

Safe in the Arms of Jesus

Luke 2:22-40

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

December 27, 2020 – First Sunday After Christmas

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In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Saint Paul wrote in Galatians, the fourth chapter, that when the fullness of time had finally come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Notice what Paul says here: “In the fullness of time,” at just the right moment, when everything was in its proper place and ready, *that* is when God’s Son came into our world. It’s all about timing, isn’t it? Indeed, the timing of the coming of the Son of God in human flesh to save His fallen creation is nothing short of a miracle in itself. Imagine! At just the right time, Christ comes to save the ungodly, to save you and me.

So, the timing of this event was just right – just perfect. And don’t many things in this life often boil down to timing? Take a football game, for instance. If a pass is off by so much as a fraction of a second, the game might easily be lost. If you bake Christmas cookies a little too long – or not quite long enough – all your efforts and all your plans can quickly be ruined. If you pluck fruit from a tree too early it’s likely to be hard and tasteless, and if you pluck it too late it’s probably going to be squishy, mushy or inedible. It’s all about timing. And so it is here also in this Gospel account of our Lord Christ’s birth. God made certain that everything was ripe and ready for the coming of His Son to save us from sin, death and the devil.

Now there are certain things in every culture people do when a child is born. It used to be that here in America, a father would hand out cigars wrapped with either pink or blue ribbons to all his friends when a new child was born. If anyone still does that today it’s more likely the cigars will be made out of chocolate or bubble gum. In some cultures, there has to be a formal presentation of the child to the community. In some ways, people have a tendency to turn Holy Baptism into this sort of

ritual – which it most certainly is not. Oftentimes, sadly, a baby’s Baptism may not even mean that much to the parents. It’s just something they have to do – a ritual. But these things we do, whether by habit or faith, also show again how much a child’s birth is about timing.

Well, there was a ritual in Jesus’ day, prescribed by the Law of God, that 40 days after a male child was born, he was to be presented in the Temple in Jerusalem. At his presentation two turtledoves were to be sacrificed on the Altar for the child’s purification. This ritual, as you might imagine, was called the Presentation. So this is the scene before us today. Mary and Joseph were bringing the Baby Jesus, not yet six weeks old, to the Temple in Jerusalem for His presentation before the Lord. Now the Temple in Jerusalem, wasn’t just like some great big church. The Temple was a huge building, over 17 acres all by itself, with walls one hundred feet thick. It was actually the third Temple – the first two had been destroyed and torn down. This Temple had been built by Herod the Great, the same Herod who tried to have Jesus killed shortly after His birth. This Temple was the pride and marvel of all Israel, with people coming from hundreds of miles away to see it.

For the Jew, though, it wasn’t just the architecture of the Temple that was so captivatingly fantastic. It was the fact that God Himself had promised His people that He would dwell in the Temple for them and for their benefit. This *was* God’s house, the place of His abode. To the Jew, if you asked where God could be found, he would point to Jerusalem and to the Temple. For the Jew this was the holiest place in all the earth, for it was there that God not only dwelt, but it was the very place where God could be found to forgive. It was a place filled with God’s glory.

So imagine if you will the picture now before us. According to the Law, Joseph and Mary had brought the Baby Jesus to the Temple, to God’s

house. And while they were there, an old man by the name of Simeon came out to meet them. According to Holy Scripture, Simeon had waited his entire life for this event – that moment when He would meet, face to face, the Savior, the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed by the Holy Spirit in a vision to Simeon that he would not taste death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, God's promised Messiah. Hence, Simeon had waited, and waited, and waited, until the time was just right for the coming of the Son of God in the flesh.

Joseph and Mary, with Jesus, were there standing on the steps of the Temple, for the Jew the grandest building of all time – that place in which God had promised to dwell. And so it was, that Simeon, precisely at that moment, approached them, took Jesus into his arms and began to sing what we know today as the Nunc Dimittis: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your Salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people Israel." There, in the midst of all the gold, glitter and glory of the Temple, it was God's presence in the Person of this little Baby Boy that was getting all the attention. "My eyes have seen Your Salvation," Simeon cried out. He didn't cry out about the beauty, the wonder, or the majesty of the Temple, but instead about the little Baby Boy who was sleeping in his arms. The earthly Temple built with hands had now finally served its true purpose. Now God would dwell in a new Temple built not with human hands. Now God would dwell among His people in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

This, my dear friends, this is the miracle we call the Incarnation. God takes on human form – becomes one of His own creatures – so that the majesty and splendor of the Creator of all things would be hidden in – and continue to be hidden – in the most ordinary of things. After all what could be more ordinary or more normal than a newborn baby? Who could be afraid of a infant nursing at his mother's breast? **This** is the fullness of time. **This** is how the Almighty God and Creator of the world wants you to see and know Him. He doesn't want you to fear Him or wonder in awe at His might and

power. No, He wants you to set Him on your lap and make Him a part of your family, a part of your very life. This is why Saint Paul writes in his letter to the Church in Galatia: "... because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Dear Christian, God wants you to call Him Father, because you are His child. He sent His Son, our brother Jesus Christ, to come into our world to save us from our sin. Do not be afraid. For this little Child who looks so ordinary, low and humble, will bring about the salvation of the whole world. That is the miracle of the Incarnation which Simeon held in his arms. And that is the miracle which you hold in your mouth at the Lord's Supper. Christ our Lord continues to come to you in the ordinary, humble things of the earth. Word, water, bread and wine are His vessels. But as Simeon noted so many years ago, God's salvation, His very glory, is contained within these humble gifts.

Christ our Lord wants you to believe in Him and trust that He will give you all that you need, both for this life and the next. In the Lord's prayer we pray that our Lord and God would give us our daily bread **and** that He would deliver us from sin and every evil. The One who comes down to earth as this little Child is the One will bring you up to heaven with Him when He returns again in glory. And because He is for you, God's wonderful, forgiving presence, can be found only in this little Babe, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. None of this makes any sense to us fallen sinners. Not a one of us are not able to comprehend how all God's might and power is able to reside in this seemingly helpless little Infant. But it is nonetheless true. **That** is the miracle we receive Sunday after Sunday in His Holy Supper – the Medicine of Immortality, as the ancients called it. So trust in Christ's Word and in His Sacraments, dear child of God. Trust in these things for your forgiveness, your very life and salvation. See with your ears and not with your eyes, and believe with your whole heart that when your last hour comes, because of the faith you have in this little One resting in Simeon's arms, that you too may depart in peace. Amen.