

**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**Sunday, January 1, 2012**  
**Pr. Bob Coughlin**  
**Luke 2:22-40 (Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Gal. 4:4-7)**

*What Child is this, who is laid to rest, in Mary's lap is sleeping?* It is the question the physician/historian tries to help us understand by writing his "orderly account" we know as the Gospel of Luke. (Luke 1:14) Right from the get-go, we see the complexity of this new King. The contrasts are just too stark to miss.

Last week we were talking about a motley group of shepherds, guided by angels to a barnyard in Bethlehem.

This week we hear about a devout, deeply spiritual, elderly man and woman, guided by the Holy Spirit in the temple at Jerusalem.

Last week followed events brought on by the forces of nature – a baby was born, followed by a supernatural announcement of triumph and glory by celestial beings.

This week the young couple, in obedience to their faith practice, are presenting their newly named and circumcised son to the Lord... setting him apart; which is followed by a very sobering announcement of salvation to the world that will come at a price.

Luke doesn't let us stay very long in wonder and warmth of the Christmas story. We are still in the second chapter and he wants us to know the whole story of what it means for God to send his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem us. (Gal. 4:4)

Today, we get more of the picture filled in.

We see Mary and Joseph fulfilling their religious duties by bringing their son, Jesus, to the temple in Jerusalem. While there, he is offered to Yahweh as was every other 1<sup>st</sup> born Hebrew male, just as Moses commanded.

At the same time, Mary presents herself for purification. You see, bearing a child comes at a cost... (What, you didn't think us guys knew that?)

For Mary, it meant that she was considered "*unclean*" for 40 days. She was prohibited from social contact and absolutely forbidden to go to the temple.

Now, she and Joseph are making atonement on her behalf so that she can be declared "*clean*". They offer a couple of doves, because they couldn't afford a lamb. (Lev. 12:8)

It is a holy moment... filled with symbolism and meaning that reaches back over the centuries to the time of Moses. Whatever this young couple knew about their son, you know that this was a proud moment for them.

Not only is it the moment of dedication, but it is the first time Mary and Joseph could show off their new son! It is a chance to put smiles on the crowds of faces, to receive pats on the back, to pinch his fat little cheeks and to hear what a handsome boy he is! This is a solemn, yet proud moment for Mary and Joseph, just as it would be for any new mom and dad.

Then, the moment is interrupted by an old man, who, in his excitement, grabs their new baby. And looking towards the heavens, he recites familiar words from the prophet Isaiah. Words of hope...being realized in the fulfillment of God's promise to come and to save His people.

*The time has come! God's redeemer has come! The people of God would be set free!*

In the glory of that moment... in the amazement brought by this great news, Simeon goes on to tell us that the price to be paid for this redemption will be high.

Nothing of value comes without a cost. It seems the greater the value, the greater the cost.

You see, not everyone will welcome the news of God's anointed savior.

Already, King Herod, concerned that his own status and rule was in jeopardy, decreed that every male in Bethlehem under the age of two should be massacred.

With the Messiah's coming – the true hearts of men and women will be exposed. As with Herod, we would see the very worst of humankind. They will do the unthinkable, causing unimaginable pain and sorrow.

It will be as if Mary and Joseph had a sword plunged into their own hearts.

We who would follow this Savior need to know this.

There is Christmas joy in being a Christ-follower. It is right to celebrate, as we have this past week. But, in today's account, within the first two months of the life of the Messiah, we are confronted with the fact that there is a sadder, darker side to the story and every day isn't Christmas.

Though he, too, is caught up in the joy of the moment, Simeon plays the part of comedian, Bob Newhart, who in his dead-pay way, would cause everyone to calm down in a particularly excitable moment by saying, *"I, I would like to make a motion that we face reality."*

Reality is that life is hard. We live our lives between how it is, and how it ought to be. We find ourselves struggling with difficulties and disappointments and longing for life without the hassles.

A recent Associated press poll of said that nearly 7 in 10 Americans say that the year 2011 was a bad one – a year they would rather forget. Who can blame them? Food and gas prices were surging, the housing market collapsed and unemployment rates remain high.

We deal with things that go on outside of us that seem to work against us... whether it is our computer that crashes (before you've backed it up), paying more at the gas pump, or trying to hit the lights on North 7<sup>th</sup> (especially when you are in a hurry!). Things don't always go our way, even when we've done nothing to deserve it.

We lose our jobs, we contract a debilitating illness, we suffer loss of a loved one. We are not strangers to sadness and pain. So, we have to learn how to live with disillusionment and frustration.

We have to deal with things that go on inside of ourselves too – our own pride, anger, greed, jealousy, lusts, and addictions. Things that we may have felt like we have conquered, or outgrown, only to find them still hiding in us, waiting to come out when we least expect it.

Just because Mary and Joseph were "favored" by being the parents of the Son of God, didn't mean their lives would be free from trouble or pain. Actually, it would be far from that.

Just because we are children of God, doesn't mean the struggles of life just go away; that we are immune from the tragedies and difficulties of life.

Yet, like Simeon and Anna, we are called to hold on to hope. Hope in the promises of God who *"clothes us with the garments of salvation"* and has *"covered us with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with jewels."* (Is. 61:10)

Our hope is grounded, not in the stock market or in medical discoveries or academic realms, but in the reality of what God has done for us. For you and I have been given our adoption papers. We are no longer slaves, but children, and if children, then heirs through God – set free to experience our rightful heritage. (Gal 4:7)

Like Simeon and Anna, we live with a longing for the fulfillment of God's promises.

We, who live in this time between *"how it is"* and *"how it ought to be"*, look ahead in this New Year with joyful expectation of what God will do in our midst. Realizing, it will come at a cost.

We, who follow this new born King, are asked to follow him to the cross.

So, let us prepare for that journey, together as a people of faith, supporting one another, caring for one another, and doing whatever it takes to reach out to a world that so desperately needs to know His love.

"The King of kings, salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him." Amen