

Christmas: The Falling and Rising of Many – Luke 2:34-35

Introduction – There is an unmistakable anticipation of conflict surrounding the birth of Jesus. An unwanted pregnancy, no room in the Inn, and a child born in a stable is not exactly great family planning. The slaughter of all boys in the area under two years old by a tyrant does not lead to quiet evenings of devotional bliss throughout the community. The rejection of the Son of God by those who claim to be following the true God, the lack of neutrality in an honest presentation of the Gospel – these do not lead to peaceful co-existence. But all of this is part of the true meaning of Christmas.

The Story – Simeon, a man of faith, was instructed by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Consolation of Israel, the Messiah, before he died (vv25-26). And so, by the Spirit, he was led to the temple where he took the baby Jesus up in his arms and blessed God (vv27-32). He then turned and blessed Joseph and Mary (v34), but turned to Mary and gave her a particular prophecy. Jesus would bring trouble; He would be a divider. He would bring the falling and rising of many; and He would be for a sign which would be spoken against. Even Mary's soul would be run through with a sword, a clear indication that she would live to see the crucifixion (John 19:26-27). He would be these things so that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed.

Some Words – This prophecy uses interesting words worth noting. This Child is “*destined*”... *keimai* is the word used to describe Jesus “*lying*” in the manger (Luke 2:12), and see where His body “*lay*” in the tomb (Matt 28:6). *Anastasis* is the word translated “*rising*” but is translated “*resurrection*” in almost every other place in the New Testament. *Apocalupto* is translated “*revealed*” and is the same word titling the “*Revelation*” of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1).

Not “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire” Sentimentalism – For many, Christmas is supposed to be a time for feeling warm and fuzzy and so the story of Christmas is to be a story of sentimentalism. We aren't supposed to have any conflict because we're celebrating Christmas. But Jesus came to declare war on fuzzy thinking about truth, sin, death, and judgment. He brought conflict to rid the world, in the end, of conflict. He stood against the serpent and refused to act like a pacifist. He came to divide and conquer. This would require His death, a great, sorrowful sacrifice. He would also call upon His followers to take up their crosses daily and follow Him. In it all, the real Jesus ruins the “can't we all just get along” mindset of “Silver Bells.”

Not “Gonna Find Out Who's Naughty and Nice” Moralism – For others, Christmas is a moralistic call to being good. We're not really sinners, we just need a bad dream to scare us into being good again the way Scrooge is transformed. But people don't just need to change their minds or clean up their hearts. There is a real sin nature that needs to be killed. We need to die and then be born again. Jesus came for the falling and resurrection of many – to new life in Him. He came to reveal what was hidden in the hearts of men, their darkness, rebellion, and unbelief. When we preach Christmas, we declare the Light to the Gentiles (v32) because without Christ there is only darkness and gloom. And this is a sign which will be spoken against – we'll be told we are too gloomy by those living in darkness. We don't need to be better people; we need to be new people.

Not “Keep Christmas in my Heart” Gnostic Spiritualism – There is a problem with materialism (putting your trust and joy in the things of this world and collecting them for this reason). But the answer at Christmastime is not to deny the gift of material things. For too many people, Christmas isn't really supposed to change anything here and so celebrating Christmas shouldn't include anything down here. But Jesus came in the flesh and was held in the arms of Simeon. Not only that, He came declaring Himself to be the King of kings, and Herod understood this. While His kingdom was not of this world, it was coming in Him to take over this world. And all rulers were being put on alert. Christmas is a threat to despots and tyrants in all times.

Christmas Consolation – Jesus came and Simeon declared Him to be the Consolation of Israel. So where is all the comfort in this story? Mary is told that even for her a sword would pierce her soul. Even though there were promised blessings, still there would be a disaster with great pain. We are told several times that Mary stored these things up in her heart. So should we as we ponder the true meaning of Christmas in the chaotic times of our lives and in the life of the world.

Blessings are not Static – The blessings Mary received came in the midst of chaos, and the pain she would experience came in the context of blessings. Blessings in history have a story arc; they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Jesus Christ came into the middle of a chaotic, dark and painful world to rid the world of the chaos, darkness and pain it loved. But the blessing does not come in one fell swoop – that's not the storyline.

Incarnational Christmas Celebration – This means you don't need to pretend, nor should you pretend that “all is well” at this particular moment in your life (sentimentalism). It means you don't need nor should try a little harder to be good (moralism). It means you don't need to deny natural physical delights in order to get closer to the real meaning of Christmas. It does mean that you are to embrace, by faith, the story – the whole story – even the part that hasn't played out yet. When faith opens your eyes to the whole Christmas story, you begin to see that Jesus Christ came to die that He might rise again as the first born from among the dead (Col 1:18) – a resurrection that will encompass a number you could not count – who will join Jesus in full vindication of every wrong, every suffering, every bad turn of events – every curse overcome with blessing.

And as you get your faith around this, there will be plenty of sentiment, plenty of Spirit-wrought power to do good, and plenty of pondering over these truths while feasting, fellowshiping, and spreading the true meaning of Christmas.

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