

SLIDE 1: A New Advent

How do we get there?

Sunday December 11, 2022

Waiting.

We spend a lot of our lives - waiting. We wait for the cable guy to show up. We wait to be seated at restaurants. We wait in lines at concerts and hockey games and theatres. We wait on the phone to speak to an operator or someone who has answers for us in some netherworld dept. We wait in waiting rooms for dentists and doctors – and then we wait again in another, smaller, anti-chamber waiting room for our doctor to enter.

The watch-making company – TIMEX - did a survey a little while ago asking, “How much time of an average life is spent waiting?” According to their survey – we wait – on average:

28 minutes in security lines whenever we travel anywhere (which I might argue is a little on the low side based on my experience at the Sumas border crossing!).

21 minutes for a significant other to get ready to go out. No comment.

13 hours-a-year waiting on hold for customer service.

38 hours each year waiting in traffic.

Human beings spend approximately 6 MONTHS of their lives waiting in line for things – which is like – 3 days a year of queuing up. The average person spends about 43 days on hold with automated customer service in one lifetime. And those who take the bus will wait about 27 days of their lives waiting around on the platform or at the bus stop!

This is WHY I carry a book with me wherever I go – either a digital copy on my phone or a hard copy in my man-purse. You can read a lot of books over the course of a lifetime – just waiting!

And – of course – we tell ourselves things like – “Good things come to those who wait” and “Waiting builds anticipation” and “Some things are worth waiting for” – which I suppose has some truth in it.

It certainly did for one man who waited in line for 10 days before the iPhone 7 was released. Others paid for spots in line and yet others paid others to stand in line for them. Tents pitched. Folding chairs and tables.

SLIDE 2. But let me ask you a question: **“If good things come to those who wait, is there anything you’d be willing to wait for your entire life?”**

What if someone offered you 10 million dollars if you just waited for it your entire life?

There is a man who waited his entire life for something. His story is told in **Luke 2.**

SLIDE 3. Luke 2:25-35.

Please turn with me in your bibles to that gospel and chapter – where we will be reading and talking about vv. 25-35 this morning.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him (v. 25).

Now – that’s a lot to take in all at once about someone who’s never spoken of in the bible - before or after this mention.

So, what do we learn about Simeon from this one verse?

a. That he was a man in the thick of the action. He was living in Jerusalem – which was - then and now - the political and religious center of Israel (though – at the time of Christ’s birth – the religious life of Israel had diminished - spoiled by the legalism of the religious leaders of the day).

b. That he is named after a tribal ancestor of Israel - Leah’s second-born son, Simeon - whose name means “God has heard” (Gen. 29:33) – because God heard and answered Leah’s prayer to bear children and named her boy Simeon for that reason.

Which might make us wonder, “Is there a hope or a prayer that Simeon prayed that God would hear and answer?” since *he* is named as he is?

c. That Simeon was “righteous and devout.” He was just and virtuous towards others – and – he was pious and reverent before God.

d. That he was waiting on God to fulfill His promises – specifically - “the consolation of Israel.” Meaning? Stay with me here for a second – this will get a little bit bible nerdy...

There were a pair of O.T. prophets – Isaiah and Jeremiah – who talked about an “Anointed” one to come. They used the Hebrew term - *Mashiyach* – from which we get the English word – *Messiah*. This was translated in N.T. Greek as – *Christos* – from which we get the English word – *Christ*.

This Promised One – this Messiah – this Christ - would deliver Israel from her enemies and establish a reign of peace and security for them (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5) – what these same prophets otherwise referred to as – wait for it – wait for it - a time of comfort or – **consolation** (Isa. 40:1; 57:18).

No one knew when this would happen – but all of Israel – all the Jews in Jesus’ day - were hoping and praying and waiting for this person to appear – including – Simeon – longing for the One who would bring peace and comfort to the people of Israel.

e. That the Holy Spirit was upon him. This is pretty cool – because – prior to Pentecost – when the Spirit came and filled many – and prior to the time that we are in – when

the Holy Spirit lives in those who trust in Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit came and went from God’s servants according to need, and sometimes, only for a short while.

This might explain, for instance, why David prayed in Ps. 51 – “Take not your Holy Spirit from me.”

So, Simeon was specially chosen *by* God to do something specific *for* God. As we’ll see in the following verses.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ (v. 26).

O.K. So there it is – or at least part of it. Simeon was given special insight by the Holy Spirit – to recognize the “Christ” – the long-awaited “Messiah.”

This is what Simeon had been waiting for all his life.

Can you imagine?

This would be like God hand-picking you to have singular knowledge of where and when the “Lord’s Christ” would RETURN to the planet.

I’d be hanging around you all the time!

I’d just want to be there – with you – when Christ returned!

Here’s an interesting question: Why would God tell Simeon this? Why was it so important that someone be there to see Jesus Christ? And that Simeon would wait his lifetime to see the child?

That’s actually 3 questions...

I think the answer is found in Deut. 19:15 (and then again in 2 Cor. 13:1) – where we are told that a matter is confirmed – something is established - by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Simeon was one of three witnesses that God used to confirm that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had come to Israel in the flesh. The shepherds – who Pastor Darrel spoke about last week – were the first. And Anna – who Pastor Darrel will speak about next week – is the third.

Here’s the thing: witnesses speak about what they have seen and heard.

The shepherds saw the child and then – “they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”

Anna gave thanks to God when she met the child and “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.”

What did Simeon say?

Moved by the spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"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 of revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (vv. 27-32).

So, there's the second and third parts of it. Simeon was given special insight by the Holy Spirit – to "move" and to "declare."

He was so devout – so in tune with God and His Word – that he moved intuitively as a response to the Holy Spirit – into the temple courts – where he met the Christ-child.

The waiting was over.

Simeon confirmed God's Word to him – when he declared, "as you have promised." Then seeing who he had waited so long to see – he declared that his life was complete – that he could be dismissed by God in peace.

Mission accomplished!

He met the One who is the "salvation" "of all people" – Jews and Gentiles alike – and the One who is "light" and "revelation."

Salvation. Light. Revelation. We should ask - From what and for who?

And we should answer - Salvation from sin and death for all humankind – not a Messiah who would come just for the Jews to rescue them from Roman occupation and oppression and place them at the head of the nations (which was a popular Jewish understanding at the time).

No. This child would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" – a way to make known - that they too could be saved – and "for glory to your people Israel" – the Jews who could be saved as well through the One who was Himself a Jew.

Jesus first came to defeat sin and death through His crucifixion and resurrection.

He will come a second time to judge the living and the dead and to rule and reign over His everlasting kingdom of love.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (vv. 33-35).

Joseph and Mary marveled. And why wouldn't they?

Sure – Mary was told by an angel that the child within her was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, that He would be called the Son of God, and that His name would be “Jesus” – which was the Greek for “Joshua” – which means “God saves.”

And sure – Joseph was also visited by an angel in his dreams who told him to take Mary as his wife because the child in her is from the Holy Spirit whose name will be Jesus – because He will save His people from their sins.

But – come on – here is this man – this man they’ve never met before – who they may or may not know to be righteous and devout – who takes their child in his arms – and makes these wild claims about His future – some only *they* would have known or imagined!

There are all these moments that lead to a moment.

This is one of those moments – when I imagine Joseph and Mary turned to each other and said, “This is happening!” – this is that child – this is our child - sort of like carrying a baby for nine months gets very real at weeks 38, 39, and 40.

They marveled.

And then they were sobered.

Simeon told them that – as much as Jesus would be for everyone – not everyone would be for Jesus. Jews and Gentiles – both - would be divided over Him and would speak against Him. All of which – and more - would break His mother’s heart.

And it did.

And people were and still are divided on their opinions of Jesus.

And many still speak against Him.

THAT is the story of a man who waited his lifetime for one thing. And it wasn’t 10 million dollars. It was to see and to declare the salvation of all humankind.

Was it worth it? Simeon thought so.

All this said – what might we learn from his story as it relates to ours - who we are, who we are called to be, and maybe the gap in between question for today – *how do we get there?*

Let me share a few observations...

SLIDE 4. How do we get there?

1. Get into the thick of the action.

2. Be just and virtuous towards others and pious and reverent before God.

3. Speak up.

1. Get into the thick of the action.

Simeon placed himself at the political and religious center of his community.
Where do *we* place ourselves?

I'm not suggesting that we should all enter politics or become pastors – but maybe some of us could/maybe some of us should.

Younger and older - maybe *we* could be light and revelation in the world of governance – in offices or in support of those who hold them.

Or maybe it's as simple as us getting into the thick of the action wherever we're at – as grandparents and parents, as leaders and workers and students, as neighbors to those around us.

Getting into the thick of the action – listening for the longings and losses of those whom God has placed in our lives – and then offering them hope from the stories of our life with Jesus.

Where do *we* place ourselves?

If we mostly hang out with each other – in our church-friends clusters, our small groups, and our big events - then how and when will we invite others - who don't know Jesus - to know and follow Him, and to join us in the movement of being blessed people to bless other people?

2. Be just and virtuous towards others and pious and reverent before God.

And when we get into the thick of the action – let's be characterized by (not perfect – but more often than not) ... characterized by virtuous behavior towards others that is grounded in our reverence for God.

One leads to the other. My love of God will lead me to love others. My gratefulness for God's forgiveness of my sin will lead me to forgive others. My lamenting with God will lead me to grieve with others. My overcoming with Jesus will give me stories of hope to share with others. My love of His Word will lead me to talk like Him. And so on.

The waiting is over.

While we have been a church in transition for some time now – for a bunch of reasons – which has felt (understandably) like we have been waiting for a long time for our next season of ministry – we do not need to wait – we have never needed to wait – to do our part to stay in healthy relationship with God (devout), and to be as kind to our neighbors as we would be to ourselves (righteous).

Simeon waited to see and declare the salvation of humankind in the Christ-child.

That time has come. As the bible says (2 Cor. 6:2) – this is the day of salvation. It is our job to see it for what it is and to declare it.

3. Speak up.

I really appreciated Pastor Darrel sharing last week about how difficult it is for him to - *speak up* – to talk about his faith with people who might not share his faith.

It's tricky.

Let me encourage you again:

- a. People are open to talking about spiritual things.
- b. People are open to questions that express genuine curiosity – about what *they* believe and think.
- c. People are open to being prayed for.

But we'll never know if we don't open our ears AND then open our mouths to find out.

Let me also remind you of what Pastor Darrel said last week – with Emmie's addition – *God chooses to use ordinary people to reach ordinary people - in ordinary ways.*

Like Simeon – I pray that we would let the Holy Spirit move us to reach our neighbors in ordinary ways.

And if you're not sure you're being moved by the Holy Spirit – perhaps this might help - from a friend of mine – who is a Director of Spiritual Formation.

She uses what she calls THE 5 FINGER TEST.

SLIDE 5. The 5 Finger Test

- 1. Does it contradict or confirm Scripture?**
- 2. Does it contradict or confirm the character of God?**
- 3. Does it bring consolation or desolation?**
- 4. Does the body of Christ affirm or reject it?**
- 5. Does it move you to faith-based action?**

Simeon was a man of God. In the thick of the action. Righteous towards others. Reverent towards God. He moved in tune with the Holy Spirit. He saw the face of the Christ-child and he spoke.

We are the people of God.

Let this be our benediction: May we be in the thick of the action. May we do right by our neighbors and draw close to our God. May we follow the Spirit's leading – and when we see God at work in us and around us – may we speak!