



# Long-awaited Gift

December 28 • 2008

## Focus Scripture

**Luke 2:22–40**

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 61:10—62:3

Psalms 148

Galatians 4:4–7

Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus. Fill our hearts with rejoicing as we embrace your promise to reshape and restore our lives and our world, through Christ. Amen.

**D**uring this Christmas season, our rejoicing reflects our confidence that God makes things happen, that the reign of God shapes our world. We rejoice with Anna and Simeon, who proclaim that the amazing good news of God’s just and loving way comes in Jesus for all nations, and celebrate with Paul that Christ is the gift who unites us as God’s children.

## Focus Scripture: Luke 2:22–40

Jesus was born of a human mother and raised within the practices of the Jewish faith. Luke’s gospel emphasizes how Jesus lived within the heart of Jewish tradition, and gives an account of the time when Jesus’ family went to the temple for Mary’s purification.

The purification ritual (see Leviticus 12:2–8) was for women only. During the 40 days following the birth of a son, the mother was not to enter the temple sanctuary. At the end of this time, she took a lamb to be offered as a thanksgiving sacrifice and a turtledove or pigeon as an act of penitence. Leviticus allows for those with limited financial resources to offer two turtledoves or two pigeons in place of a lamb and a bird.

In the temple, Joseph and Mary meet Anna and Simeon, who are portrayed as faithful, elderly Jews. Likely, they also were poor. Some scholars suggest that Simeon and Anna are representatives of the *anawim*, the “poor ones” who relied solely upon God for their sustenance. They waited in hope for God’s promised saviour.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon greets Jesus as God’s long-awaited gift for all nations. Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph, and foretells how people’s responses to Jesus will bring conflict. Identified as a prophet of exemplary devotion, Anna sees Jesus in the temple and tells others about the child – others who were also longing for God’s saving power to be made known.

Simeon and Anna respond to the gift of Jesus by praising God. In Luke, their encounter with Jesus is the first “manifestation” of Jesus – the first time human beings (as distinct from the angels) recognize who Jesus is and what Jesus’ birth signifies for humankind.

The prophet proclaims the good news of God’s saving love and care in **Isaiah 61:10–62:3**. Dating from the end of the exile (around 535 – 520 BCE), this passage promises that the righteousness God will cause to “spring up before all the nations” will be like the flowering of a garden. God will restore the relationship with God’s people, and this redemption will be as evident to all as the brilliance of dawn.

Unstoppable praise for God’s reign rings from the words of **Psalms 148**. This psalm is read every year on the First Sunday of Christmas. It is in the very nature of all creation to praise God.

Paul writes of God’s long-awaited gift in **Galatians 4:4–7**. With Jesus, a new era has dawned, in which all people – whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, women or men – are to be included in a relationship with God that is as intimate as that of children with a loving parent. Taken out of context, Paul’s comment that Christ was born “under the law in order to redeem those who were under the law” may seem anti-Jewish, as if God’s law were no longer valid. However, Paul is not being anti-Jewish; rather, he is saying that it is faith in Christ that can bring us together now.



In our celebration of Christmas, we join with Anna, Paul, and Simeon in praising God for the long-awaited gift of Jesus. We join them in proclaiming that the good news of God’s saving love and care is among us now in Christ – and will be among us even more fully in the time to come – as those who are poor, oppressed, or heart-weary are lifted up, strengthened, and healed. In what ways might you and your church express your joy in the long-awaited gift of Jesus? How will you proclaim the good news of God’s saving love and care through word and deed?

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

