

Shadows of the Saviour's Suffering

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Date: 21 September 2014

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, which you'll find in Luke's Gospel at chapter 2. We just recently begun a study in Luke's Gospels. You'll see on your chairs this morning, there's a sheet which is not for really particularly reading today, it's just something for you to have.

It's a little road map to Luke's Gospel. I want to encourage you to read through the Gospel, perhaps with that by your side, to just see how carefully Luke has crafted and put together this message of salvation.

And you'll see on one side there's a summary of the Gospel, which I've largely taken and adapted from a book by David Gooding, which I recommended last week.

And on the other side, there's just a little summary of these first two chapters, which I'm calling the overture to the Gospel. Like the overture to an opera, which gives you all the key themes, the melodies, right at the beginning to get them into your head.

And that's what Luke's doing here in the first two chapters of his Gospel. We're used to all these individual stories, read at carol services and things at Christmas, but very rarely do we read them all together and get the flow of what Luke is actually wanting us to pick up.

[1 : 12] That's what we've been trying to do this last couple of weeks. Last week we looked at chapter 1, and this week we're going to look at the whole of chapter 2, which is the second part of that overture.

It's long, so we'll read part of it, then we'll sing, and then we'll come back to it. But let's read, first of all, Luke 2, chapter 2, verse 1 through to 21.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was the governor of Syria, and all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.

To be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

[2 : 21] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy, that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. When they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

[3 : 35] And all who heard it wondered, marveled at what the shepherds told them. And Mary treasured up these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

When the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice, according to what is said in the law of the Lord. A pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Now, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[4 : 43] And the Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit to the temple.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed.

And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

[5 : 51] And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin and then as a widow until she was 84.

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day and coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee and to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

His parents didn't know it, but supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey. But then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. And when they didn't find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

[7 : 06] After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?

And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. Well, do turn with me to Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, page, I think, 857 in the Church Bibles.

[8 : 17] A chapter all about the shadows of the Saviour's suffering. In the National Gallery in London hangs a painting that was once thought to be by Rembrandt but is now reckoned to be by a pupil of his.

It's called The Adoration of the Shepherds. There's a very similar one by Rembrandt himself which is in Munich today. But both of these paintings are depictions of the scene here in Luke, chapter 2, verses 16 to 19.

They show the shepherds and the parents gathered around the manger. And the light in the picture emanates from the child in the manger.

He is the light of the world. But in the background, in the shadows, if you look carefully, you see that the beams in the stable roof are in the unmistakable shape of the cross.

And the painter's point is clear. Even over the cradle of the Redeemer who brings the sunrise of light into this world are already gathering the shadows of the cross.

[9 : 26] Now, the skill of the artist both records the scene and subtly conveys a very powerful message at the same time. And just so with Luke, our gospel writer.

We're getting a feel for his carefully ordered account as he calls it in verse 3 of chapter 1. And we've seen that the whole story of his gospel falls into these two movements.

The revelation of the Savior's glory, bringing heaven's salvation down to earth. That's most of the first nine chapters. And then following that, the road to glory as Jesus shows the path to everlasting glory for himself, but also for everyone who will be his follower.

And so, chapter 1 and chapter 2, as I've said, are like an overture that tell that whole story in miniature. We saw last time that chapter 1 is about the sunrise of the Savior's light in the world, at his coming.

There's joy and praise at his coming, and it's full of songs for the Savior's sunrise. Climaxes in the Benedictus, that wonderful song of Zechariah that we looked at last time.

[10 : 38] But, like Rembrandt the painter and his pupil, Luke insists that we also see the other side, the dark side, which already is looming over the future of this child.

And we find that in chapter 2, as it reports the events surrounding Jesus' birth, it carefully also draws attention to these dark shadows, the shadows of the Savior's suffering.

And we can see that that is an obvious emphasis that Luke points to. We can see it in the climax, in each of the three movements in this chapter that we read.

Each episode ends with a focus on Mary and on the message that she receives and on her reaction and her thoughts, the things that she pondered in her heart.

It's very striking. And Luke, I think, must have heard these things directly from Mary herself many years later. We know that Luke accompanied the Apostle Paul on his journeyings.

[11 : 45] And Luke, in Acts chapter 21, he tells us that he went to Jerusalem with Paul. And we know that Paul was then imprisoned for two years. And it seems very likely that Luke spent those two years in Palestine researching and listening to all of these eyewitnesses, the servants of the Word that he speaks about in chapter 1 before he left again, as Acts chapter 27 tells us when he went with Paul on that ship to Rome.

So he had plenty of time to interrogate Mary and all of these other eyewitnesses. And I think this chapter rings with the authenticity of somebody who is looking back and saying, this is what happened and this is how I felt about it.

This is what I thought at the time. And three times in this chapter a message is given to Jesus' parents and especially to his mother.

A message that causes them to wonder, to marvel. And we're told Mary treasured these things up in her heart and she pondered what these things could possibly mean about her new son.

So verses 17 and 18 we have the saying of the angels that's reported by the shepherds. Verses 33 and 34 we have the saying of the prophets Simeon and Anna.

[13 : 03] And then in verse 50 we have the saying from Jesus himself. And each of these leads to wonderment, to deep reflection. So it's clear and it is so clear that we can be sure I think that Luke means us to see it and to ask ourselves well what does Luke's choice of these stories to report, what is his concern in each part and his construction of this whole chapter.

What does that lead us to understand what he is communicating to us, what his message is about the Savior that he wants us to understand in these divine words that come to Mary.

Well let's look at each section and try to hear what Luke is saying to us. First, look at verses 1 to 21 because here we have a message of comforting assurance for Mary in the words of the angels that are delivered by the shepherds.

Luke brings these two episodes, verses 1 to 7 and 8 to 21 together to teach us as God then taught Mary that the coming of the life of God's Son into our world is surrounded by difficulty and distress. But nevertheless, it is all according to God's plan and purpose. And so his people can be and must be at peace.

[14 : 31] That's the message of the angels. Verse 14, peace among those with whom God is pleased, his people of faith. What Luke is saying here is that it is God and not Caesar who is in control of events.

And his power is at work. It's achieving his purpose. However the circumstances may seem to suggest otherwise. It's heaven's verdict, not earth's verdict, that is the verdict that really matters about what is going on.

Now the whole narrative of chapters 1 and 2 center and hinge on the reporting of these two births. The birth of John, the end of chapter 1, and the birth of Jesus, the beginning of chapter 2.

But what a total contrast there is in these births. Do you see? The end of chapter 1 we saw last time recorded. John's birth at home, surrounded by friends and neighbors and family, amidst great rejoicing on earth all round about.

But Jesus' birth here, how different it is. Very far away from home. Unannounced. Unknown. And outcast.

[15:45] Not even among a strange people because there was no place for them inside the inn with the other people, so they were outside among the animals in some sort of outhouse or cave.

Now don't miss that contrast that Luke deliberately wants us to see here. The last we heard of Mary, remember, she was singing for joy. She was singing about this miracle that had overtaken her.

She was singing about her Savior. She was singing about God's coming salvation. About how blessed she was. About how God had exalted those of humble estate like she was.

She was singing about how God had filled the hungry with good things. It was joy everywhere for Mary. But when we come to verses 1 to 7 of chapter 2, it is a cold, hard reality check, is it not?

It's back to the mundane reality of life. Here is an unmarried girl. She's still betrothed to Joseph. She's not yet legally married. She's pregnant with an unplanned pregnancy, which was no doubt a source of very great shame to her and had been for months and months.

[16:59] Most people around her would never believe her. Can you imagine it? Who on earth was going to believe a story about an angel coming and this being a miraculous conception? People still don't believe that today.

Yes, dear, that's an original one. I've never heard that before, I'll grant you, but pull the other one.

Come on. It was a source of shame, surely. And life goes on and governments want taxes and Caesars, inland revenue, wants everybody on file so that he can tax them more.

Well, nothing changes, does it? And so there's a 90-mile journey for the privilege of paying more tax that has to be made by poor, pregnant Mary.

That's hardly a joy at any time, is it? But when you're nine months pregnant and on foot, ladies, how would you fancy that? Would you do that just to give more tax to Mr. Cameron or Mr. Salmond?

What a nightmare. You can hear what she's saying, can't you? Joseph, I'll probably have to give birth when we're miles and miles from home.

[18:04] It'll be awful. We'll be in some inn probably full of all sorts of strangers and nobody that we know and they'll all be in a bad mood about these Romans. But it was worse than that, wasn't it?

Because there wasn't even a place for them in the inn. And so these verses are telling us that a poor, frightened, teenage girl who's lived under the shadow of shame for months and months going into labor outside in some sort of cave with a carpenter as a midwife.

Hardly bears thinking about it. That makes you shudder, doesn't it? And there was no cradle. There was no crib. There was just a dirty old animal's feeding trough that no doubt Joseph had to clean out from the muck in the bottom so that there was somewhere for this baby to be put.

That's the real story that these verses are telling us. We've become so used to sentimentalizing all of this because of our Christmas cards and nativity plays. We totally miss the shocking reality of this.

It must have been deeply harrowing, desperately difficult, hugely distressing for Mary. It was awful for her in any circumstances, but just imagine how much more awful and how much more disappointing and devastating it must have been for her.

[19:32] After all that she'd been told by the angels, all the expectations that she's had in chapter one about this son being special, being unique, being the son of David, the king, being the son of God is what she'd been told.

How on earth did that possibly fit with the reality she found herself in the midst of now? I wonder if you've ever experienced something even remotely similar in your own life when you've been so clearly led by God's certain word in the scriptures to obey him and to follow his command on your life and you've trusted him and then everything just seems to have gone totally wrong and instead

of it being the way of great blessing that you believed, it seems that in fact what has happened is God has just abandoned you altogether and left you on your own in an absolute mess. But I'm pretty sure that's how Mary felt in the exhaustion of her traumatic delivery and the distress of her surroundings. How could she not feel like that? The Messiah, the son of God, the king of Israel in a smelly old outhouse and lying in a cattle trough. How can that possibly fit? And yet, do you see, even in the sparse detail that we get in verses 1 to 7, Luke is saying to us, look, this is all according to God's plan.

[21 : 12] What had Gabriel said to Mary back in chapter 1? The child will reign on the throne of his father, David, the great king of Israel. What did Zechariah said in his song? God has raised up a horn of salvation in the house of his father, David. And so, where had this inconvenient decree of the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, insisted that Mary and Joseph had to go, verse 4 of chapter 2, to the city of David, to Bethlehem? And just in case we don't catch that, because, says Luke, Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. You see, this is God's plan unfolding, not Caesar's. In fact, do you see the delicious irony? Caesar thought he was doing all this to shore up his own grip on his kingdom, to shore up his own power on his empire, but no, his actions precipitate the birth of the child whose gospel will one day conquer the whole of his Roman empire. So, even amid the discomfort and the distress of this unwanted journey, it is God's plan and God's purpose that is being fulfilled.

[22 : 40] And that's what verses 8 to 21 underline for Mary and indeed for all of us. Notice, we get just 7 verses describing the circumstances of Jesus' birth, but 14 verses here that help to explain it and bring this message of comforting assurance to Mary in her distress.

And this is where Luke's focus really is in this passage, in the saying, verse 17, concerning this child that the shepherds come and bring from the angels and verse 18, in the amazement that it brings to everybody and verse 19 to Mary treasuring these things up and pondering them in her heart. She is not wrong and deluded about what God had said to her before from these angels. She wasn't imagining it. And despite all of these things now that she's experiencing, do you see verse 11? Who is this child? The Savior that she was promised. The Christ, the anointed Messiah King born in David's city. And he is, say the angels, he is the Lord himself. All through chapter 1, many, many times those words have been referred to God himself.

[23 : 59] The Lord is with you, says Gabriel to Mary. The Lord God will give this child the throne of his father David.

This child, the angels are saying to her, is everything you were promised he would be. And although his birth is unnoticed on earth and outcast, it's not unnoticed and it's not unsung in heaven. The multitude of the whole army, the heavenly host, is singing glory to God about this Mary right now, right now. They know exactly where you are. They've sent these shepherds just so that you will know that they know. You see what they're saying? Despite all of your difficulty and distress, perhaps near despair, God is in heaven. And all his armies of angels have you in their sights and they have you in their song. And however dark, however difficult, however disappointing the circumstances around you seem to be, however much it seems to you that God is not doing what he said and promised he would do, that is just not so.

[25 : 20] His plan and his power and his purpose are 100% on track. And you know, Dr. Luke, I never thought I'd be so happy to see a bunch of rather malodorous shepherds barging into that cave in my exhaustion and distress that day.

But what a comforting assurance that was from the Lord to me. Those shepherds were as good as angels to me that day, Luke. And what a comforting assurance for Theophilus and all the others that Luke was writing to, don't you think, to understand that as well? That those who are intimately associated with the Christ, with the King of Heaven, may very well indeed be outcasts and strangers here on earth, but they will never be forgotten, not ever, and they will never be out of sight of all the angels of heaven, even amid discomfort, even amid deep distress

that may very well often surround God's people on earth.

And so they can be at peace knowing the assurance that God is in control, that his purpose is working out, and that he does see, and he does know, and he does care.

And what a comforting assurance surely to every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ today in a world where we may often feel marginalized, and in many places today may even face the terrible distress of persecution and real suffering.

[27 : 10] Remember what Jesus says later on in Luke chapter 9 as he begins his journey to Jerusalem and explains what it means to be a follower of his. Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

He explained that those who reject Jesus on earth will also reject his people. But he gave again a wonderful assurance to his disciples.

Blessed are your eyes saints that see what you see. Because I tell you, prophets and kings longed to see what you see and did not see it and hear what you hear and have not heard it.

The announcement of the good news of salvation, the coming of the kingdom of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. it is not all going wrong.

God's plan is being fulfilled in this earth and for this earth even though so often it may seem to us that there's nothing but difficulty and distress for Christ's people.

[28 : 20] But you see what Luke is saying? This pattern is God's pattern. And it will be seen wherever Jesus is being born, as it were, in this world.

Wherever the Savior's grace is breaking in in power to bring the light of salvation in this dark world. What an encouragement and assurance that must be to all the servants of the word today who are sowing the seed of the gospel throughout the world and feeling like outsiders, feeling excluded, feeling marginalized.

It's so easy, isn't it, to think, well, where has God gone? Why has He abandoned us? Where's His power? Where's His provision? This is a disaster. It certainly doesn't feel, does it, like the glory of God and His kingdom is breaking into this world at this moment.

But that's what Mary thought. And she was wrong. Because it was. God was wrong. And that's the God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in this world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

[29 : 53] God. He's the God who chose a feeble babe, born as a stranger, to be His Savior for the world. And He chooses the feeble frailty of the word of His gospel to bring everlasting life to those that He's rescuing.

And even though none on earth should see any of this, don't ever think, friends, that your labors for the gospel of God are in vain.

What earth is blind to heaven sees and heaven rejoices in. Remember what Jesus says in Luke chapter 15? There is joy in heaven among the angels of God when even one sinner repents.

What a message of comforting assurance the angels brought through the shepherds to Mary. What a comfort it should be to us also. Something surely for us to treasure, to ponder in our hearts this coming week, especially if we find ourselves perhaps a bit dispirited, a bit disappointed, even distressed, wondering if God has perhaps abandoned us.

No. His peace is for all those with whom He is well pleased, all those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 18] And we can trust Him. Mary and Joseph did trust Him. Verse 21, they showed that trust by naming the child Jesus, the name that the angel had given even before he was conceived.

But alongside that wonderful message was a more troubling message for Mary. In verses 22 to 40, tell of an encounter with these two elderly prophets.

prophets. And if you look at that, you'll see that what they bring is a message of coming anguish for Mary. That's what Simeon and Anna's words declared in the temple mean.

Their clear message is that the way to glory and salvation for Israel and for all peoples will involve great disturbance and opposition and even death for the Redeemer.

God's plan. But even this is all according to God's plan. It's according to your word, as Simeon puts it in verse 29. And so like him, Mary too can be at peace, even through the anguish that will surely come into her life.

[32 : 33] And so to all others who are bound to Jesus as the Savior can also be at peace. Once again, Luke's focus is clearly to show us that God's plan is on track, that his purpose is unfolding perfectly, even when it doesn't look like it.

But first, notice how he wants us to see that his plan in all things is determined by the scriptures. It is according to your word.

We're told they went to the temple to dedicate the child. Every firstborn child had to be redeemed because he was set apart to the Lord. You remember the story of Samuel, who was left unredeemed and left serving in the temple for all of his life.

But Luke's point is that all of this is determined by the scriptures. Look how he hammers it home. Verse 22, according to the law of Moses. Verse 23, as it is written in the law.

Verse 25, what is said in the law of the Lord. Verse 27, according to the custom of the law. Verse 29, according to your word. Verse 39, they performed everything according to the word of the Lord.

[33 : 42] Do we get the point? Everything is being dictated by God's scriptures. And everything is being directed by God's spirit.

God's spirit is at work through his own words in the scriptures and also through his providential oversight of all things in history and in circumstances. So verse 26 tells us that Simeon had had a personal word from the spirit.

We're told the spirit brought him to the temple. Verse 27, at just the time that Jesus was there. By the way, that is always the work of the Holy Spirit throughout time and history to bring people to God's word and to bring people to the Lord Jesus.

We're told the same with Anna. Verse 38, she came at that very hour. Verse 29 and 30 tells us that the Holy Spirit was clearly opening Simeon's eyes so that he would understand the scripture.

So that according to your word, he says he grasped that Jesus is God's savior and to see him is to see salvation. In other words, he understands that all the scriptures are going to be fulfilled in this child and in what this child will accomplish for the whole world.

[34 : 58] Notice he speaks not only about a glory for Israel but for light to the Gentiles, for salvation for all peoples. And so he blesses God. He says, my whole life is now complete.

I can depart in peace. But Simeon also understands something else very important. That for salvation to come to all the peoples, this child must suffer.

For Israel to have a redeemer, he cannot be redeemed. He must be handed over to God's service as a savior and as a savior who must suffer. That was Jesus' own testimony, wasn't it?

The moment that he was confessed as the Messiah by Peter, immediately he said, the Son of Man must suffer and be rejected and be put to death and to rise again on the third day.

And you see, that word is being foreshadowed even here in his infancy. The dark side of his suffering is foreseen. And verse 34, Simeon says, he will be the cause appointed by God according to God's plan of the falling and rising of many in Israel.

[36 : 07] He'll be a sign that is opposed. And for Mary, his mother, that will bring anguish, a sword piercing her own soul as she witnesses all of this pain and sorrow and grief in the suffering of her own son.

Jesus himself in Luke chapter 20 later on quotes the scriptures that Luke is alluding to here through Simeon's words about the builders rejecting the very corner stone upon which God builds his kingdom.

He quotes from Isaiah and says, everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. All who reject him shut themselves out of God's kingdom forever.

But you see, this is all in God's plan. God has appointed this very thing, says Simeon. But why would anybody reject God's cornerstone of salvation?

Well, look at verse 35. Because, says Simeon, he will expose many hearts. He will reveal the truth about the human heart. He'll expose their sin. He'll call people to repent.

[37 : 21] And many, many human beings, most human beings, would rather die than admit that they need to humble themselves and repent and be obedient to the call of God in Christ.

We'll see that next time exactly in chapter 3. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He preached it even to Herod the king. He called him to change his ways, especially to repent for stealing his brother's wife.

And what did Herod do? He locked him up in prison to shut him up. Because a gospel of repentance will always be opposed.

And so Simeon reminds Mary that there will always be anguish for those who are bound to this Savior, to the true Savior. Yes, as Anna also proclaims, he is the true Redeemer. He is the one who is the Savior of the world, but his way will always be marked by disturbance and opposition, by pain and by anguish of heart.

[38 : 28] And you know, Dr. Luke, said Mary many years later, though that word left me reeling then, as Jesus' ministry unfolded, as I saw it all fulfilled, as I felt the anguish, as I felt the sword pierce my soul, I remembered old Simeon's words.

And I remembered that he could see all this coming anguish, and yet, at the same time, he could know God's wonderful peace. And that helped me to remember that God does know what he's doing through Jesus, and that he knew my part in that, even when I find it so very hard.

And it reminded me I can trust him, and I can be at peace, even in the midst of that anguish. Well, I'm imagining those words of Mary, obviously.

But don't we often find ourselves saying something very, very similar to that? And don't we need Simeon's message to strengthen us for our lives of following Jesus on the road that he calls us to, a road often that will contain anguish?

Don't we need to know that the road from the cradle to the crown in heaven will always involve for you and me, the anguish of the cross? That it will always be a way that brings challenge and opposition if we're following the true Savior, not a false Savior.

[39 : 54] There will be pain, there will be anguish of soul for all who follow the Savior. Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily.

Whoever will be my follower, there will be pain. And yet, just as for Simeon, there will also be peace because he has come and because we too have seen the salvation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so not even the greatest anguish of heart or the most piercing pain or anything else in all creation can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord, says Paul in Romans 8.

Well, the final story in verse 41 to the end gives us a message that Mary received not from angels, not even from prophets, but directly from Jesus, her own 12-year-old son.

A message this time that brought her confused anxiety as she wrestled with what it really meant that Jesus was not just her son, not just a human child, but that he really is the son of the heavenly father, the son of God.

[41 : 15] And that would mean distancing and disruption in her earthly relationship with him as her mother so that he could truly be her savior.

The first part of the story records the natural anxiety of parents who have lost a child. Every parent can imagine that nightmare, can't they? We lived through the nightmare of that poor family, the McCann's that they had to endure when they realized that they'd lost their girl from their holiday apartment.

Many of us will have had the momentary horror of discovering that a child's got lost in a supermarket or on a playground or out in the street or somewhere like that. And so verse 48 says, quite naturally, they were searching for him in great distress.

Who wouldn't be? But again, notice Luke's concern. It's all building up, isn't it, to Jesus' words to Mary and to her response in verses 49 to 51.

They find him, we're told, verse 46, after three days. You can imagine how frantic they were. But before we hear that exchange between Jesus and his mother, Luke points us to what Jesus was doing.

[42 : 31] We see him in verse 46 in the temple, among all those scholars and teachers, and all of them are amazed at his wisdom and his words. The picture is of one who is totally at home in the midst of the temple there.

And that's what he tells us in verse 49, isn't it? I must be in my father's house or about my father's business. He is claiming a unique relationship with God his father, a unique role in the affairs of men.

Didn't you realize that? He asks his parents. Well, no. They had no real conception of just how much more he was than even what they've been able to understand so far from all the words about him.

Yes, indeed, he was fully human. He was a real 12-year-old boy. He wasn't going to be unnatural in that way. He wasn't going to demand to usurp their parental authority.

Verse 51 tells us that clearly. He submitted to them. But he was much more than merely human. Not in an unnatural way, but in a supernatural way.

[43 : 45] He had a unique relationship with God, his true father. And so he must be about his work, his work of salvation.

And so Mary would have to learn that Jesus could not be domesticated. His life could not just be fitted into her world and into the world of her natural family because her son was God's son.

Her son is the Lord of glory. He's the Lord of heaven and earth. He's Christ the Lord. And that's something that the whole New Testament is so very clear about.

Outside the gospel narratives, did you know you will hardly ever find Jesus referred to just by that name, Jesus, a tiny handful of places. You'll always find him referred to as Jesus the Christ, as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus.

Because you see, the apostles had understood, as Peter says, God has made him both Lord and Christ. And every knee must bow.

[44 : 54] And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord over all. And Mary had to understand that. The time would come when she could no longer think of this boy as Mary's lad.

She would have to recognize him as her Lord. Indeed, Mary's only mentioned once more in the whole of Luke's gospel in chapter 8, and not even by name, and in fact, with a bit of a sense of rebuke.

As Jesus says, my true mothers and brothers are those who hear and do what the gospel says. Mere earthly relationships, he's saying, are not the ultimate thing.

It's those who know Jesus Christ as the Son of the Father, as the Lord of glory, as Lord and God, and bow before him. You're his true family.

What an important thing for us to learn, as well as for Mary to learn, is it not? That we cannot domesticate the Lord Jesus Christ.

[45 : 59] We cannot deny him his true identity. To know him is to know God the Son. It's to know the Lord of heaven and earth. It's to know the one who created all things and who will judge all people.

We sometimes sing, my Jesus, my Savior, or my Jesus, I love you, I know you are mine. And there's a very right sense, a right sense in which that is so, because he is a personal Savior for me and for you personally.

And he must be that, not just in a general and vague sort of a way. But there is also a desperately wrong way to think of Jesus as ours, as mine.

He does not belong to me. He is not mine to own or control or manipulate. I belong to him. I am his to rule and to possess for his purpose, for his glory.

We have to be so very careful. It is easy to sentimentalize our thinking in that way, to think of Jesus as my chum, just my friend, even as my boyfriend.

[47 : 16] I have to say sometimes some of the praise songs that you hear border on that way of thinking, and dangerously so. But Jesus was not just Mary's boy, Mary's lad.

He was Mary's lord. And if she could not domesticate him, how much less can we? Don't you realize?

I must be about my father's business, a sovereign lord of all, to judge the living and the dead. I cannot be conformed into your little personal world.

Not even for you, Mary, his earthly mother. That's a word of warning I think we need to hear in our contemporary world today, isn't it?

To ponder in our hearts. We dare not domesticate the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can we subordinate him to make any earthly relationship, even a family relationship, more important, forcing him to fit into our domestic arrangements to keep the peace so that we don't alienate our personal circumstances.

[48 : 27] What did Jesus say in Luke chapter 14? Whoever does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and yes, even his own life, cannot be my disciple.

He will not be subordinated, even to our closest natural family ties and earthly loves. The father's house and the father's business must come first.

And that will mean painful choices and necessary divisions in our experience. Do you think I have come to give peace to this earth, says Jesus in chapter 12?

No, I tell you, but rather division. Father against son, mother against daughter, in-law against in-law. So Mary, verse 51, treasured up all these things in her heart.

And as she watched her son increase in stature and wisdom and in favor with God, and as she saw his ministry unfold, even the horror of the cross and then the glory of the resurrection, eventually, eventually she saw her anxious confusion give way to the clarity of true faith.

[49 : 48] That her son, the babe of Bethlehem, the boy of Nazareth, even the suffering man on the cross, that he truly was the Lord of glory, that he was her savior, indeed the savior of the whole world.

Friends, we also need to ponder these things in our heart. Because the work of salvation, according to Jesus himself, will always be something that cannot be subordinated to our domestic peace and harmony.

It's something he says will do the very opposite. It will disrupt and divide even very close earthly ties. It will demand distance at times, even from those we love deeply for the sake of the needs of the Father's house.

A house that longs to be full with those who are lost and must be found, with those who are sick and must be brought healing. So if one day your son or your daughter goes to the farthest ends of the earth because of the business of the Father's house, don't resent God.

Don't try and domesticate their call in gospel service. He's not our Jesus to control and use for our domestic purposes.

[51 : 14] He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the savior from heaven, and we belong to him. Don't you understand what my father's business is all about?

I must be about my father's business. I must preach the gospel far and wide, for I was sent for this purpose. And you, if you are my disciples, you must take up your cross and follow me in the same way.

The songs of the Savior's sunrise will not be heard in this world, nor his light shine in people's hearts. Unless, like Mary, all Christ's people learn not to balk at a life lived in the shadow of the Savior's suffering.

There will be anguish and anxiety, things that we find hard, hard to understand. But there will also be assurance, great assurance, just as there was for Mary.

God knows and God sees. And everything is unfolding according to his plan and his purpose, dictated by the words of Scripture and directed by the power of his Spirit.

[52 : 36] And so, as we follow him on his road to glory, even in the midst of much pain, it means that we also can have peace. We can have great peace, just like Simeon, because our eyes have seen his salvation in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, as with Mary, may our hearts receive these words of yours from heaven through the angels and shepherds, through the prophets Simeon and Anna, and through the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

and ponder these things. And come to rejoice in seeing your way as the only way until the very end of our lives.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.