Simeon — the eyes that see salvation (fact sheet)

> **Key verse**
>
> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2.25-32)

In one sentence: A righteous and devout man in Jerusalem, waiting for the consolation of Israel, was promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah; guided by the Spirit, he took the infant Jesus in his arms, praised God in the song traditionally called the Nunc Dimittis, and foretold both the child's significance and the opposition he would encounter, including the sorrow Mary would experience.

At a glance

Fact	Detail
Name	Simeon — a name related to the Hebrew for "hear" / "he has heard". Not the Simeon of Acts 13:1, nor the patriarch, nor the rabbi of later tradition.
Where	Jerusalem. He "came in the Spirit into the temple" (Lk 2:27) — not a temple official as far as we are told.
When	Forty days after the birth, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus for the purification rites and to present their firstborn to the Lord (Lk 2:22–24; Ex 13:2). They offered two birds, the provision allowed by Leviticus 12:8 for a woman who could not afford a lamb. This indicates that the family used the provision for those of limited means.
Character	"Righteous and devout" (Lk 2:25) — the same description given of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Lk 1:6).
His hope	"Waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25) — the promised comfort and deliverance of God's people, echoing Isaiah 40:1–2.
The Spirit	"The Holy Spirit was upon him" (Lk 2:25). The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, revealed the promise concerning the Messiah to him, and guided him into the temple at the appointed moment. Luke presents him as specially endowed and directed by the Spirit. Although the Spirit was active throughout the Old Testament, Luke's account contributes to the wider New Testament picture of the Spirit's work in the coming of the Messiah.
The promise	Revealed by the Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah (Lk 2:26).
The encounter	"Guided by the Spirit" (v27), he came into the temple at the very moment the parents brought Jesus in; Anna came up "at that very moment" too (v38).
What he did	Took the child in his arms and blessed God (v28).
The song	The *Nunc Dimittis* (vv29–32): "my eyes have seen your salvation … a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Fact	Detail
Why he had peace	He had received his promise **and** had seen salvation — for Israel and for all peoples (vv29–32).
The other side	"Destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel… a sign that will be opposed" (v34; Luke 2.34-35).
The sword	"A sword will pierce your own soul too" (v35) — *rhomphaia*, a large sword, not the small *machaira* of Luke 22:36, 38, 49, 52; the sword is the death of Jesus (Morris).
The parents' response	Mary and Joseph "marvelled at what was being said about him" (v33) — even they were still learning.
Anna	A prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; very old — married seven years, then a widow to eighty-four. Never left the temple, worshipping night and day with fasting and prayer (vv36–38; Luke 2.36-38).
Her witness	She gave thanks to God and "spoke about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v38).
His age	Luke does not give it. The language of being "dismissed" has led to the common picture of an old man — but the point is that the aged, as well as the young, are in this story.

What Luke records

The setting: Jesus presented in the temple (2:22–24)

- When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (v22).
- "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord" (v23; Exodus 13:2).
- They offered a sacrifice in keeping with the Law: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (v24; Leviticus 12:8) — the offering of the poor.

Simeon's hope and promise (2:25–26)

- There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, "righteous and devout," waiting for the consolation of Israel, with the Holy Spirit upon him (v25; Luke 2.25).
- The Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah (v26).

The encounter and the song (2:27–33)

- Moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts, just as the parents brought in Jesus to do what the custom of the Law required (v27).
- Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God (v28; Luke 2.25-32).
- "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace" (v29).
- "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people: a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (vv30–32).
- The child's father and mother marvelled at what was being said about him (v33).

The prophecy and Anna's witness (2:34–38)

- Simeon blessed them and said to Mary: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed" (v34; Luke 2.34-35).
- "So that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (v35).
- Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, was very old: she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four (v36).
- She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day (v37).
- At that moment she came and began to praise God, and spoke about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (v38).

Background and some interpretation based on my personal notes

- **A man of patient hope, not a man with a plan.** Luke calls him righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, with the Holy Spirit resting on him. As Tom Wright puts it, Simeon and Anna are "living in a world of patient hope, where suffering has become a way of life" — and the remarkable thing is that God's appointed redeemer deals with that suffering by sharing it himself (*Luke for Everyone*).
- **The same language as Zechariah and Elizabeth.** "Righteous and devout" (v25) matches Luke 1:6. Raj Nadella notes that Luke's introduction of Simeon deliberately parallels that of Zechariah and Elizabeth; both were associated with the temple and maintained the commandments of the Lord (Working Preacher).
- **Waiting for the consolation of Israel.** The phrase is messianic — the comfort and deliverance of a people who had known slavery, exile and occupation (Isaiah 40:1–2). Many in Simeon's day were waiting; few had his heart (Renovaré). His hope was not self-centred: he lived for the nation.
- **The Spirit rested on him.** "Upon him" suggests a continuing presence, whereas in the Old Testament the Spirit came on people for particular occasions; a lasting endowment was rare. To be "in the Spirit" (v27) adds a special sensitivity and guidance — the Spirit who gave the promise also prompted the moment.
- **A personal, particular promise.** He would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah (v26). God's word had lost none of its potency: the same God who answered Zechariah and Mary kept his promise to Simeon.
- **Luke's timing is no accident.** Guided by the Spirit, Simeon walks into the temple at the same moment as a young couple carrying their baby; Anna comes up "at that very moment" (v38). WBC notes Luke's balancing of male and female figures throughout the infancy narrative — Zechariah and Mary, then Simeon and Anna. Two old people, holding a baby, seeing the end of the story.
- **"Dismiss" is slave-release language.** Simeon speaks of being released in peace, like a servant whose appointed task has been completed. The language has often encouraged the traditional picture of an elderly man, but Luke does not state his age. The emphasis is on the fulfilment of God’s promise.
- **Two reasons for peace (vv29–30).** Simeon can die in peace because he has received his promise **and** because he has "seen" salvation — not only for Israel, but "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (v32): all peoples blessed through Jesus. His peace answers the angels' "peace on earth" (2:14); it is not the absence of conflict but the assurance of redemption.

- **The *Nunc Dimittis*.** The church's evening song takes its Latin name from "now you dismiss." Its words echo the Servant passages of Isaiah (42:6; 49:6; 52:10), and its theme — salvation reaching to the Gentiles — runs on through Luke and Acts (Biblical Training).
- **More awe (v33).** Mary and Joseph marvelled at what was said: the same response the shepherds and Mary had, and a reminder that even the parents were still learning who their child was.
- **The song has a second, darker verse (vv34–35).** Now we get the other side of Jesus' mission and the response he will receive: falling and rising, a sign spoken against, the thoughts of many hearts revealed. There will be a cost — to Jesus and to Mary.
- **The sword (v35).** Leon Morris is surely right: *rhomphaia* denotes a large sword, not the small *machaira* of Luke 22:36, 38, 49, 52, and the sword that pierces Mary's soul is the death of Jesus. Simeon holds the cradle and the cross in the same arms.
- **Anna completes the witness.** Eighty-four, a widow, a prophetess, never leaving the temple, worshipping night and day with fasting and prayer (vv36–37). She gives thanks and speaks of the child to everyone looking for redemption (v38) — like the disciples who follow her, driven to bear witness to what she has seen. Anna is one of the few women explicitly identified as a prophetess in Scripture. Her presence alongside Simeon shows that God's salvation was recognised and proclaimed by both a faithful man and a faithful woman.
- **God honours long-term faithfulness.** Both Simeon and Anna were elderly, faithful and waiting for decades. In a largely profane generation God kept a godly, humble, devout remnant — and he generously honours faithfulness for the long haul.

Simeon and Anna — parallels

Parallel	Simeon	Anna
Righteous and devout	"Righteous and devout" (v25)	Prophetess, worshipping night and day with fasting and prayer (v37)
Elderly	The common picture, from "dismiss your servant"	Eighty-four, a widow for decades (v36)
The Spirit and timing	The Spirit upon him; "guided by the Spirit" (vv25, 27)	"At that very moment" she came up (v38)
Waiting for Israel's hope	Looking for the consolation of Israel (v25)	Looking for the redemption of Jerusalem (v38)
Recognised the child	Took him in his arms and blessed God (v28)	Gave thanks to God (v38)
Spoke of what he saw	The *Nunc Dimittis* and the prophecy to Mary (vv29–35)	Spoke about the child to all who were looking for redemption (v38)

A light for revelation to the Gentiles — the thread in Scripture

- Isaiah 40:1–2 — comfort my people; the consolation Simeon waited for
- Isaiah 42:6 — "a light to the nations"
- Isaiah 49:6 — "a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"
- Isaiah 52:10 — God's salvation revealed to all nations

- Luke 2:32 — "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel"
- Acts 13:47 — Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah 49:6: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles"

The progression

1. He waited
   Simeon lived with the promise that he would see the Lord's Messiah (Luke 2:25–26).
2. He came
   Guided by the Spirit, he went into the temple at the appointed moment (Luke 2:27).
3. He saw
   He took the child in his arms and recognised God's salvation (Luke 2:28–30).
4. He sang
   He blessed God for salvation prepared for all peoples (Luke 2:30–32).
5. He prophesied
   He told Mary of the falling and rising, the sign opposed, and the sword (Luke 2:34–35).