

**Isa. 61:10–62:3**

**Ps. 148**

**Gal. 4:4–7**

**Luke 2:22–40**

# The Lord, at Last!

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Tweens will be encouraged to persevere in their hope in God,  
as did Simeon and Anna.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Luke 2:22–40

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” William R. Herzog II

Luke’s purpose in narrating these events seems clear. He wants to portray Mary and Joseph as obedient to God’s revelation. Following Torah, they circumcise the baby Jesus on the eighth day, and according to Gabriel’s instructions, they give the child his name (1:31). Both parents are attuned to divine revelation, whether it comes through an angel or the Torah. Notice that the Torah is first called “the law of Moses” (2:22) but is subsequently identified as “the law of the Lord” (2:23, 24). Their obedience to Torah is no less divine than their obedience to the angel. Both actions show their fidelity to God’s purposes.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James C. Howell

God came down, not to thrash evildoers or crush the Romans, but as an infant, to elicit love, to nurture tenderness. Simeon has waited all his life for this child. Now he can die in peace. This waiting and dying in peace are theologically poignant for us who glance away from death anxiously, who die in considerable consternation. We do not like to wait. We want to move, fill the time, stay in control, rush to the next titillation—and in our inability to be still and know that God is God, we miss God.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” William V. Arnold

With the grace of God and commitment of his parents, and surrounded by the hopes and dreams of so many, [Jesus] was launched toward becoming the person God intended him to be. And so should be the case with every child—created in the image of God, surrounded by God’s grace, cared for by faithful parents, and encouraged by supporters, both known and unknown, within the community of faith and others in God’s wider good creation.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Shelley D. B. Copeland

Imagine being this seasoned person of faith, who had the chance to witness a poor teen mom and a dad with the Anointed One in their care. Imagine knowing they had a child with tremendous promise and possibility for an entire people. If you were in such a position, would you do something more for this family than offer a blessing? Perhaps we are called to create a society with a positive regard for struggling, faithful parents, because we believe we are co-stewards of the future. Perhaps this text is pleading with us to create a more just society for the children who come into the world through parents of limited means.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Luke 2:22–40**

## Focus on Your Teaching

Most tweens have learned they can't have everything they want when they want it. They don't, however, have to like this fact, any more than most grown-ups do! The temptation to focus on the "here and now" remains powerful. It poses challenges as you teach about God, whose ways are not ours and often take longer than any of us would like. You can empathize with students' frustration at not understanding God's timetable, even as you introduce them to two people whose persevering hope in God was rewarded.

*God of all time, as a new year begins, help me faithfully wait for you to show your presence in my students' lives and in my own. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- ☐ Color Pack 10, 11, 12, 29
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1, materials listed there
- ☐ nonalcoholic sparkling cider, cups
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ wall or desk calendar for 2024
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ pens or markers
- ☐ postcards

**For Responding**

- ☐ option 1: card stock, markers
- ☐ option 2: hymnals or songbooks, recording of Nunc Dimittis (optional)
- ☐ option 3: items for project chosen

## ■ LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

As tweens arrive, greet them by name and wish each one a merry Christmas. Encourage them to clap along as the group sings "Go, Tell It on the Mountain" (Color Pack 29; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Pour and serve cups of sparkling cider to encourage a festive atmosphere as you invite learners to tell the highlights of their holiday celebrations.

Point out that Epiphany is on January 6. This marks the time the magi followed the star to find baby Jesus. Lead the gathering ritual as described on Resource Sheet 1 (Gathering and Closing Rituals). This week's "Star Stuff" trivia question is:

The brightest star the naked eye can see in the night sky is:

- a. Polaris
- b. Sirius (*correct answer*)
- c. Canopus
- d. Alpha Centauri

Display Color Pack 10, reading aloud the caption. Ask: "How might Sirius remind us of Jesus?" Affirm thoughtful responses. Offer the following prayer or one of your own:

*Light-giving God, who calls every star by name, send your Spirit to keep us aware of Jesus' presence with us, so that we may shine brightly with love for all people. Amen.*

Ask tweens to think about things they are looking forward to in the new year, such as birthdays, starting at a new school, or special trips. Pass around the 2024 calendar and invite tweens to write these anticipated events on it. Ask:

- ✂ Which of these anticipated events is hardest to wait for, and why?
- ✂ How do you deal with waiting for something you're looking forward to?
- ✂ How can we help each other wait for what we're expecting in 2024?

(Keep this calendar to remind you to check in with tweens at important times for them during the year.)

## EXPLORING

Tell learners that today's reading from the Gospel of Luke is about the expectations of two people, Simeon and Anna. Show Color Pack 11. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Great Expectations), and recruit two volunteers to play Anna and Simeon in the skit. Anna should be played as the old woman Luke tells us she is. Although Simeon is usually depicted as being old, Luke says nothing about his age. If time allows, repeat the skit with other actors.

After the skit, have tweens find Luke 2:22–40 in their Bibles, assisting one another as necessary. Recruit several volunteers to read the text aloud in sections: verses 22–24, 25–32, 33–35, 36–38, and 39–40. Discuss the story using the following questions:

Read Leviticus 12:1–8 to better understand the reason for Mary and Joseph's visit to the temple.

Before his death, Moses promised "the sons of Asher" a position of privilege (Deuteronomy 33:24–25). In Luke's story, a "daughter" (female descendant) of Asher receives the privileged sight of God's saving action in the infant Jesus.

In some churches, Candlemas is celebrated forty days after Christmas (February 2). Candlemas commemorates Luke 2:22–40. A candlelight procession symbolizes Jesus' arrival as Light of the World. Groundhog Day, also on February 2, derives partly from medieval legends that hibernating animals interrupt their sleep to honor the day.

- ✠ Explain that Joseph and Mary are following Jewish law by coming to the temple after Jesus' birth. What sacrifice do Joseph and Mary offer? (v. 24)?
- ✠ What does Simeon expect will happen when "the consolation of Israel" occurs? (vv. 25–26)
- ✠ How does Simeon express Jesus' importance for all people? (vv. 28–32)
- ✠ Why do you think Simeon says that Jesus will be "a sign that will be opposed"? (vv. 34–35)
- ✠ How does Anna connect the baby Jesus with "the redemption of Jerusalem"? (see also Luke 24:44–47)
- ✠ What do you think Joseph and Mary remembered most about this visit to the temple?
- ✠ What do you learn from Simeon and Anna about persevering in your hope in God's promises?

Explain to tweens that the Christian festival of Candlemas, commemorating today's Bible story, occurs on February 2. Give each learner a postcard to self-address. Invite tweens to write answers to this question on their postcards:

- ✠ How and where will you be looking for God at work in the new year?

Gather the postcards, telling learners you will mail them to arrive on or about February 2 so that they can be reminded to be aware of God's presence and activity in their lives.

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Bless a Baby** To extend Simeon's blessing of the infant Jesus, make cards to bless babies or young children in your congregation. Make cards from folded card stock. With markers, illustrate the front of each card with a picture of Jesus blessing the children. Inside, include messages that encourage children and their families to always hope in God, as well as a word of God's blessing. Plan to deliver the cards to families with children during worship or ask the church office for a list of addresses so you can mail them.

2. **Sing It, Simeon** Tell tweens that Simeon's words of praise have been encouraging believers to persevere in hope as a part of daily Christian prayer since the fourth century. These words are often called "Nunc Dimittis" (nunk di-MITT-is), after the Latin words for the first phrase. Have learners search your congregation's hymnal or songbook for musical versions of Simeon's song. Option: Play a recording of Simeon's song from recordings of worship music or from contemporary artists such as Michael Card ("Now That I've Held Him In My Arms"). Challenge learners to create their own song, chant, or rap based on Simeon's song; if possible, arrange for its inclusion in worship.
3. **Promise and Possibility** In the excerpt on page 1, the "Homiletical Perspective" on today's text suggests that Luke's words call us to create a just society for children born to financially struggling families. As a step toward that goal, help your group make concrete plans for a collection of supplies (such as baby food, diapers, washcloths, crib sheets, clothes, developmental toys) and/or funds to assist newborns and children who are in need in your community or somewhere else in the world. Decide what to collect, for how long, and what ministry or social organization the drive will support. Plan for publicity within and outside of your congregation. Enlist the help of others in the congregation as possible. Pray that your efforts will help others persevere in hope in God.

## CLOSING

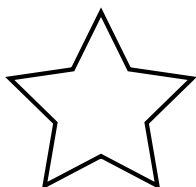
Gather the group and introduce this session's "Star of the Week": the five-pointed Nativity Star. Cut a pattern for the Nativity Star from Color Pack 12 and have learners trace it to make their stars, as described on Resource Sheet 1 (Gathering and Closing Rituals). As they work, explain: Even though the Bible mentions a star only in connection with the magi, whose visit to Jesus many churches celebrate on Epiphany (January 6), the star has become a popular, widespread symbol of Christmas. This star can remind us of how Simeon called the newborn Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32) and how the risen Christ calls himself "the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

Lead the closing ritual as described on the resource sheet. If desired, use the litany to begin a time of prayer in which you and your learners voice thanksgivings and concerns to God. Extend a sign or word of peace with one another as you depart.

## Gathering and Closing Rituals

(Save this sheet to use on December 31; January 7, 14, 21, 28; February 4, 11)

Use these rituals each week to help tweens welcome and respond to the light of God, which we see shining most clearly in Jesus the Messiah.



### GATHERING RITUAL

#### You Will Need

- ☐ Color Pack 10
- ☐ 7 star-shaped stickers (about 1 inch across) or 7 stars (about 1 inch across) cut from construction paper, glue stick

Before the December 31 session, write one letter of the word *MESSIAH* on each of seven stars or stickers.

1. Each week, gather the group around Color Pack 10.
2. Ask the “Star Stuff” trivia question provided in each session plan. Invite the learner who first answers the question correctly to stick that week’s prepared star sticker on Color Pack 10. Do this so that the word *Messiah* is spelled out by February 11.
3. Lead the prayer offered in each week’s session plan.

### CLOSING RITUAL

#### You Will Need

- ☐ star pattern for the week cut from Color Pack 12 or Color Pack 20
- ☐ one half-sheet of card stock or construction paper per learner each week
- ☐ pencils, scissors
- ☐ metallic markers or glitter glue
- ☐ masking tape or string

Give each learner a piece of card stock on which to trace the “star of the week.” Have them cut out their stars. If desired, use metallic markers or glitter glue to decorate them.

Affix loops of masking tape to the backs of the stars and post them on a wall or door. Option: Use varying lengths of string to hang the stars from the ceiling. In seven weeks’ time, your group will create an impressive star field! Close each session with this litany:

**Teacher:** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”

**Learners:** Jesus also said, “You are the light of the world.”

**All:** Jesus, Messiah, may we shine as your stars in the world!

December 31, 2023  
The Lord, at Last!

Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary  
**FEASTING on the WORD**  
CURRICULUM

Tweens  
Resource Sheet 2

## Great Expectations

**Scene:** The temple in Jerusalem

(ANNA is standing with eyes closed, hands raised to heaven, silently praying. Behind her, SIMEON enters, looking around, confused. He approaches ANNA and taps her on the shoulder.)



ANNA: (*opening eyes, startled*) What! (*turns*)  
You scared me half to death!

SIMEON: Sorry, but I need help. I'm looking  
for someone.

ANNA: You're supposed to meet someone?

SIMEON: You could say that.

ANNA: Well, the temple's a big place. You  
might have had more luck meeting your  
friend if you'd arranged to catch up at a  
local pita shop.

SIMEON: But the Spirit told me to come *here*,  
today.

ANNA: (*skeptically*) The Spirit arranges your  
social calendar?

SIMEON: No, it's not that. . . . Well, you may  
think I'm strange when I tell you this. The  
person I'm looking for is the Messiah.

ANNA: (*very excited*) The Messiah! That's who  
I'm looking for, too!

SIMEON: Really?

ANNA: I haven't left this temple in . . . oh, I  
don't know *how* many years. And all this  
time, I've been looking for the Savior.

SIMEON: Have you seen him?

ANNA: If I had, would I still be here?

SIMEON: I guess not (*looks around*). Do you  
think he'll be easy to spot? He *will* be the  
Lord's anointed king, won't he? A ruler  
like his ancestor David, powerful and  
glorious?

ANNA: (*also looking around*) But he'll be  
gentle and kind, too. Like the prophet  
Isaiah wrote, he'll come to comfort Israel,  
to tell us God forgives all our sins.

SIMEON: He won't be coming *just* to Israel.  
Isaiah also wrote that everyone to the ends  
of the earth will see the salvation God  
sends. So the Messiah must be someone  
Gentiles will listen to, as well.

ANNA: But some folks just won't welcome a  
Messiah who tells them to obey God, even  
if it is the best thing to do. There's *nobody*  
that *everybody* listens to . . .

(*SOUND EFFECT: Crying baby. ANNA and  
SIMEON look in its direction, and break into  
huge smiles.*)

ANNA: . . . except a crying baby.

SIMEON: That child . . . do you think?

ANNA: I think that the friend you're looking  
for just kept his appointment.