

We should not lessen the great joy of the good news of the Christmas narrative. However, the sending of a Savior had a sobering side which Joseph and especially Mary needed to hear. When Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification and the "redemption" of their firstborn, they were met through the direction of the Holy Spirit by Simeon. He first blessed God for seeing the Messiah, then blessed the parents, and finally spoke a sobering warning to Mary with four characteristics of the Messiah.

- I. ***Messiah would be a divine agent of division:*** "this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel"
 1. Those who "fall" and "rise" could be the same group, but two different groups are likely in mind. The "stone" who is the Messiah will be a help and refuge to some, but a stone of stumbling for others that will cause them to fall. Cf. 1 Peter 2:4–8.
 2. God appointed the Messiah to bring division (cf. Matthew 10:32, 34–39; 16:24–26; 19:16ff). A key clarification is found in John 1:11–12 which divides people into those who receive Him and those who do not.
- II. ***Messiah would be a rejected pointer to God:*** "this child is appointed ... for a sign that is opposed"
 1. A "sign" is something that points. The miracles which Jesus did pointed to His identity as the Messiah. Jesus Himself was appointed as a sign, pointing to the action of God. His character, His works, and ultimately His resurrection pointed to God. Cf. John 3:2; Luke 23:47; Mark 7:37; Matthew 12:39–40.
 2. The sobering aspect of this characteristic is that the sign would be opposed. He was not regarded as a "real" sign from God. The Pharisees still sought a "sign" from Him, though He had done many miracles. But they sought a sign only to test Him.
- III. ***Messiah would be an affliction to Mary:*** "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also"
 1. This is a special application for Mary.
 2. Mary's own soul might be thought pierced when the prophecies concerning her Son, such as receiving the throne, were not fulfilled in her life, when her relationship to Jesus was replaced by disciples who did the will of the Father (cf. Matthew 12:46–50; Luke 11:27–28), or especially when she observed the rejection of Her Son and ultimately His crucifixion.
- IV. ***Messiah would be a revealer of hearts:*** "so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."
 1. This explains the reason or the result of the Savior being appointed to divide and be a sign that is opposed.
 2. The heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, it is difficult to be certain what the heart really is thinking and believes (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:11). A person can even fool themselves about what they believe (cf. Matthew 7:21–23).
 3. How a person responds to Jesus reveals the heart. For example, the Jews claimed to believe Moses, but Jesus said that the response to Him showed whether they truly believed Moses (John 5:46). Similarly, Jesus revealed the heart of the rich young ruler.

Following Jesus Christ requires a heart change and will divide people. Following Jesus requires waiting for the fulfilment of promises. Jesus is the Savior; Jesus is Christ the Lord. But He came first as the Suffering Servant. A person's relationship to Him and through Him with God the Father is more important than all the cares and desires of this life.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- How do these warnings speak to the philosophy that each person's own belief is good for them?
- What might have been the reaction of other Jews (e.g., Pharisees, publicans, those like Anna) to these warnings?
- How can reflecting on these warnings help you put your current challenges in perspective?