

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Equipped

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### Scripture:

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#### Luke 2:22-38

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

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**Transcript:**

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Today's text comes from the Gospel of Luke 2:22-38. It says this, "When the time came for the purification rights required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him, Jesus, to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what was said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."

"When the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations. A light for the revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.' The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'"

"There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84 years old. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who are looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

Well, good morning. My name is Becky and I work here with the elementary students at BelPres. I'm super excited to be with you here this morning. And as I was looking at this text that we're looking at today, I remembered this time in college when I entered into a program called deputation. You see, I was going to University Presbyterian Church. This program, deputation was one where college students would sign up to do a summer mission trip, but it was a unique situation. You would sign up not knowing where you were going, who you were going with or what you were going to do. Instead, it was just a big leap of faith.

Almost a decade later, I'm amazed that I said yes to this. I remember talking with the other college kids who had signed up before we knew what we were doing or where we were going. And us wondering, "Are we going to know what we need to know when we end up somewhere? Wherever that is. Are we going to know what to say? Are we going to know the language? How are we going to be helpful to the ministry partners," that the church had all over the world. But I remember the pastor talked to us and said something that has stuck with me. He said, "God does not call the equipped, but God equips the called" You see, it didn't really

matter that many of us hadn't been out of the country, and it didn't matter that we didn't know the skills that we were going to need that summer.

What mattered was that God was with us. And when we said yes to his call, He was going to equip us to do the things that we needed to do, and give us the people to teach us how to do those very things. I thought about this story because in this text we meet Simeon and Anna. They're two rather normal people. They're almost boring. They're just briefly in the story of Jesus. They're really like you and I. They don't walk on water, and they don't split any seas. They're just normal, average, faithful people who God equips to have the words and knowledge to know how to bless and encourage Mary and Joseph on this very day, and their baby Jesus.

Mary and Joseph were two people who needed encouragement. Think about it. Mary and Joseph enter the temple with their newborn baby, and tradition tells us that this would've been within 40 days of Mary giving birth to Jesus, a season marked by sleep deprivation and weariness. This is hardly the time that most young families want documented in a book that thousands of people are going to read for many years after. You add to that scandal of their pregnancy and marriage. And frankly, it's a wonder they left the house at all. But that's not all. When they walked into the temple, they carried the sacrifice allotted for the poorest in their community. And so they walk into the temple, young, poor, followed by scandal, surely exhausted, brand-new parents. I imagine Mary and Joseph walking in trying to just avoid eye contact with everyone in the temple. They wanted to get in and get out, offer their thanks to God and get home. Surely Mary wanted a nap. Surely Joseph just wanted to protect his family from the whispers and the sidelong glances that must have followed them everywhere they went, and yet God had a different plan for them.

So first they meet Simeon, a man who the Bible describes as a good man, one expecting and waiting for the Lord to act, and who has been promised to see the Messiah. And Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and blesses him, calling out great things that Jesus will do. Simeon has so much to offer Mary and Joseph, in the ways in which he embraces Jesus. He offers acceptance in their religious community when they have felt like outsiders. He offers reassurance of who Jesus is. Think about it. Mary and Joseph, almost 10 months ago, each had an encounter with an angel, and then they had to travel to have their baby.

Around 40 days ago, some shepherds showed up and said that they had seen angels. Surely even the most faithful people must have been wondering by this point, "Was all of that a dream? Is this real? Is God really doing something special with their child?" But Simeon offers reassurance that God is still there, God is still acting and God has something really special planned with Jesus.

And thirdly, Simeon offers to them a blessing for their child. Something so precious, especially for this family in this moment. And part of Simeon's wisdom, something I think truly a gift from

time spent with the Lord is that he predicts not only the beautiful parts of what it will look like to be Jesus' parents, but also the difficult parts. The text says, Simeon shares that Jesus will mark both the failure and the recovery of many.

This is hardly the baptism blessing that we offer in our services. "Your child will be the failure of many." No, no, no, of course not. But Mary and Joseph have to hear this. Being Jesus' parents will be great, and it also will be difficult. It's so important that they hear this, and I truly believe that only someone who has spent a lot of time with God is capable of telling a hard truth like this in grace, and offering blessing alongside it.

As I was thinking about Simeon in the wonderful ways in which he meets Mary and Joseph in this important moment, I thought about a time in my own life when people were giving my husband and I, a lot of advice. When my husband and I were engaged, everyone that we told we were engaged to, gave us advice. It's a funny time in life. Lots of people have lots of things to say and some of it was good advice, don't get me wrong. But it was funny. We started to notice a funny pattern happening. You see, someone would tell me that it was so important to pick my battles, the same week that somebody would tell my husband to communicate about everything that frustrated him, kind of hard to hold both at once. Or the next week someone would tell my husband, happy wife, happy life. And at the same time I would hear, "Compromise is key." Again, how do you hold both of those? It wasn't all bad advice, it just was hard to hold all of it at once.

At our wedding, my father gave a toast and gave a piece of advice that was different. You see, my father and mom, they celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary in December. And when they got up to talk at our wedding, my dad shared that in marriage and in raising my sister and I, there were sometimes things that they did, that they wouldn't have necessarily chosen for themselves. For instance, what they ate. Now, my sister and I were pretty easy eaters as long as whatever they served, we could slather ketchup all over. And so one of the things that was a frequent flyer in our household was meatloaf. It was easy to make. It was quick, and you could eat it with ketchup.

Well, my sister and I went off to college and meatloaf stayed on their meal rotation, until eventually one day my dad and mom sat down to eat and they were going to have meatloaf. My dad finally admitted it and he said, "I don't really like meatloaf." And my mom said, "What? I thought you liked it, and that's why I've been making it all these years." They laughed and agreed to never again eat meatloaf, and to always communicate about what they thought about the things they were eating. Well, the story is great because it emphasizes the importance of communication in a marriage, or in any relationship. But also I love that it underscores that in relationship we may sacrifice for another person's happiness, or just so that our kids will eat.

This story was a hit, and years later, it's a thing that people quote most about our wedding. I think it's because it was true, and it was real. It was a mix of both a blessing and an advice for a marriage, but also honesty about what real marriage looks like. And I imagine in the same

way Mary and Joseph probably quoted Simeon to each other years after they met him, remembering the man who offered both blessing to their child and told them about who He would become. And so Mary and Joseph have this encounter with Simeon. I imagine they were like, "Wow, that was incredible. Surely now it's time to go home and take that nap."

But God has not done lavishing his love and grace upon this special young couple. Anna enters the scene and we learn that she is a prophetess, one who has been widowed for most of her life after just seven years of marriage. She lives in the temple, worshiping, fasting and praying. I think it's such an interesting story that we hear about Anna, because life could have made her bitter so easily, and yet she turns to God. Her circumstances could have made her doubt. But she is steadfast in her faith. And society surely may have seen her as an outsider, but she seems to really know that her place is set with the Lord. What a perfect person to meet this young couple, scared, poor, feeling, outcast with their precious baby.

She breaks into this anthem of praise, singing for those around her, praise for what God is doing with this child. And I think it's so cool because Anna can highlight for them what God is doing even if it's hard for Mary and Joseph to see. Because again, they are two sleep deprived parents of a newborn. Even though they have seen the angels, it's been 10 months, it's been a while. And so Anna and Simeon are brought into their story to remind them of what God is doing in their life.

This is the beauty of community. You see, when I can't see what God is doing in my life through all of the mess, somebody else can so often come and pointed out for me. Anna has lived through the mess. She's lived through grief and sadness, and yet she has seen that God is faithful. She has the tried and true testimony of someone who has walked with God for decades. What a blessing for Mary and Joseph to be able to talk to someone who has literally known God for longer than they have been alive. You see, she is capable of testifying of what God is doing now in this incredible baby, but also of what God has done her whole life. She can testify that God has been showing up, past tense, in the present and will continue to show up in the future. Anna is able to spotlight for them that God is at work in their lives even in a difficult season and even when they cannot see it.

As I was thinking about Anna, I was thinking about a Christmas movie. I watched, It's a Wonderful Life with My family over Thanksgiving. And it's a classic movie. It tells the story of the life of George Bailey who is known for being a really great person in his hometown. He's kind and he's loving, always looking out for his friends and his family. But all at once, things start to not go his way. His family loses some money, he has some problems in business, and he starts to lose hope that his life has had any purpose whatsoever.

Enter Clarence, a fictional angel whose job it is to show George what the world would've looked like without him. And so he takes George around town, showing him a dark world, one that has never been touched by his kindness or love. And pretty soon it becomes clear to

George that he has had a big impact on his town, on his friends, on his family. He begs Clarence to take him back to his normal life. The movie ends back in his normal world as his community and family rally around him. Sometimes we lose the ability to see what others can see in us, and we need a Clarence to come and point it out. And sometimes we are called to be Clarence for one another, helping others to see where God is at work in our lives.

In our text, Jesus was just a few days into His life here on earth, and yet He was already beginning to bring beautiful things into the world, like this community that surrounds Mary and Joseph. A community that shares wisdom and kindness with those in a hard season. A community that's intergenerational and serves one another with love. A community where children are delighted over and seen as precious gifts from God. A community that recognizes the look of exhaustion on the faces of new parents and is quick to give encouragement.

This is the community that we are invited into by Jesus to. One where we purposefully find ways to use who we are and what we know to bless those around us.

As we go into this new year, I challenge you to think of how you can help build that community around you. Ask God where He might be calling you to serve others. Consider what skills and wisdom you have that you could share with those around you. Do you play an instrument, and could join one of our worship fans? Or do you love young people and could come serve our middle or high schoolers? Or maybe you would be great on our hospitality team, helping us to make this a church where people who are weary, are welcomed in and blessed. Maybe, you are already serving and you can help prioritize wherever you are, discipling those around you, and sharing God's love with them.

You see, Jesus does not call the equipped, but He equips the called. So don't worry if you feel like you have nothing to offer others. Jesus, just like Clarence can sometimes see things in us that we cannot see ourselves, and He will give us the skills, and the words, and whatever we need to be a blessing to those around us. Through Him, we can be the Simeons and Annas to people who we meet, sharing God's love and hope with the world.

Let's pray. Dear God, we thank you so much for this story of Simeon and Anna. We pray that you would help us to know where you are calling us to share your love with those around us. Equip us to be the people that you are calling us to be. Help us to build this kind of community. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Who is someone that offered you encouragement during a difficult season? What did that look like?
- What does Christian community mean to you?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.