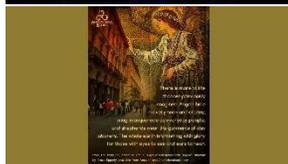




## Now is the Moment



Over the last few weeks, we have read Luke chapter 1. On Christmas Eve, we read the first 20 verses of Luke 2 finishing with the shepherds returning to their flocks. The Christmas story is over. So, what happens next? What is the work of Christmas? **Now is the moment** that we have. What will we do with it?



Bruce Epperly wrote a book *The Work of Christmas: 12 Days of Christmas with Howard Thurman*. I don't have the book, but there is a great quote in it. [I am not sure whether these are his words or Howard Thurman's.]

*There is more to life than we previously imagined. Angels hide in every nook and cranny, magi masquerade as everyday people, and shepherds wear the garments of day laborers. The whole earth is brimming with glory for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.*



Today we will the rest of Luke 2, which covers what we know of Jesus as an infant, and then a story of Jesus as a 12-year old. The Bible then goes quiet until the grown-up John the Baptist bursts onto the scene at the beginning of Luke 3, and we'll save that for later in 2019. I am going to break the reading up into 4 sections today and say a few words about each bit. Let's start with the first few verses.

< Luke 2:21-24 >

<sup>21</sup> *After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

<sup>22</sup> *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* <sup>23</sup> *(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),* <sup>24</sup> *and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*



In this first bit of our story this morning, we see the faithfulness of Jesus' parents as they obey the Jewish laws. If you've been our Bible Study group this Fall studying Exodus & Leviticus, this will be familiar to you! Luke has just described four things happening to Jesus in the immediate few weeks after his birth.

**First**, newborn Jewish baby boys are to be circumcised when they are eight days old. **Second**, the naming ceremony occurs, and his parents give him the name Jesus, which is the name that the angel gave Mary. **Third**. A firstborn male child must be consecrated and an offering of 5 shekels made. Luke does not mention the shekels, but he does say that the baby Jesus was designated as holy to the Lord. **Fourth**, a woman after giving birth is unclean and has to offer a sacrifice as part of a purification ceremony. Jesus will now be 40 days old. The sacrifice should be a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. But if you can't afford a lamb, then a pigeon or turtledove can be substituted. We are told that Mary & Joseph bring two birds for this purification

ceremony and so, we have it confirmed that they have limited economic means. Jesus was born into a poor family, but a family that faithfully kept the Jewish law.

Now while they are in the Temple, they encounter two people whose stories Luke is about to tell us. Let's listen to the first story.

< Luke 2:25-35 >

*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. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,*

*29 **"Master, now you are dismissing your servant<sup>[h]</sup> in peace, according to your word;***

*30 **for my eyes have seen your salvation,***

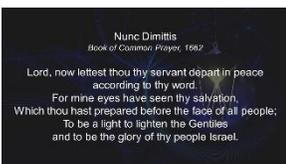
*31 **which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,***

*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. <sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

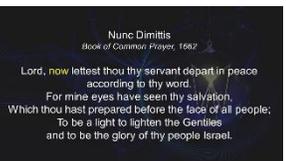


Luke tells us that Simeon is a righteous and devout man on whom the Holy Spirit falls. Simeon has been waiting for a Saviour for a long time, and when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple, **now** as he holds the baby, he sees something special there.



The words Simeon uses to praise God, we know today as the **Nunc Dimittis**. It is our fourth song in Luke. We had the Mary singing the Magnificat, Zechariah singing the Benedictus, the Angels singing the Gloria and now Simeon singing the Nunc Dimittis - all in the first 2 chapters of Luke. Many composers have set the Nunc Dimittis text to music. It is often used in liturgical churches at the

Evensong service. When I first moved to California, we had a retired pastor in our congregation. He was in his late 90's. Our pastor at the time had the retired pastors give the Benediction each Sunday. When it was his turn, the Benediction that Rev. Al Chandler used was the Nunc Dimittus. On many a Sunday, we heard those powerful Nunc Dimittus words spoken by an elderly, faithful, righteous, devout servant of God. It was powerful and affirming, and all the more so, as he became frailer and frailer.



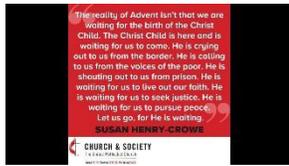
Simeon's song highlights the Lukan theme of promise/ fulfillment. In the Greek the song begins with an emphatic "**now**." On the one hand, the **now** refers to the coming of the Lord's Messiah. The emphatic **now** signals the dawning of the messianic kingdom; the day that Israel had hoped for and longed for is here at

last, and with it the prophetic promises will be fulfilled. On the other hand, the **now** signals that the Lord has kept his promise to Simeon, who has lived to see it all.<sup>1</sup>

After Simeon has sung his hymn of praise, he also prophetically tells Mary that it will not be all sweetness and light. With this disturbing prophecy, Simeon tells Mary: *This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel.* We will all have to fall before we can rise. What counts as a consummation for Simeon is only the beginning for all the other players in the drama, including us. What is next, is also begun in us.<sup>2</sup> And it begins **now**. And it will not all be easy – there will be difficulties. But we are all called to be disciples of Jesus, and a light for revelation to the whole world.



Susan Henry-Crowe, Church & Society spoke these wise words this Advent:



*“The reality of Advent isn’t that we are waiting for the birth of the Christ Child. The Christ Child is here and is waiting for us to come. He is crying out to us from the border. He is calling to us from the voices of the poor. He is shouting out to us from prison. He is waiting for us to live out our faith. He is waiting for us to seek justice. He is waiting for us to pursue peace. Let us go, for He is waiting.”*

Simeon teaches us about what it means to wait faithfully, but also actively. The time for us to act is now, but God’s timing also means that the time for total fulfilment is not yet.

Simeon was Mary and Joseph’s first encounter in the Temple. They also met another prophet. Take a listen.

<Luke 2:36-40>

*<sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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.*

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



Anna is a prophet. Luke’s gospel is full of women’s stories as well as men. And Anna was an old lady now of 85, which in Jesus’ time was old. And she was still faithfully present in the Temple. She also saw the baby Jesus and gave God thanks.

<sup>1</sup> W. Hulitt Gloer, “Luke 2:25-40: Homiletical Perspective” in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke*, Volume 1, *A Feasting on the Word Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), Kindle Locations 2201-2204.

<sup>2</sup> Richard S. Dietrich, “Luke 2:25-40: pastoral Perspective” in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke*, Volume 1, *A Feasting on the Word Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), Kindle Locations 2107-2109.

One of the blessings of being part of a faith community is the wide company of people invested in those we love. **With age comes wisdom.** How wonderful that both Anna and Simeon were so attuned to God's Spirit that they could offer encouragement to these first-time parents.

No child's life is going to be easy, there will be ups and downs, but being surrounded by those who see your child as a gift for the world can make all the difference in the long dark nights with a screaming baby. It can make all the difference however old we are! A supportive faith community with those who are older passing their faith wisdom to those who are younger is a true blessing. Are we opening our eyes to those who are around us and offering words of encouragement and support? **Now** is a good time!

And, now we come to the last section of chapter 2! Jesus is no longer a baby. He is about to enter his teenage years. He is portrayed as very human in this story. Such stories are common in the Greco-Roman world. They express the idea that a great man was assumed to have had a precocious childhood.<sup>3</sup>

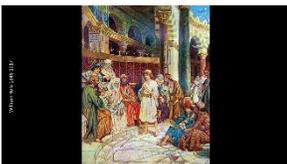
< Luke 2:41-52 >

*41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

*48 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."*

*49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

*50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*



Again, in this story, we see the faithfulness of Jesus' parents. They have obviously raised him in the faith and taught him well. He is well-grounded in the scriptures and eager to discuss them with others. He does seem to be oblivious though that his parents might be worried about him! In that sense, he is a typical child. Jesus does however seem to have a deep sense of his calling at that young age.

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis E. Smith, "Luke 2:41-52: Exegetical Perspective" in Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke*, Volume 1, *A Feasting on the Word Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), Kindle Locations 2335-2336.

Notice that we are in the Temple again for this story. And it is again in the Temple that others begin to see something special in Jesus. It is not unusual for someone have a deep sense of calling and just be waiting for that calling to be acknowledged by someone. Who are we seeing? Do we dismiss others when they tell us of their dreams or do we encourage them? When someone is hungry for the gospel, instead of criticizing their questions, we need to be patient and then offer plenty of encouragement. The church, like the Temple, is the place to nourish and form others in their faith. Jesus grew from his religious roots.



I called today's sermon *Now is the Moment*. Now is the time that we have. Yesterday is gone. We can keep putting things off until tomorrow, or we can begin to act now. As Simeon says, *My eyes have seen your salvation*. Christ is born in us again, this Christmas season. Are we going to close our eyes and bask in that feeling, or are we going to open them and seize the moment?

There is a beautiful quote in our bulletin this morning from Howard Thurman, an African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among people,  
To make music in the heart.*



My prayer is that in this Christmas season, we will journey together with God and each other; that our eyes will be open to seeing salvation in our midst and naming what we see; and that we will offer encouragement, and seize the moment with action, and continue to look forward with **anticipation**. Thanks be to God, Amen.

Let us pray ...<sup>4</sup>

### Resources

Bartlett, David L. and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Bartlett, David L. and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Jarvis, Cynthia A. and E. Elizabeth Johnson. *Feasting on the Gospels--Luke, Volume 1: A Feasting on the Word Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2016/12/litany-luke-2-25-32.html> written by Dr. Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, Associate Professor of New Testament at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.