

**December 31, 2017 Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**A Sermon for the First Sunday of Christmas, Year B**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 2:22-40**

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the second chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] 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.”

<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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,

<sup>29</sup>“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;

<sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

<sup>33</sup>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.”

<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.

The gospel of the Lord.

## **Praise to you, O Christ.**

So...here we are the week after...perhaps some of us are still emerging from the haze of trying to remember what day it is (hint: we're in church in the morning)...Perhaps it's nearly a miracle we're here. Perhaps not. Maybe others of us were thrust almost immediately and unceremoniously back into our routines by the demands of work or children or other family members...or just our own need for a natural ebb and flow to the days.

I hope the seas weren't too stormy. The holidays can be treacherous emotional weather. I hope you had sacred silent nights, or laughter filled days when you needed them.

It is odd, too, how this sacred threshold in the church's time comes so close before the threshold most of us also mark with a new calendar year.

We are barely done with one earth-tilting event, before we are reminded again of the passing of time...of our own becoming-ness...and sometimes unbecoming-ness...at another milestone...or supposed milestone.

It can be a little dizzying.

I suppose it makes a certain kind of sense...so shortly after a new life has entered the world...that we would feel disoriented, exhausted, uncertain of what will happen next.

I imagine by this time the sometimes lovely idea of a new tiny human might have become to Mary and Joseph what it does to some other parents...a screaming, sleepless, onslaught of mess and needs-not-our-own taking over each waking moment and ounce of energy...

New life can't help but throw into disarray the pattern of the lives that surround it. I imagine the Christ child is no different.

So, on Christmas Eve, we sing Silent Night and stand in hushed wonder. But today maybe we haven't washed our hair for a week, and can count the hours of sleep we can remember on one hand...or the honest-to-God healthy meals we've had.

It's the Seventh Day of Christmas, and things are getting real.

A friend of mine a number of years ago was eagerly awaiting her first grandchild...and she was sort of shaking her head at her daughter who was expecting...and who was also so excited...but maybe not so realistic about what this new life would mean for her own. She was telling her mom about all her plans about where she would be going and what she would be doing with this new baby in tow. And, my friend confessed to me (I'm not sure if she said it to her daughter or not). "I don't know if she realizes a baby carrier and all its contents aren't just like another, much larger, designer handbag."

Babies...and almost any other humans we invite fully into our lives, for that matter...tend to flummox our best laid plans. Because it's not about "me" anymore...it's about "us." And "us" is almost always complicated.

In a few weeks, those new or returning to this community...as well as those long part of it...will be invited to spend some intentional time on that journey of "us" in this place...in our Water from the Well Discipleship Class (for lack of a better word). And it will be wonderful and meaningful...and also probably a little bit complicated. I hope you might consider taking part if you can.

It takes a lot of intentional time and work, I think, to live into the complicated journey of "us"... of life in community...of our lives all together centered in Christ. Our elders sometimes know better how to live with and recognize what is complicated in this difficult but worthwhile way...like my friend, Gayle, did as she waited for her daughter's baby. Some parts of it, though, we do have to learn for ourselves.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful images of age welcoming and honoring new life with wisdom and love is the scene we see in the temple today...when Mary

and Joseph meet Simeon and Anna when they come to present Jesus in Jerusalem.

I wonder how much sleep they'd had. I wonder how much they knew or thought they knew about what this journey was going to be. I wonder how much they had already realized they didn't know, in those seven short (or maybe very long) days.

Of course, for them it couldn't have been the same as it is for most new parents. Most don't get messengers from God and visitors from across the world telling them what they know and have heard about their new baby...

But in some ways, it also must have been very much the same. I can't imagine that they weren't tired and overwhelmed, living in an entirely new reality.

I wonder if the temple was full that day – bustling with worshippers...I wonder if Jesus' presentation was right in the middle of everything and a grand affair? Or was it maybe something that happened off to the side amidst the hustle and bustle...hardly noticed...not the main event...just one of many. Or maybe, maybe the temple was mostly empty...like you could feel the volume of the air taking up the empty space...see dust floating in shafts of light...quiet and mostly still. Maybe the presentation of Jesus was the most important thing that happened that day, and there was no missing it, except for the fact that almost no one was there who could have missed it if they tried.

Sometimes holy things happen in the quiet places, with barely a witness to testify to them.

So, I wonder if Simeon and Anna, who saw the Holy Family that day...had to spot them through a crowd...or whether it would have been impossible to miss them...those three out of only a handful who came to fulfill holy duties in the course of the day.

But when they found Mary and Joseph – bearing the Savior of the world, they both recognized the holy at work. Simeon, it seems, had felt summoned to the temple as if by an unseen force that day. Something drew him there...and when

he saw the child, he took him into his arms in wonder (though I do hope he asked permission first)...and sang a song of thanks to God, a final benediction on the work of his own life...and the promise fulfilled.

Then Anna, the prophet. Oh how I do love Anna. I've met her. Maybe you have, too. The woman who never leaves a holy task untended. She is always there.

My Anna is named Karen. And she is as fierce as she is tiny. I struggle to remember a time I was at church when she was not also there. And every time we left each other's company (usually it was me leaving church before her...because...again...I'm not sure she ever did leave...or that she yet has)...we would part with the words, "See you in a few hours." It didn't matter how long we were meant to be apart. We would call it "a few hours"...or it would feel like it was. Maybe because time mattered so much less apart from that sacred place and her sacred work of tending it.

They saw the Holy Family, and they knew the world was changed. They knew *they* were changed. They knew things would never be the same. And perhaps this is a part of the great wisdom of Christ entering the world as an infant. When an infant enters your life, there is no mistaking how much is about to change. They become the center of the universe. And this infant...well...he really was.

And, now after the candlelight has faded from our eyes, and we stand here in the light of day...this truth that marched into the temple to Anna and Simeon has arrived for us. Make no mistake. Life with Jesus in it will not be the same.

More will be asked of us than we have yet imagined. More will be given to us than we can comprehend. It will be harder and more important and more complicated than anything we've ever done or known. But he is here now. No stopping it. And even though this journey with Jesus at the center of our lives is probably going to be the hardest thing we ever do...it is also going to be the most wonderful. With Simeon, we hold in our arms the one who bears love, justice, peace, and a kind of power that the world cannot comprehend...which means we hold not only the child...not only this holy one...but we, ourselves, are made bearers of love, justice, peace and power to this world.

Look out, world. It's Christmas.

Amen.