REALLY say...?** and this question echoes through history!

Every word in the Bible is being challenged, yet the Truth is, every month there are archaeological discoveries which confirm and support the Bible accounts.

The question to us is, **Which do you believe?** If you want to believe what the word of God says, it will challenge what the world has taught you.

Let me leave you with this thought:

It is not an accident that God surrounded the coming of Christ with different generations. Why are Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna all very old? Why did God plan the parents of the last OT prophet (*John the Baptist*) be old, and the parents of the Messiah be young?

And why are the two witnesses Simeon and Anna at the point of death when they see Jesus and testify of Him? Luke seems to stress their age very deliberately, in his choice of words, details and expressions.

There are several responses, but let me emphasise one: It is never too early or too late, to be wholly committed in your devotion to the God, to be aflame and alight with hope in God, and surrender your will to the actions of the Holy Spirit. The world asks us, *What can you **do** for God? What will you **do** for the Church?*

But God asks a different question: *I have a plan for this creation and you are a part of my plan. I don't want you to do anything for Me, lest you mess up My plans, **BUT** I am happy for you to surrender to My plans, because then, I can and will use you to accomplish **MY** plans!*

How will you respond?

AMEN.