

Embrace Your Calling!

Meditation on Luke 2:22-40

Dec. 31, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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

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. ²⁶ 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant 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. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ 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, ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ 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.

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

I had a nice, peaceful Christmas Day at home with my family. Did you? My cat let me sleep a few hours later than usual, then we had

coffee and opened presents as the lights on our Christmas tree twinkled. I made waffles and watched two of my favorite Christmas movies—*It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

The day after Christmas, my son, James, arrived from Minnesota with his girlfriend, Andrea. When they got on the plane in Minnesota that morning, the temperature was below zero. Thinking of James and my other children and stepchildren, I am reminded of one of the roles God has given me to serve in His Kingdom—I am a mother. Even when my children and stepchildren are grown and having kids of their own, I am still their mom.

On Friday, I took James and Andrea to Cocoa Beach. Living all her life in Minnesota, Andrea hadn't been to the ocean but once as a small child. Her family's vacations have been to the lakes in Minnesota, and to Duluth on the coast of Lake Superior, which seems as big as the ocean when you are standing on the shore.

Even the birds looked cold at Cocoa Beach on Friday! It was in the 50s, cloudy and windy. I went back to the car to get my jacket, and when I returned to the beach, Andrea and James had gone into the water to take a photo and had gotten their pants' legs wet up to their knees! Neither had a towel or change of clothes. What were they thinking?

I was a mother that day, too, but I tried not to scold. It was nice to have them stay with us. It was hard to say goodbye after only a few days, not knowing when we will be able to see them again. It had been almost 2 years since our last visit. I worry about them living so far away on so little money and not eating enough vegetables and fruits.

While I have other roles in the Kingdom of God, I am always a mother. I wish I could do more to help my children. Sometimes, prayer doesn't seem enough. But I know it is the most loving thing I can do.

Even with my challenges as a long distance mom, I can't imagine how difficult it must have been to be Mary and Joseph, raising her firstborn son, Jesus, the Messiah. Our reading in Luke provides details about Jesus' family and 2 other people with unique roles in his childhood. Luke emphasizes the importance of his family, their faith and the temple in Jerusalem, to which they traveled 90 miles one way from Nazareth every year for the Feast of the Passover.

But they are visiting the temple in Jerusalem for a different purpose on this occasion. Luke in 2:22 begins this passage with, "when the time came ..." We can only guess the time; Jesus may have been 35 or 40 days old. But where were Mary, Joseph and Jesus staying from the time of his birth in Bethlehem, his circumcision at 8 days, to the presentation at the temple on this day? Did they go back home to Nazareth? Travel to Jerusalem would be time consuming, physically demanding, especially for a woman who just gave birth, and costly for a poor carpenter who may not be able to afford to stay in an inn for one or more nights. We only know that they "returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth" (in 2:39) "when they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord."

The presentation, with a sacrifice of two turtledoves or young pigeons, was required for every firstborn son to be redeemed—bought back—from God. This is based on the story of Passover,

when the angel of the Lord brought death to all the firstborn among the Egyptians, but passed over the houses of the children of Israel, whose doors were sealed with the blood of the lamb. As a result, God claimed possession of every firstborn male in Israel, according to Numbers 3:13.

Let's think about this. Luke is telling us that our Redeemer has to be redeemed—bought back—not because he sinned, but simply because he is a firstborn son in Israel, belonging to God.

Now, did you catch that Luke grants Joseph the important role and title of father, though he is not the biological father? Joseph will disappear from Luke's gospel after he and Mary lose 12-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem after the Passover and find him later in the temple. Mary will say, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." (Luke 2:48)

A prophet named Simeon plays another leading role here. Luke says the "Holy Spirit rested on" Simeon and that the Spirit revealed to him, that "he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." (2:26) This doesn't tell us how long Simeon had been waiting, hoping and praying to see the Messiah-- only that he was old and near death when the promise is fulfilled. Simeon looking forward to the "consolation of Israel" has echoes of Isaiah, such as 40:1, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" and 49:13, "Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones."

Simeon bears good news of salvation for Jews and Gentiles but

also a word for Mary about her son's pain and her own suffering to come. He says, "A sword will pierce your own soul, too."

A prophetess named Anna also figures prominently in this passage. This is the only place in the New Testament where Anna appears and anyone is called a "prophetess," though the NRSV translates the word "prophet." Being a woman in the Bible, she is identified by her relationship with men. She is the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher and was married seven years before becoming a widow. She spends the rest of her life—living to be at least 84!-- wholeheartedly serving God—never leaving the temple, worshiping with "fasting and prayer night and day." After seeing Jesus, she, too, praises God but then, unlike Simeon, shares the news of "the child to all who (are) looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

If there is one thing I wish I could change about this passage, it's that it ends so abruptly. Luke sums up the first 11 years of Jesus' life in one sentence. He says, "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

I wish Luke told us more about Mary and Joseph and what it was like being parents of the Messiah, the child who brought God's salvation to the world-- a light for the Gentiles and for the glory of Israel. Did Mary worry about Jesus? Did she ever feel like prayer wasn't enough?

While I have other roles in the Kingdom of God, I am always a mother. What about you? I see mothers and grandmothers and great

grandmothers. I see fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers. I see brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles. I see children of God, loved by God, blessed with many gifts and unique roles in His Kingdom.

This year, I challenge you that instead of making resolutions that might discourage you if you aren't able to keep them, why not choose to embrace your calling?

Treasure the person God has made you! Pray faithfully for your family! It is the most loving thing you can do!

Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you for your salvation--a light for the Gentiles, glory for Israel! We believe in Jesus the Messiah though we haven't, like Simeon, yet seen him with our own eyes. We believe that you are with us and hear our prayers and that your Spirit speaks to us and changes us when we pray. And that when we cannot think of the words to say, your Spirit prays for us! Thank you for using us in many roles and ways to build your Kingdom. Bless our families and friends, Lord, especially those in need of your healing, guidance wisdom, and provision. In the name of our Messiah, Redeemer and Lord, the Light of the World, we pray. Amen.