

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 24, 2017
Lesson Title: "The Promised One"
Lesson Passage: Luke 2:21-38

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Less familiar than the traditional "Christmas story" in Luke 2:1-20 is Luke's account of the return of the family of Jesus to the Temple for the purpose of offering sacrifices for Mary's purification and the presentation of the infant Jesus to the Lord. In the Temple, Simeon, a "righteous and devout" man, takes Jesus in his arms and praises God that he has lived to see the messianic hope fulfilled. Then, Anna, an elderly prophetess, echoes the testimony of Simeon, praising God that the messianic hope has been fulfilled in Jesus.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the nature of the Jewish rituals that brought Joseph and Mary to the Temple with their infant son. (2) Explain why Simeon and Anna were inspired by their encounter with the baby Jesus.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, observe that although Jesus was uniquely the "Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11), as the son of devout Jewish parents he was a child of the Jewish covenant community. So, when he was eight days old, he was circumcised and given a name, according to the prevailing custom. And, about a month later, Mary and Joseph took him to the Temple to participate in two rituals--a rite of purification and a sacrifice denoting the redemption of their firstborn son. While in the Temple they encountered two elderly pilgrims whose zealous reaction to Jesus attested to his messianic identity.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Discuss the reference to the circumcision of Jesus in Luke 2:21:* According to Jewish tradition (*see Lev. 12:3*) Jesus was circumcised when eight days old. NOTE: As the Christian movement developed in New Testament times, "circumcision" took on a negative connotation when members of the "circumcision party" claimed that the traditional Jewish rite was essential to salvation (Acts 15:1,5). But though Paul himself had been circumcised as an orthodox Jew (Phil. 3:5), he insisted that circumcision has no bearing on one's salvation, which is based on faith (Gal. 5:6). However, long before the circumcision debate became a hindrance to the gospel enterprise, Joseph and Mary were motivated by a desire to link the life of their son with the rich heritage of Israel.

2. *Comment on the naming of Jesus (Luke 2:21):* (1) In Jewish tradition, the naming of a child was not a casual matter. (They had a saying which, incidentally, appears in 1 Sam. 25:25: "Like his name, so is he.") (2) "Jesus" (Greek, *Iesous*; Aramaic, *Yeshua*) is a shortened form of

Yehoshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation" or "God saves." (3) Most important, "Jesus" was the name given by the angel in Luke 1:31.

3. *Explain the nature of the two Jewish rituals referred to in Luke 2:22:* (1) Purification. Although some translations read "when the time came for their purification," the KJV translation ("when the days of her purification") is in accord with the regulation in Leviticus 12:6. EXPLANATION: A Jewish mother was considered "unclean" for seven days after the birth of her child, and was expected to live in ceremonial isolation for another 33 days (Lev. 12:4)--a total of 40 days. The rite of purification involved the sacrifice of a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and either a pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering (Lev. 12:6). If the poor could not afford a lamb, they were permitted to substitute another pigeon or a turtledove as a burnt offering (Lev. 12:8). (Luke 2:24 implies that the family of Jesus was classified as poor.) (2) The "presentation" of Jesus. EXPLANATION: This ritual had to do with the redemption of the firstborn. The idea is that the first-born son belonged to the Lord, but could be bought back, or "redeemed," by offering a substitute. (This is explained in Exodus 13:1-2, 12-16.)

4. *Let class members read Luke 2:25-27. Then note what is said about Simeon:* He was "righteous" (upright, obedient to God) (v. 25). He was "devout" (he gave himself wholly and unreservedly to serving the Lord, v. 25). (Luke 2:26 implies that he was advanced in years.) He possessed the hope that springs from faith. God had promised a Messiah, and Simeon believed Him. He lived every day in the expectation that God would fulfill His promise (v. 25). He was sensitive to the Spirit, and he was inspired by the Spirit to come into the Temple at the right moment (v. 27).

5. *Explore the content of Simeon's song of praise (Lk. 2:28-32):* (1) "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (v. 30) means that he has seen the Messiah (the "Lord's Christ," v. 26). (*Compare verses 30-31 with Isa. 52:10.*) (2) "A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). (*Ask various class members to read Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 49:6b and John 1:4-5, 1:9 & 8:12.*) Call attention to the all-inclusiveness of "to the Gentiles" and "to thy people Israel." (God's saving purpose reaches out to all people everywhere in the world.)

6. *Comment on the description of Anna the prophetess in Lk. 2:36-38:* She was elderly, but apparently quite active (v. 37). Her life was devoted to worship (v. 37). She saw the Messiah because she came to the Temple faithfully ("and coming up at that very hour"--v. 38). APPLICATION: Erratic, on-again-off-again worship habits miss out on countless blessings. Having seen Him, Anna "spoke of him to all."

CLOSING THE LESSON

A final thought: As we think about our family observance of Christmas, let's remind ourselves that Christmas is a worldwide celebration, from Armenia to Zimbabwe, from Argentina to Iceland. And this reflects the plan of God from the beginning, as indicated by Luke's testimony that, while Christ was still a babe in arms, a Jewish prophet foresaw that his messianic salvation was intended for all mankind.