

# Making Room

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 2.21-52

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## I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our advent series, Making Room, recalling the third line from the wonderful Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*:

Joy to the World, the Lord is come,  
Let earth receive her King!  
*Let every heart prepare Him room,*  
And heaven and nature sing...

Last Sunday we kicked off the series by thinking together about Matthew 1.1-17, which details Jesus' family lineage, through which God made room for the birth of His Son, our Savior and Lord. This week, I'd like to invite us to think together about how room was made by devout believers within Jesus' religious tradition to welcome Him as the promised Messiah.

## II. Connecting with One Another

Can you recall a Christmas gift you desperately wanted, but had to wait a long time to receive? What was it? How did you feel opening it on Christmas morning?

## III. Study the Text

- a. If you have time before meeting with your small group, reflect upon Luke 2.21-52.

What do you notice in these verses that you haven't noticed before? What questions do you have in reading this passage? What do you find here that's interesting or thought provoking?

- b. Read Luke 2.21-24. Luke is careful to point out (and to repeat again in verse 39) that the actions Joseph and Mary undertake in Jerusalem were necessary ceremonies every Jewish boy was to undergo. That Luke repeatedly mentions "the Law of the Lord" and alludes to the Hebrew Scriptures is an effort to bring his Gentile (non-Jewish) audience up to speed. One commentator has even noted, "The major motif of this section is that the Law of the Lord was fulfilled at Jesus' birth."

Why do you think Luke felt it necessary to clarify the requirements of the Law to his Gentile audience? How would doing so help them better understand Christian faith? Why is it important to understand the birth of Jesus in the context of first-century Judaism?

- c. In describing the three ceremonies that Joseph and Mary undertake (circumcision, redemption of the firstborn, and purification after childbirth), Luke references Leviticus 12, Exodus 13.2, 12, 15, and Numbers 18.14-16.

Leviticus 12 declares that new mothers are to bring a lamb to sacrifice, though verse 8 reads, "if she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering." Scholar Bruce Larson makes sure we don't miss the connection: "The mother of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world could not afford a lamb."

How does this shape your understanding of Mary and Joseph's status in their community?

How does it reveal the gracious ways that God - and their faith tradition - "made room" for Mary and Joseph?

- d. Read Luke 2.25-32. Recall that Joseph and Mary travelled to the Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of the Law. In contrast, Simeon was in the temple because he had been prompted by the Holy Spirit.

While the reasons for their presence in the temple may be different, God seems content to use either! How have you seen this to be true in your own life? In other

words, how has God used both your obedience to His Word and the guidance of His Spirit in your spiritual journey?

Are our obedience and God's Spirit-led guidance really two different things? Why or why not?

- e. William Barclay writes of the promised Messiah, "Some Jews believed that some great, celestial champion would descend upon the earth; some believed that there would arise another of David's line and that all the old glories would revive; some believed that God Himself would break directly into history by supernatural means. But in contrast to all that there were some few people who were known as *the Quiet in the Land*. They had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies with banners; they believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God. Simeon was like that; in prayer, in worship, in humble and faithful expectation he was waiting for the day when God would comfort His people. God had promised to him through the Holy Spirit that life would not end for him before he had seen God's own Anointed King. In the baby Jesus he recognized that King and he was glad."

Barclay notes four groups of first-century Jews. Do you see any similarities with twenty-first century Christians?

Do you identify with any of the four groups? If so, how?

- f. Reread Luke 2.29-32. Bruce Larson writes, "Part of Simeon's prophecy must have been a great shock to Mary and Joseph... No one expected the Messiah to be for all people." Indeed, that may have been why Mary and Joseph "marveled at what was said about him"!

How does Jesus' being "for all people" inspire our understanding of Christmas? In other words, how is the inclusion of the Gentiles a way of "making room" for others, especially non-Christians!?

- g. Read Luke 2.36-38. Luke makes specific mention of Anna's age, an age which was quite uncommon in the first century. How does his doing so communicate the opportunity we all have - regardless of age - to "make room" for others?
- h. Read Luke 2.41-52. How does Jesus' question, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" reveal how room had been made for him?

#### IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Reflect for a moment that many of us Gentiles have been grafted in, adopted by God through Jesus, the promised Jewish Messiah. We are heirs of Simeon's prophecy! How does that alter your understanding of celebrating Christmas? How does it change your perspective towards non-Christians?
- b. Mary was unable to afford a lamb, though room was made for her in the temple. How has room been made for you even when you felt you didn't have enough of something?
- c. How could you, like Simeon, be more attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit this Christmas season?
- d. With a little help from William Barclay above, we thought through four groups of first-century Jews (and perhaps twenty-first century Christians). How could you be more like one of "the Quiet in the Land" this advent season?
- e. Anna was undeterred from making room for Jesus. How have you been deterred from joining God in His mission to make room for others in our church?
- f. How have others made room for you? What are their names? Have you thanked them for their faithfulness to God and shared how it has impacted you?

#### V. Pray

- a. Thank God for Elders and Deacons who have served, for those continuing to serve, and those beginning to serve in January. Pray that God would empower and equip them by His Spirit to make room - and to lead us in making room - for others.
- b. Lift up our ongoing visioning process, asking that God's Spirit would guide the members of that team in their work.
- c. Pray that our church would be like Simeon and Anna, *the Quiet in the Land*, as we make room for others this Christmas season.