

Sunday, December 27

Sermon Title: Wondering, Waiting, Proclaiming

Text: Luke 2:22-39

Jesus Presented in the Temple

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss[c] your servant in peace.*

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

*32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."*

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.[d] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

Please take a moment to quiet your hearts as we reflect on the scripture reading and as we prepare to hear the message

On December 1st, my family was excited to begin our Advent Jesse Tree. The Jesse Tree is a centuries-old way of telling the story of God leading up to the birth of Jesus. This was our second year reading through the advent devotional and my children seemed to remember that this was something special, a tradition to cherish. The devotional began with an invitation, "Breathe: Calm your head, heart and hands as you slowly breath in and out". This was a great reminder to slow down and enter into the story after a busy school day. Even Matthew sat still in his chair. So far so good. Next, we read the Scripture passage from Isaiah which begins, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit". It was at this point that I started to get concerned. Were my children really going to understand the connection between the words of prophecy in Isaiah and the birth of Jesus? Matthew, our three-year old looked confused and began fidgeting in his chair. By the time we'd finished reading the text, he was climbing under the table. Perhaps this was a bad idea.

Next, we moved to the wonder question. "Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God told a prophet named Isaiah to tell God's people that Someone was coming to save the world. That Someone was Jesus, God's Son. He would be born into the family of Jesse and was described as a new branch growing out of a tree. How do you think God's people felt when they heard about this promise of a Savior?" Hannah, Breanne and Kate were eager to jump in with their own suggestions and questions. This was their favourite part - imagining and wondering about the people of God who were waiting for the promised Saviour. Meanwhile, Matthew was practicing multiple ways of climbing into and falling out of his chair. At this point, I think Melissa and I assumed that Matthew was too young for this devotional. Before closing in prayer, Melissa asked Matthew, "Do you have a wondering question about this story?" Our last attempt to engage his

attention. To our surprise, Matthew climbed back into his chair, closed his eyes and said, “I wonder...hmmm... I wonder if Jesus saves the day?”

In today’s text, Mary and Joseph have travelled six miles from Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, to Jerusalem, where the temple was located. In Jewish custom, following the birth of a son, the mother had to wait 40 days before going to the temple to offer sacrifice for her purification. Furthermore, the firstborn son was to be dedicated to the Lord. In bringing Jesus to Jerusalem, the pattern of dutiful obedience, otherwise known as ‘trying to do the right thing’ by Mary and Joseph continues.

At the temple, Luke introduces Simeon and Anna. Here is what we know about Simeon:

- 1) Simeon is described as righteous and devout.
- 2) The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon, and we are told that he is waiting for ‘the consolation of Israel.’ This is a beautiful phrase, but what does this mean? It means that he is waiting for the comfort the Messiah would bring to His people at his coming.
- 3) Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit has revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

It is believed that Simeon was quite old when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple. While Luke doesn’t give us exact time frames, I wonder what Simeon was thinking as he waited for this revelation to come true?

In today’s reading, we learn that Simeon is at the temple because he was prompted by the Holy Spirit. While there, he meets Mary and Joseph, he takes baby Jesus into his arms, and he praises God, saying *‘for me 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.’*

Simeon's period of wondering and waiting was over, as the Holy Spirit's words were fulfilled in this visit. In Jesus, Simeon has met the Saviour of the world.

While Simeon was with Jesus, Anna came up to see the baby and Mary and Joseph. Anna's story is fascinating. We know that:

- 1) She was very old. She was either 84 years old, or had been widowed for 84 years.
- 2) She is described as a prophetess, in fact, she is the only woman described as a prophetess in the New Testament. Other prophetesses in the Bible include Miriam, Moses' sister, and Deborah, one of the judges of Israel. This title clearly indicates that Anna is someone of importance.
- 3) Luke says that she never left the temple and worshipped day and night. While this might be considered a 'phrase of the times', what this indicates is that Anna was dedicated to her role as a servant of God.

When she sees Mary and Joseph, she comes to them and makes a public pronouncement about baby Jesus. In fact, verse 38 of our text speaks to the future redemption of Jerusalem because of this child. There's a sense of urgency in this part of the story. Anna seeks the family out, and when she finds them, we're told that she starts speaking about Jesus to the others who were in the temple courts. She didn't have a private word with the family like Simeon did. It was as though the truth about this child immediately compelled her to share the good news!

After Mary and Joseph dutifully fulfilled all that was required by the law, they left the temple and returned home to Nazareth.

What I find so fascinating about today's story is how utterly surprising it is! This is the first public appearance for Jesus. Though he was born in a

stable-like setting, surely the visit from the shepherds, who were visited by angels, I might add, would have raised the profile of this family. One can imagine stories of nicer lodgings, or visits with important religious and political figures. Instead, the very next story in the gospel of Luke, where Jesus is presented in a public place, is centred around him meeting two elderly people!

I took a Gospels course in University. In fact, Melissa took that course with me, with one of our favourite professors. While Melissa can remember seemingly everything that Dr. Hielema said in that course, I can barely recite anything without first looking at my notes, which I no longer have. However, one of the things that I do remember relates to our story today.

Dr. Hielema said that this story is another reminder of how God doesn't use the proud, the boastful, the 'highly successful' people, but instead works through the lives of quiet, faithful, ordinary, humble people. We see this in the characters we've already been introduced to in the book of Luke - Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary. It's no stretch to see that Anna and Simeon fit this description too. They faithfully show up at the temple and do their work. They go about their daily, ordinary lives humbly and faithfully in service to God.

And it is to these people, Simeon and the elderly widow Anna, who God reveals the glory of His Son. Simeon understands that He is holding the Saviour of the world, and promptly says that God can now take him in peace. Anna's reaction is different, and perhaps a better blueprint for us to follow. She sees Jesus, understands who he is, and promptly starts telling other people about this child. She's ready to proclaim the good news to the world!

We have few stories from Jesus' childhood, so Anna and Simeon may not have been convincing, or have held high enough positions for people to listen to them on this temple visit day. It would take another 30 years before Jesus' 'active' ministry began, but in these first 40 days of Jesus' life, in a

manger, and in the temple courts, God's rescue plan was already fully in motion. The Saviour has entered the world, fully human, fully divine.

This story reveals the answer to my son's question. Yes, Jesus does save the day. His birth, perfect life, and death on the cross have freed us from our sins, and given eternal life to all those who confess and believe in Him. He has paid the ultimate price for the sins of the world. No matter how hard things may be, and living in a pandemic has certainly revealed how weary our world is, but no matter how hard things might get, we have hope, because over 2000 years ago, a baby was born in the town of Bethlehem, the Saviour of the World.

May we share this hope as joyfully and boldly as Anna did, all those years ago, in the temple courts. May we be reminded that God works in the lives of the quiet, faithful, ordinary, humble people. May we live not to the standards that we may see on tv and the media, but as committed, obedient servants of the Great High King.

Amen.