

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

Dec 27, 2020

Pastor Kelsey

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), **24** and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. **27** Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed **35** so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there

with fasting and prayer night and day. **38** At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Sermon

Gracious and Loving God,

Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

One of my favorite Christmas movies, that I watch every year, is The Santa Clause with Tim Allen. For those who are not familiar, the whole movie revolves around the idea of what if Santa Claus was a figure that someone becomes if they put on Santa's suit. In the case of Tim Allen's character, Scott Calvin, he hears Santa on the roof, goes out to investigate, and in shouting at Santa, startles him into falling off the roof. That Santa DIES and disappears, leaving the suit behind. Scott Calvin then happens to try it on, find the sleigh on the roof, and ends up getting pulled along into delivering the rest of the gifts with his son Charlie. The rest of the movie then revolves around the next year leading up to Christmas, as Scott physically and emotionally turns into Santa, grows closer to his son but denies his new identity and his son's claims of their visit to the North Pole, and fights his ex-wife and her husband over custody of his son as they think he has lost his mind too. It is all made to be heart-warming and silly. The biggest theme of the movie is around the belief in Santa Claus. All of the adults strongly did not believe in Santa Claus anymore, and at the beginning Charlie was beginning to question it. But after Scott and Charlie, the son, actually visit the North Pole, Scott denies it all and says it was a dream, while Charlie finds new belief in Santa and the magic of Christmas, and ultimately helps his dad come to terms with his new identity as Santa. The theme seems to revolve around this line from hot chocolate extraordinaire, Judy the elf, who says that children's belief in Santa is all about, "Seeing isn't believing, believing is seeing." Meaning that they don't need to see it to believe it, but believing in Santa means that they know the North Pole workshop and all Christmas magic is there.

Though it is not about magic elves or transforming into Santa, today's passage also tells us of some people who lives out that quote, "Seeing isn't believing, believing is seeing," and show us what it means for us to do the same. Today's story from Luke 2:22-40 gives us a unique glance into the life of Jesus after his birthday. It tells us of two

people who the holy family meets as they go to the temple in Jerusalem for the Jewish rituals of purification. First, we meet an old man named Simeon who was a devout Jewish man. He was told by the Holy Spirit sometime before this interaction that he would live until he sees the Messiah. Despite no signs that the Messiah was coming, and seemingly no idea that he would meet him on that visit to the temple before the Spirit told him to pay the place a visit, Simeon believed he would indeed meet the Messiah. Despite Jesus surely looking like a normal baby on the outside, and the parents coming in to fulfill the customary purification laws, Simeon knew who the Christ child was as soon as he laid an eye on him. His belief meant that he recognized the Messiah identity of Jesus.

We also hear about Anna, the first person described as a prophet and the first evangelist in the book of Luke. Yay women leadership! She is described as a woman of great age, of 84, which was super old for those times. She is that old, and has been a widow since her husband died after 7 years of marriage. As women did not have much societal power or equality back then, her being alone for those many many years likely means that she had lived a life in poverty. Yet, she remained devout, worshiping in the temple day and night. She was there already when the Holy Family shows up. The text doesn't say if she even interacted with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, but she believed in the coming of the Messiah and recognized who he was when he came into her presence. She couldn't keep that visit to herself, especially as she knew that this child was the fulfillment of God's biggest promises, the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon and Anna model for us the proper responses to the news that God has brought salvation for all peoples, not just Jewish believers, but Gentiles now too, and that this is a fulfillment of God's promises to God's people. Their response also reminds us of some of the main things we should be celebrating about the coming of Jesus. It is easy for us, who are two thousand years of Jesus being around later, and who have heard the Nativity story many times throughout our life, to know we are supposed to be excited about Jesus's birth, but forget what we are supposed to be seeing by believing in it. Jesus's birth is exciting because of how it happened and to whom and where his parents were, but all of that is based on the truly Good news is as Simeon proclaimed, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Jesus marks the completion of God's promises, which are no casual deal. This is not the promise of a parent that their kid can have an extra scoop of ice cream if they are well-behaved in the grocery store. This is a promise to bring about salvation, eternal life and redemption to this world and our lives while on it. We most often talk about Salvation as tied to Jesus's death, that our salvation comes from Jesus dying on the cross, but Simeon reveals to us here that salvation is not just about Jesus's later death, but that he has seen God's salvation by seeing baby Jesus. Salvation for all peoples became possible with the BIRTH of Jesus, not with the ministry or messages of Jesus,

not with the death of Jesus alone, but with the Birth, the entering of the divinity of God into a human life , and not entering as a possession of an existing human, but of God entering a human life permanently from conception to death, experiencing humanity through life, death, and eternal resurrection. Our salvation is not all about Jesus's death, but about Jesus's life, which makes our salvation not just about what happens to us when we die, but about what God brings to us while we are alive. This is what we are witnesses to and what we see working inside us as we believe it is God's work in us and in the world.

The nativity story, and the Gospel as a whole really, is important for what it means about God and salvation, but ultimately the Gospel story is remembered because of those who witnessed it and shared it through time. In today's passage we remember the important witness of Simeon and Anna in the temple. In one of the passages we read on Christmas Eve at the live nativity, we remembered the witness of the Shepherds who heard the news from the Angels and went to visit the baby Jesus first. Next week we will remember the Wise Men who came to witness the Messiah for themselves and welcome him as an important figure for all people in the world.

We learn from these many witnesses that the Nativity story is one that is important for us to know and believe for ourselves, but even more important is to share the impact of Emmanuel, of God with Us, with others. To proclaim the Good News that God is With Us, that God comes to be with us through the lowly and the marginalized, through unexpected ways and in those who flip society's values on their head. As Simeon and Anna saw what they had always believed and trusted would come true and that led to them proclaiming and bearing witness to what God was doing in the world, we are to share the ways that God is fulfilling promises, showing us salvation and shining a light toward the redemption of all peoples and not just the elite or a select group of people.

That is all fine and dandy to say, but what does being a witness to God with Us really look like? How can we live it out? It can look different for different people! Just as Jesus was witnessed to in many different ways, we can witness Jesus in different ways. Mary and Joseph witnessed to God with us through obedience to what God was calling them to do with their lives. Mary said yes to God's crazy plan to have his son be born by her, an unmarried, poor woman from Galilee. She said yes to living out God's plan for her. Joseph supported that call by God to Mary's life and supported her in living it out. We can be witnesses to God at work by trying our best to live out God's plan for us or by supporting God's call in others. I think of the way that I was called to be a pastor and Brennen supports me in living it out.

The shepherds hear about what God is doing and go to it to experience it for themselves. Sometimes, the exciting work of God is not happening right in front of us and we need to put down what we are doing and go to where God is doing something

new. I think of those in our congregation here who jumped in to get the Food Pantry going.

Simeon and Anna are those who Christ shows up in front of them unexpectedly while they continue to live out how they devoutly lived out their faith for most of their life. Simeon and Anna experience God with us in a new way within their old habits. They both then proclaim in praise and joy. For long-time believers, they remind us to find joy and praise every time we experience a moment of meeting God during our daily faith life and the importance of sharing those moments with each other to remind all of the ongoing salvation and redemption of God.

Next week we will discuss them more, but the Wise Men can show us that for some, their way to witness to God With Us, is to put in much effort to witness God at work for ourselves and to support that ministry through gifts.

All of these ways of witnesses, and more as represented as the many more figures in the New Testament, are valid and important ways we can all witness to God with Us. We don't all have to do it the same way or say the same thing. We all experience God with Us differently in our own faith walks, the important part is that we find our way to share with confidence like Anna and Simeon. Recognizing God among us and sharing with others is particularly important during this year as many are surely feeling farther from God as we face stress and strife, loss and grief, and worship in ways we have never done before. Many have been feeling farther from God with all that 2020 has brought, so when we do feel God among us, God at work, we should share so everyone can hear and see that God is here. Let us all be Simeons and Annas or listen to the testimonies of the Simeons and Annas among us, and see together God's salvation and light for revelation to all people.

God of mystery and love,

You have given us your Son that we might have life--new, vital, sparkling. Let us feel the wondrous power and love of you in our hearts this day and know that God is with us always. Help us move from the sweet experience of the birth of the Christ Child into the reality of the powerful witness of Jesus who will be Messiah for us all. Remind us again that this season is not about bows and boxes, feasts and family; it is about preparing us, your people, for a mission and ministry of hope and peace for this aching and angry world. Empower us to be people of great faith, placing our trust in you, believing that peace is not only possible, it truly can happen if we will work with you and with one another. Bless each one of us in your service, for we ask this in Jesus' Name.

Amen