

First Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:25-40

12/31/17

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pt 1:2)

### **Luke 2:25-40**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

**“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:11). Can you believe it was just a week ago when we heard those words on Christmas? Now a week has gone by and everyone has moved on from Christmas. In a way, that’s understandable – it’s sad, but understandable. There’s so much pressure at Christmas, pressure to have such a *“Holly, Jolly, Christmas”* that it can be suffocating. Popular culture has put this image in our minds of what a successful Christmas is, and with all the planning, preparing, and shopping (notice, no church there. No thanking God for a Savior...) – you might just want Christmas to be done with, to be over and gone, good riddance for another year. Christmas can be so hectic that it robs you of time to really meditate on whose birth we just celebrated.

But, we’re still in Christmas! Christmas is far too big, far too monumental, far too life-changing to be contained on just one day! Think again about those words of the angels to the shepherds: **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”** What are the two most important words in that verse? “a Savior”? “Christ...Lord”? Now, of course, every word of Holy Scripture is important. But there are two words that mean so much, without those two words Christmas wouldn’t be any different than Labor Day or Presidents’ Day. What are those two words? “to you” – **“a Savior has been born to you”**.

Christmas doesn’t simply commemorate a great man who was born into our world. Christmas means that God has become man for you. It means that God came down and took on human flesh to save you from your sin. And the glory of God’s grace is that he has revealed that good news to you, just like he did for Simeon and Anna. He revealed that good news to save you!

It had been forty days since Jesus was born, forty days since that awe-inspiring evening in the stable of Bethlehem when Mary laid her newborn baby in a manger, forty days since angel messengers told the shepherds where they’d be able to find this unlikely child who is the Savior of all people, and now it was time for Mary and Joseph to take Jesus to Jerusalem for the presentation of Jesus at the Temple.

Think of how many people Mary and Joseph passed by that day in Jerusalem. Think of how many people walked by Mary and Joseph without any idea of who it was that was being brought to the Temple that day – that it was the Son of God himself!

But God, in his grace, made sure Simeon and Anna didn’t miss him. Simeon is described to us as **“righteous and devout.”** He was righteous because God had brought him to faith in his promise of a Savior, God had brought him to wait **“for the consolation of Israel”**. The righteousness that was his through God-given faith motivated a “devout” lifestyle in Simeon. He was devoted to God in everything he did.

God had a special gift for this faithful Christian man – **“It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”** Can you imagine the joy and the excitement every morning brought Simeon?! Would this finally be the day when the Savior would come?!

On this special day, Simeon was moved by God to go to the Temple. There he finally saw who he had been waiting for! He saw his Savior! He was able to look into the face of the one who, three decades later, would set his face to Jerusalem, determined to go to his death. He was able to hold in his arms the one who would stretch his arms out on a cross for him and for all people. Simeon saw and held the one promised since the fall of Adam and Eve.

Simeon’s joy moved him to song – a song that has made its way into our Communion liturgy. **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 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.”**

God had given Simeon total peace of mind and soul because he saw the reason he could die in peace – his Savior, Jesus. In his song, Simeon gives thanks to God because now, at long last, he had everything he needed – he had his Savior! God kept his promise! The one who would bring his salvation by his death on the cross was finally there.

It’s fitting that this is the song we sing after receiving Holy Communion. In Holy Communion God gives you the same wonderful blessing he gave to Simeon so long ago. God gives you, in very visible form, your salvation. You are able to hold in your hands the body and blood of Jesus, connected to that bread and wine, given to you for your forgiveness. Through that sacrament you receive the blessing of forgiveness which Jesus won for you with his death – what more could you ask for! What more do you need! Because Jesus has come, because Jesus died for you, and because Jesus gives his forgiveness to you, you have heaven. This entire world could be crumbling around you, but you still have peace. Your health and wealth and family and friends could all fail you, but you still have heaven!

Thankfully God has done for you what he did for Simeon. He has brought you to see and to know your Savior. Sometimes, however, do we walk right past Jesus?

We can’t really blame all those other people at the Temple that day for not recognizing Jesus. How were they supposed to know their Savior was there with them that day? But you do know who Jesus is. You do know that he’s your Savior, and yet do you walk right past him, too? You get caught up in your life, you get caught up in the activities you have planned, in the work you have to do, in so much else that you walk right past Jesus without giving him a second look.

Think of Christmas. What does Christmas mean? How many would answer that question with presents, family, snow, vacation – and Jesus is only an afterthought? Here we are a week out from Christmas, and has the joy of God fulfilling his promise and sending to you a Savior been all but forgotten as you get back to your regular life? Think again of Simeon’s song. Does that song fill your heart and mind every day? *“God, you’ve given me all I need because you’ve given me a Savior!”* Or, more likely, is it simply forgotten?

When that happens, when we walk right past Jesus without giving him a second thought, when he becomes ordinary – just another on our list of things to manage in life, when he is passed up for

anything and everything else under the sun, then we need to take a hard look at our lives and come to God in repentance.

Then, we've forgotten the words of the angels, **"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you"**. Jesus was born to give you freedom and forgiveness. He was born so that he could grow up and die for you to take away your sin. And God brings you to see him, to know him, and to treasure him. He brings you to recognize your sin from which Jesus has set you free and to rejoice that you have the peace of forgiveness.

In short, God still does for you what he did for Simeon. God makes you righteous. He gives you his Word and sacraments, where you see and hold your Savior, to strengthen your faith in him and to pull you close to him. As he builds your faith, as he makes you strong and firm in the righteousness – the right standing with him – that is yours by faith, he causes your faith to show in your life. He makes you devout – devoted to God in all you say and do.

This all comes from God. He's the one who has given you Jesus. He's the one who has brought you to know Jesus, who has given you faith in Jesus and made you righteous. He's the one who builds your faith so that you sing praises with Simeon and treasure him about all else.

Through that joy of forgiveness God brings out the attitude we see in Anna this morning. Anna, like Simeon, was waiting for God to keep his promises. Like Simeon, God brought Anna to trust that he would do that, that he would keep his promises, so Anna spent her days being occupied with God's business. She stayed at the Temple, she fasted and prayed. She, too, was devoted to God because she knew God was devoted to her forgiveness.

When Anna heard what Simeon was saying, she had to come and see for herself. She, too, saw her Savior. She saw the one who would set her free from her sin. And that joy of forgiveness filled her heart and life, too. She **"spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."**

Anna couldn't keep her joy to herself. Her Christmas joy at the birth of her Savior flowed out to everyone she met. She expressed her thankful joy that God had ended her waiting and brought his Son into the world to save her, and to save everyone she knew. She had to share what she had seen and heard.

That same attitude naturally flows out of you – that desire to bring others to know the joy of forgiveness naturally flows out of the heart that sees the wonder of Christ's birth and what it means for me! If that desire is absent in your life, if you think *"I don't know how to do that"*, or if you think it isn't important to share the news of a Savior, Paul gives the way to grow in your desire to be like Anna: **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."**

There's the secret to being like Anna, and it's really no secret at all. Grow in your own faith, grow in your own wonder of God's love, and your ability and desire to live that love and share that love will naturally grow too.

The hype and hoopla over Christmas might be over in the world. But not for you! For you, the joy of Christmas is never-ending! For you, the gift of Christmas is eternal! For you, every day is Christmas as God invites you to see in his Word the Savior who has been born **“to you”**! That gift gives you the joy to be like Anna – to share with all the good news that **“a Savior has been born to you”**!

Amen

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)

Amen