The phrase “Bucket List,” according to the Urban Dictionary, has been around for ten years now. A Bucket List is a catalogue of things people want to do before they die. The term was made popular by a movie in 2007 about two men, played by Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson, who share a room at the same hospital. Each has just been told that he has a terminal condition. They make a list of things they want to do before they kick the bucket and set off on a road trip to accomplish them. They go on an African safari, climb the ancient Pyramids of Egypt, fly over the North Pole and ride motorcycles on the Great Wall of China.

What’s on your bucket list? Maybe you aspire to write a novel, go sky diving or play a round of golf at Augusta National. For an old man named Simeon, seeing the Messiah ranks first on his bucket list. We read in Luke 2:26 that God, through the Holy Spirit, revealed to Simeon that he will not die until he sees the Messiah.

Simeon belongs to a community of people known as “The Quiet in the Land.” They believe the answer to Roman tyranny isn’t found in standing armies and warrior leaders. They practice a life of prayer and quiet watchfulness to prepare for God’s deliverance. I had never heard of The Quiet of the Land before preparing for this sermon. That’s probably because they’re so quiet. Boisterous people get all the press. Sometimes slow and steady wins the race.

Simeon is led by the Holy Spirit to the temple on the very day Mary and Joseph arrive to consecrate their infant son. Jesus’ parents are conscientious about observing the Law of Moses. Five times in this passage, Luke tells us Jesus’ family did something prescribed by Old Testament law. They consecrate their son on the 40th day, as Mosaic law specifies. This consecration compares to our practice of baptism. We acknowledge in baptism that children aren’t ours in any possessive sense. They are God’s children before we are gone, just as they are God’s children after we are gone.

They bring an offering in keeping with the law. They cannot afford a lamb; a pair of turtledoves is all they can manage (Luke 2:24). How ironic that the holy family
We hate to wait.

cannot afford the customary offering

When Simeon sees this couple with their newborn, something clicks. The Holy Spirit confirms in Simeon this child will be the promised Messiah. In a tender moment, this old man takes this newborn in his arms and pronounces a remarkable oracle. It’s commonly known by the Latin words that begin the song, *Nunc Dimittis*, “Now dismiss your servant in peace.” The adverb “now” is placed in emphatic position to herald a dramatic new era in salvation history. “Now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon says, in effect, you can take me home now. I can die in peace. I have seen salvation with my own eyes. Simeon goes on to predict that “This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). He will become a polarizing figure. It’s been that way from the outset—some hail him as Messiah; others denounce him as an imposter. With that, Simeon closes with the cryptic words, “and a sword will pierce your heart also” (Luke 2:35).

Our focus these past four Sundays of Advent has been on “The Songs of the Messiah.”

We’ve examined the songs of Isaiah, Zechariah, Mary and now, Simeon’s song. Simeon models the virtue of waiting. Every day he goes to the temple to wait for “the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Patience is not a virtue many of us have mastered in our day. We are all about making things happen. We pride ourselves in being busy people who get things done. The Nike slogan fits our circumstances: “Just do it!”

We regard waiting as a waste of time. We hate to wait. Table servers cannot bring our food fast enough. High-speed internet providers cannot supply connectivity fast enough. Traffic cannot move fast enough.

The one thing Americans hate most about waiting is standing in line. Whether it’s a checkout grocery store line, a DMV line, a steady stream of traffic or an airport security line, it doesn’t matter. We hate to wait in line.

Advent is a season of waiting. Maybe that’s why Advent has never really taken hold. Forget Advent and all this talk of waiting; bring on Christmas.

Maybe you find yourself waiting right now: waiting for a diagnosis; waiting for a job; a child to be born or a relationship to materialize or improve.

There is plenty of waiting in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah wait 25 years for the birth of a child. Moses and the Israelites
God’s purposes cannot always be microwaved.

wait 40 years to arrive at the Promised Land. Before the New Testament era, people have been waiting 400 years for a word from the Lord. Scripture compresses thousands of years into 1100 pages. Between the action narratives of Scripture, there is a considerable amount of waiting.

Patience is a Christian virtue. Waiting isn’t a waste of time. Eugene Peterson writes, “Waiting does not diminish us; any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting.”

The Hebrew word for waiting means to bind together by twisting. Waiting is the process by which we bind ourselves to God in such a way that his desires become ours. Waiting can enlarge our lives.

Simeon’s song has been set to various musical arrangements. These settings date back 1500 years or more. The reason why we don’t hear these songs more often is that they are intended as evening canticles. That is, they are going-to-bed songs. “Now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

What an ingenious way to go to bed. Think of what your eyes behold before bed—an inane TV show, piles of paperwork, dirty dishes. Those of you who have a hard time sleeping, why not recite this song as you would count sheep:

“I can sleep in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

John Calvin made an interesting observation about this passage. If the infant Jesus was sufficient for Simeon to rest in peace, how much more shall the life, death and resurrection of Jesus give us confidence in life?

The name of this Messiah is never mentioned in this song; yet we are told earlier in the chapter that the name Mary and Joseph give to their son, Jesus, is given by the angel before his conception (Luke 2:21). The Greek name Jesus derives from the Hebrew name Joshua or Yeshua, meaning God helps or God saves. Jesus’ very name equates to salvation. Salvation has a wide range of meanings in Scripture. Salvation refers to well-being, wholeness, peace and contentment. Jesus’ name reminds us that he not only saves us from sin, but he saves us for life.

The Global Language Monitor announced Monday that the word “tebowing” has now officially entered the English lexicon. Tebowing is the act of taking a knee in a posture of prayer, a move made popular by Tim Tebow, quarterback for the Denver Broncos. Tebow has become an internet sensation. People from Afghanistan to Istanbul are striking the Tebow pose. Four students were suspended from a Long Island high school last week for tebowing in the halls between classes.
Tim Tebow has led his once moribund team into first place in their division. He has also become the most talked about and polarizing figure in sports. Some are annoyed by his public displays of faith. Personally, I find him refreshing, given some of the deviants who have come to epitomize professional sports these days. I pray he holds up under all the scrutiny.

When this Heisman Trophy winner played for the University of Florida, Tebow painted various Bible verses on his eye black for each game. Several times he sported Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved by faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” I don’t ever recall this passage on display at a college football game.

I commend Tebow for drawing attention to this seminal passage in Scripture. Salvation is a free gift from God’s inexhaustible storehouse of grace. We do not earn salvation; it’s an act of God’s grace.

After a series of revival meetings, the evangelist Billy Sunday was helping people take down the tent used in the revival. A young man, who had been at the revival the night before, approached Billy Sunday and asked in earnest, “What must I do to be saved?”

“You’re too late,” was all that Billy Sunday said, as he continued working.

The young man was devastated. “Don’t say that, for I desire salvation. I will do anything or go anywhere to obtain it.”

“I can’t help it,” Billy Sunday replied, “You’re too late. Your salvation was completed many years ago and it’s a finished work. All you can do is accept it. You have done nothing and can do nothing to merit salvation. It’s free to all who will receive it.”

I’m assuming there are guests here today; some of you may be new to the Christian faith or this church. You may be exploring what it means to live by faith. Or you may have been in the church for some time, but you are hearing Jesus’ invitation to follow him as if for the first time. The Christian life begins by receiving God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. If you desire to commit yourself to Jesus Christ, I invite you to pray this prayer along with me:

*I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, that you love me; more than I can ever know you love me. I am sorry for the things I have thought, said or done. Christ, have mercy on me. I acknowledge you as Savior for my sin and I endeavor from this day forward to entrust my will to your safe keeping. I thank you that you died on the cross so that I can be forgiven and set free. I now receive this gift of salvation and invite your Spirit to take up residence within me. Amen.*