

December 1, 2024
The Mission of Christmas Brings Hope
Luke 2:25-38
Vernon Advent Christian Church

This past year, our focus has been on God's mission to reach the world with the gospel and how he has invited us to be a part of his mission. And as we enter now into the advent season, Christmas celebrates the focal point of that mission, God setting in motion his plan to rescue humanity by sending Jesus into the world.

Today is the first week of the advent season which includes the four Sundays before Christmas when the church looks back to Christ's first arrival in Bethlehem in anticipation of his second and final arrival when Jesus comes again. And for the next four Sundays we will reflect on the 4 themes of advent, that it brings hope, gives peace, produces joy and demonstrates love.

Now, the word advent means "arrival, or appearing," and the advent of something, or someone, means that it's finally here. At his first arrival, Jesus came into the world in human form to rescue us and save us from sin. Luke 2:11 makes this clear when it says, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, He is Christ the Lord." And at his second coming, he will come as the victorious king and judge and will gather all those who "have longed for His appearing," as Paul says in 2 Tim. 4:8. But now, we stand between these two advents, waiting and longing for our redemption. And the advent season is an invitation for us to step back from our daily lives and to see the big picture of God's great salvation that he has given to us through his son Jesus as we look forward, with great anticipation, to his coming again.

You know, we live in a world that is desperate for hope with nothing to offer. We all instinctively know that this world is broken. And we all long for it to be made right again. That feeling that we have we would call that hope. But, as believers, our hope is not dependent on a feeling but our hope is in a person, Jesus. And Christmas is a reminder that God has given us reason to hope.

I've noticed quite a few people are starting to put up their Christmas lights and we can see the decorations have been put up here at the church. Christmas lights and decorations signal to us that Christmas is coming. All the stuff of Christmas can create anticipation in us and a feeling of hope. But today I want us to think about the reality of hope, not just the warm fuzzy feelings. You see, hope is not a wish that something might happen, it's a confident trust that it will.

Today, we will consider how the mission of Christmas brings hope to us, that confident trust, by looking at our text in Luke 2. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God. [Read Luke 2:25-38]

Now, we've picked up the story in Luke 2 right after the birth of Jesus and now, about 40 days later, Mary and Joseph have made the short journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and arrive at the temple with their newborn, like all good Jewish parents, to make the purification offering, described for us in Lev. 12 and to present Jesus as their firstborn before God, which we find described for us in Ex. 13. In other words, there is nothing out of the ordinary going on here, at least on the surface. But that all changes in a moment.

While they are in the temple courtyard, they happen to run into a man named Simeon. Now, who is this Simeon? We are not given a lot of detail, but we are told a few things about him. We're told he was righteous, which meant he lived according to the Mosaic law. We know

that this righteousness does not make one right with God, but I think Luke intended this to be a compliment. We're also told that he was devout. This word here means an "active devotion". In other words, he didn't just do the surface-level stuff for everyone to see. But he was devoted in his heart to always doing the right thing.

We're also told that "the Holy Spirit was upon him." This description is similar to the one used for those in the Old Testament who God used for his purposes, which makes sense, because the indwelling of the Holy Spirit hadn't taken place yet and wouldn't until after Christ's resurrection and ascension and Pentecost.

So Simeon was a righteous, devout and Holy Spirit led man. But I want us to notice one more important description of him in our text. We are told that he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Now, this is a direct reference to the waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Simeon still believed in God's promises despite the centuries of silence and oppression from foreign world powers, promises to give Israel true comfort. And here we see the first aspect of how God's mission of Christmas brings us hope, it's in the act of hoping. You see, hope is not a feeling it's an action.

What does the act of hoping look like in Simeon's life? The scripture says he is "waiting." In the Hebrew language the word "hope" means "to wait." And more specifically, "to actively wait with confident expectation." One of the places we see this is in Isa. 40:31, "but those who wait, literally hope, in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." The root of the Hebrew word of hope literally means a "stretched string," meaning there is a tension there, much like that of a guitar string stretched tight until it is perfectly tuned, showing us that our hope is an active hope and not passive. By that, I mean, that we must put our hope into action by confidently trusting in God and his promises and not simply sitting back and thinking of hope as wishing that something might happen.

So, Simeon has been waiting and watching, looking forward to God's promise while living a devoted and righteous life. His hope was active. What about you and me? Can you say in the middle of the tension, with the storms of life swirling all around, can you say that you have an active hope in the Lord today? If not, I would love to have some time to sit down and talk with you more about that. But how? How is it that Simeon, and us, can have such a hope. It's because he had a reason for his hope.

What was Simeon's reason for hope? That God is faithful to keep his promises. You see, God, through his Holy Spirit, had made a personal promise to Simeon. The promise was, "Simeon you will not die before you see the Messiah." Even though this is a specific promise to Simeon, it also fits within God's larger promise to the nation of Israel.

You remember way back in the garden, after Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they were given the first promise that God was going to one day rescue his people. He says in judgement to the serpent in Gen. 3:15, "the seed of woman will crush your head." Nancy Guthrie, in her book, "Jesus in the Old Testament," points out that every male child born after this promise would have come into the world with the question as to whether this child would be the promised rescuer. But over time, that anticipation began to fade. Years later, God then promises Abraham in Gen. 12 "I will make you a great nation, I will give you a land as your inheritance and through your offspring, all the nations will be blessed." So, we're given a clearer picture that the promised Messiah will be a descendent of Abraham.

And again, hundreds of years later to King David, God promises that there would be a King who would come from the line of David who will sit on David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7).

So, the Messiah would not only be a descendent of Abraham but also in the line of David. And how does Matthew begin his gospel? “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1)

And then God spoke through the prophets and over and over again he promised that he would send the Messiah to rescue his people. But then there was 400 years of silence in between what we know as the Old and New Testaments. And the people had been waiting with no communication from God through the prophets. Slowly, as it had in the past, the hope for a Messiah, the rescuer, turned into doubt. And the people began to wonder, “Would God really keep his promise?”

But we see Simeon is unwavering in his hope because he remembers the faithfulness of God. He knows the story of the Old Testament. That God promised to deliver his people from Egypt and he did. That God promised to provide for the Nation of Israel in the desert and they had plenty of water and food. And God promised Israel a land to live in and he gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. Simeon has reason to hope because he remembered that God is faithful and God keeps his promises.

You and I have reason to hope today. We have reason to hope because God is still in the business of keeping his promises. Listen to some of these promises God has made to us through his word and I pray they are an encouragement to you. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Heb. 13:5) “I will send the Holy Spirit, he will be a comforter and guide.” (John 14:6) “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18) “Do not let your heart be troubled... If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1-3) Simeon’s reason for hope is the same as ours. God is faithful and will always keep his promises.

And this plays out in our text, as Simeon’s hope becomes reality in vs. 28 as he beheld the object of his hope. Our text says “He took Jesus in his arms.” Simeon picked up an actual person. The object of our hope is Jesus. Christmas is a celebration of the incarnation, when God became man. Jesus took on flesh. He entered into space and time and experienced everything in what it means to be human.

And when Simeon picks up Jesus he burst into praise in vs. 30, “for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” Although Jesus is the Messiah promised to come to the nation of Israel, he is the hope for all the nations. Jesus is the light in the darkness. As I said earlier, we know instinctively that the world is not as it should be. Something is broken. And we cry out to God to do something. But the truth is, he has already done something. He has kept his promise. He has given his son.

The Spirit then leads Simeon to make a prophecy. Jesus is going to cause a rising and falling of many in Israel. Those who take pride in their own achievements will fall. And those who throw themselves on God’s mercy will rise. This is the simple truth of the gospel. There is no middle ground. We either come to a place of full repentance and reliance on Christ for our salvation or we face the just penalty for our rebellion.

He then tells Mary, “A sword will pierce your own soul too.” Simeon is speaking of Jesus going to the cross. I can’t imagine the agony that Mary felt at the cross. She probably asked as we often do in times of despair, “God what are you doing?” “How could this happen?” But Simeon was preparing Mary with the same hope that he had. Even though Jesus would one day pay the full redemption price by giving his life on the cross, that would not be the end of the story. There would still be hope.

And that's the beauty of it. The resurrection gives us a confident hope that Christ will come again. 1 Peter 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." We have a living, and present, hope through the resurrection of Jesus. A hope that, because Christ has risen, he will come again. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the object of our hope.

I'll close with one last challenge we find in our text today, "Will you be faithful and share the hope that you have with others?" 1 Peter 3:15 says, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

In vs. 36, we are introduced to a prophetess named Anna. Anna is among only a handful of women in the Bible that is given the title "prophetess." And we're told that Anna had been married only seven years when she became a widow, and she remained a widow for the rest of her life. Most translations indicate that Anna was eighty-four years old when she met Jesus. But it is also possible to translate the text to mean Anna had lived eighty-four years after her husband died. That would mean Anna could have possibly been over 100 years old at the time. Either way, the point is she had spent the vast majority of her life serving the Lord in the temple.

We're told that, "She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying". In other words, she had dedicated herself fully to the Lord. What stands out is that her devotion was constant for the majority of her life, and her devotion was rewarded with an encounter with the savior. Her many years of sacrifice and service were worth it all when she saw the Messiah, the one for whom she, just like Simeon, had waited so long for.

And, "Coming up to them at that very moment," it says in vs. 38, she immediately recognizes Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and begins thanking God and "she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." The text says "she went up to them," and she spoke to others who were looking for redemption, for a reason to hope. These verses show us a boldness to initiate the conversation. Anna recognized what an awesome privilege she had been given to tell others about Jesus. Some people probably thought she was just a crazy old lady, but Anna was more concerned about the Messiah than what others thought.

Boldness like Anna's is stepping out of your comfort zone, by faith, to share the gospel with those who need it. Good news is meant to be shared, and Anna shares it with everyone who was anticipating the Messiah. The Redeemer had come, the prophecies were being fulfilled, and Anna was blessed to see it happen. We, too, need to boldly share the hope that we have with a world that is desperately looking for it.

But sadly, too many people do not live with the hope that we have. They are either too distracted or in despair. But we are a people of hope with a message to share. Let's follow the examples of Simeon and Anna, let's be a people of hope, a people actively waiting with confident expectation that God is faithful and will keep his promises, as he has already shown us by giving us his Son, Jesus, and will again when he returns. And let's share that hope with the world. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for communion.