

A Very Special Child
Luke 2:22-24; Luke 2:25-32; Luke 2:36-40
December 30, 2018 – First Sunday in Christmastide

Luke 2:22-24 - The Dedication of Jesus

Friends, our reading for today, from the second chapter of Luke are often overlooked by the church. In fact, they are not included in the Common Ecumenical Lectionary, that list of suggested scriptures for all Christian Churches to follow. But I believe these are wonderfully special readings.

Our first reading sets the stage. We're told that Mary and Joseph took the baby to the Jerusalem temple for their purification, as was prescribed by Jewish law. There are those who would claim that Luke is a "Gentile gospel," that Luke was a Gentile; and the Gospel was written for Gentiles. Perhaps those who would claim that have never read the second chapter; and the emphasis on Jewish law and the emphasis on the redemption of Jerusalem.

So what is the Jewish law to which Luke refers? It's from the twelfth chapter of Leviticus. You may have noticed that Luke states, "The time had come from *their* purification." Two things will happen at the temple somewhat simultaneously. First, Mary will undergo a ritual purification after childbirth; and second, Jesus will be dedicated to the Lord, as the scripture says: "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord."

Now there's a key point here. Leviticus says the mother should give a lamb for the dedication and a young pigeon or turtledove for her purification; *but*, if the woman cannot afford a lamb, she can offer two pigeons or turtledoves instead. Luke tells us that the couple offered a pair of turtledoves or pigeons. Luke is telling us that the couple did not have the means to offer a lamb for this important event. Jesus was born of humble stock. Jesus was not part of the aristocracy – not even close. Jesus' birth family were common folks, I might even say folks just like you and me. And isn't that appropriate. When God took on human form, when God became one of us, God literally became one of us. God did not become a king, in an earthly sense. God did not become a ruler, in an earthly sense. No, God became like us, so God could walk with us; so God could talk to us; so God to relate to us, as a teacher, yes; but also as a friend.

Luke 2:25-32 – Simeon's Pronouncement

Then there was Simeon, a righteous man, a devout man who was looking for the consolation of Israel, and we're told that the Holy Spirit rested upon him. I asked in one of our Advent sermons if you've ever known someone who seemed so spiritual and so much at peace that holiness literally seemed to radiate from them, that they never seemed to get ruffled no matter what was happening. That's

the way I picture Simeon – his entire life guided by the Holy Spirit, and spending much time in prayer.

And then. . . then his eyes fall upon the baby; and the Spirit spoke. I don't know exactly what Simeon saw in the Christ Child. I don't know what words suddenly came to Simeon's mind; but Simeon somehow knew that this was no ordinary baby. Now recognize that Simeon spent a lot of time in the temple; and people were bringing babies into the temple for dedication all the time. It's not just that there was suddenly a baby in the temple; but this... this was a very special baby; and Simeon knew it.

So Simeon, took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation – a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of your people Israel." Jews and Gentiles, all the world will know the glory of God through this very special baby.

Simeon said it, when he was in the presence of Jesus. He knew that he was in the presence of "the Holy," and every Christmas we are called to experience that presence anew. Every Christmas, we are called to, at least figuratively, take that baby into our arms and to praise God for the glory, for the peace, for the salvation that faith in that baby offers each of us.

Luke 2:36-40 – Anna's Declaration

And finally, there is Anna. Luke was not sexist. Women play an important role in Luke's Gospel; and one of Anna's roles is to parallel Simeon, to be the female counterpart in the recognition of the Christ child. We're told that Anna was eighty-four years old; and she never left the temple. She worshiped there day and night with fasting and prayer. And then she saw Jesus; and, at that moment, she began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And after all of this, we're told that the family returned to Nazareth; and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. And yes, you know the rest of the story. But I ask, "Is there a little bit of Simeon or a little bit of Anna in you?"

Throughout Advent, we spoke of welcoming Jesus anew into our hearts. On Christmas Eve we celebrated Jesus' coming, coming again into our lives as we seek an ever closer relationship with the living Christ. On this Sunday after Christmas, it's time to thank God for that gift. It's time to praise God for that glory. But more than that, on this Sunday before the New Year, it's time in some very small way, to model Simeon and Anna.

It's time, not just at Christmas, but every moment of every day of our lives to know that gift of the Christ, our Savior, our Redeemer, and also our Friend. And it's time, everyday, to seek to live in his Hope, his Love, his Joy, and his Peace.

I've stated before my fondness for Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. And so, as we head into the New Year, I quote Paul saying:

⁷ The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ [And] finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

(Phil. 4:7-8 NRS)

I can't think of any better recommendation for life in 2019; and I wish you all a blessed and Happy New Year.

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