

Safe in the Arms of Jesus

Luke 2:22-40

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

December 17, 2015 – First Sunday After Christmas



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 the 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 place and ready, that’s when God’s Son came into our world. You see, it’s all about timing. 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 throw 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 be quickly ruined. If you pluck fruit from a tree too early it’s likely to be hard and tasteless, and if you pull it off 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 Christ’s birth. God made sure 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 to all his friends wrapped with either pink or blue ribbons when a new child was born. If anyone still does that today it’s more likely the cigars will be made out chocolate. 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. But these

things we do, whether by habit or faith, also show again how much a child’s birth is about timing.

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. And at his presentation two turtledoves were to be sacrificed on the Altar for the child’s purification. It 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. This Temple, however, wasn’t just like some great big church. It 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. It had been built by Herod the Great, the same one who tried to have Jesus killed following 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. This was truly God’s house, the place of His abode. To the Jew, if you asked where God might 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 not only that God’s name dwelt, but it was the very place where God could be found. It was a place filled with God’s glory.

So imagine if you will the picture now before us. 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 – this moment when He would meet the Savior, the consolation of Israel, face to face. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not taste

death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, God's promised Messiah. And so he had waited, and waited, and waited, until the time was just right for the coming of the Son of God in the flesh.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph were standing there on the steps of the Temple, one of the grandest buildings of all time – that place in which God had promised to dwell. And it was precisely at that moment when Simeon approached Mary and Joseph, took Jesus into his arms and began to sing what we know today as Simeon's song, 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 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 side? **This** is the fullness of time. **This** is how the almighty God and creator of the world wants us to see and know Him. He doesn't want you to fear Him or to 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 again in Galatians: "And 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."

God wants you to call Him Father, because you are His child, and He has sent His Son, our brother Jesus Christ, to come into the world to save us from our sins. Do not be afraid. For this little Child, who looks so ordinary, low and humble, this little child 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 like Simeon so many years ago, God's salvation, indeed 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 for the next. We pray in the Lord's prayer that He would give us this day our daily bread **and** that He would deliver us from evil. He **will** take care of you. The One who comes down to earth as a little Child will bring you up to heaven with Him. Because He is for you, God's glory, His wonderful, forgiving presence, is to be found in that little Babe, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. It doesn't make sense to our eyes. We cannot comprehend how all God's might and power can reside in this helpless Infant. But it is true, nonetheless. And that is the miracle we receive Sunday after Sunday in His Holy Supper. Trust in His Word and Sacrament for your life. For in Him you have nothing to fear. And when your last hour has come, by faith in this little One in Mary's arms, you too may depart in peace. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.