

My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

1st Sunday after Christmas – Epiphany of our Lord – December 31/January 1, 2006

Sermon Background Study

Luke 2:21-40 (NRSV)

²¹After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

²²When 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”), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵Now 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. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷Guided 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, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then 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 ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶There 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, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

³⁸At 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.

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

Christmas is a season of waiting. The younger we are, the longer the waiting seems to last. But Simeon and Anna have been waiting too – for their whole lives. Now, their Christmas has come.

Today’s passage completes Jesus’ birth narrative which began with Luke’s familiar Christmas story that we read reach Christmas Eve. After all the angels and glorious proclamations at Jesus’ birth, we’d expect the story to go on to even more uplifting and glorious heights. Instead, Luke opens the door to the surprising role of suffering in the coming of God’s kingdom, a suffering grounded in hope and love.

Waiting and expecting

Simeon is old. He is righteous and devout, and pretty much just waiting to die. But he wants to live long enough

Thru the Bible Begins!

We certainly picked a good year to take this journey through the Bible. This weekend is Dec 31/Jan 1 and marks the beginning of the 12-month book-at-a-time reading plan. You should already have a copy of the reading plan and some tips. If not, copies are available at the information booth in the narthex and around the church. The reading plan is also posted online: www.standrewcccl.org.

Each week this year, I’ll be using the upcoming week’s passages as the daily readings on page three of the background study. The reading plan has six readings per week and a few extra days “off” now and then, as there about 25 readings each month. The extra days are for reflection and catching up.

Each week, the Scripture passages that are read during worship and are the basis for the sermon will be drawn from the readings for the week before. For example, next weekend’s Scripture reading is Psalm 1:1-3 (from Day 1 this week) and Genesis 15:1-6 (from Day 6 this week). We will follow this plan all the way through the year, though at certain times, such as Easter, we will read extra season-appropriate passages.

This means that we won’t be using sermon series as much as have in the past. We could say we have a 52-week series lined up. Still, next week will begin a six-week series *Winning At All Costs*. We’ll talk about winning at life, marriage and relationships, family, work, school, and money. All the Scripture passages will be drawn from the reading plan.

Many of us have tried and failed to read all the way through the entire Bible. But by doing this together, we are confident that we will be able to help each other through any difficulties and, most important, that we will grow closer to one another and to God. Please join us!

to see the salvation of Israel. Simeon knew that things were not right. He needed only to look up at the Roman soldiers standing atop the Antonia Fortress to be reminded, for the fortress sat adjacent to the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Israel had suffered for so long. But now, the Holy Spirit assures Simeon that he will live to see the realization of his hope.

One day, on what must have felt a bit like an impulse, Simeon went to the temple. There, he saw a young woman, a girl really, with her husband. They were carrying a newborn into the temple to be consecrated. As soon as Simeon laid eyes on the child, he knew that he could die in peace, exclaiming, "For my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon was not speaking of his personal salvation. Salvation for the Jews had nothing to do with "getting to heaven" or any other path to personal redemption. Instead, the salvation for which Simeon had been waiting was the salvation of Israel and, hence, the world. The child, this Messiah-child, would be the fulfillment of God's promise that Israel would be redeemed from sin and restored to a right relationship with God. In other words, God had made a covenant with Israel and that covenant would be kept by the baby in Mary's arms. And as had been promised to Abraham two millennia before (Genesis 12), all the world would be blessed through Israel. The baby was to be a light to the gentiles every bit as much as to the Jews.

Despite the events surrounding Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph were astounded by the appearance of this old man and what he had to say. But Simeon went on. The baby would create turmoil not peace. Many would speak against him. Jesus would reveal what is really in people's hearts which is, of course, often not very pretty. And, in a statement that surely cut to Mary's heart, Simeon saw suffering ahead, saying to the new mother, "A sword will pierce your own soul as well." It might be all angels and adoration now, but the coming of God's kingdom would exact a high price.

Redemption and Purification¹

Jewish Law prescribed certain rituals after childbirth. First, all male infants were circumcised on the eighth day after birth (verse 21).

Second, as a reminder of the Exodus (when the first born of Egypt died and the Israelites were redeemed out of their slavery), the first child born to a couple was consecrated to the Lord's service. Then, the infant would be redeemed (bought back) at a price of five shekels. Luke notes Jesus' consecration (verse 22 and 23) but makes no mention of Jesus' redemption ritual. Perhaps Luke didn't know all the specifics of Jewish Law and custom. Or, perhaps Luke wants to make the point that Jesus remained consecrated to the Lord, that his parents never redeemed him from the Lord's service.

Purification of the mother was a third ritual. After the birth of a male child, the mother was ceremonially unclean for seven days and then went through a 33 day purification period. This period was twice as long for mothers of female infants. (Don't ask me why!) While she was ritually unclean the mother could not enter the temple nor touch any holy object. After the 40 (or 80) days the mother was to offer to the Lord a lamb and either a pigeon or a turtledove. If the mother could not afford a lamb, she could instead offer two turtledoves or pigeons. Mary can offer only the two birds (verse 24).

Simeon and Anna encounter the infant Jesus when Mary brings him to the temple for his consecration (verse 27).

¹This is drawn from R. Alan Culpepper's commentary on Luke in the New Interpreter's Bible. This commentary set is in the St. Andrew library.

Speaking for God

As Mary and Joseph tried to make sense of what Simeon had said to them, they were approached by an old woman. Anna was eighty-four and had been a widow for about as long as she could remember. Anna had the gift of speaking God's word to the people of God. She was one of God's prophets and never left the temple.

Anna is overcome at the sight of the child. Like Simeon, she understands the meaning of this infant. Anna gives thanks to God and then uses her God-given gift to proclaim this Good News to everyone in the temple who looked forward to the salvation of Israel - which meant everyone who could hear her. In Israel at the time, perhaps the only Jews who did not anxiously await Israel's redemption were those who had made their bed with the Romans, such as the Sadducees and other people of means who were doing quite well under Roman rule.

Doing what is required

Throughout the beginning to his Gospel, Luke has gone to great pains to show us that Jesus and his family carefully and lovingly observed the Jewish Law. This is particularly interesting in that Luke is the only NT writer who is not Jewish. You can't really see this in the English translations, but Luke's opening is even written in the style of the Old Testament.

Many Christians get the idea that Jesus came to oppose the Law and toss it out. But this is a misguided reading of Scripture. Jesus was not only the hope and consolation of Israel, he came to fulfill the Law. As we read through the Bible this year, we'll come to understand this better and see what it means for us.

Thru the Bible Daily Bible Readings

January 1 - 7

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Genesis 1-2; Psalm 1 God creates a good world and creates humans in his image.</p>	<p>Day 2 Genesis 3-5; Psalm 2 The humans rebel against God, doing the one thing God told them not to do, and set in motion tragic consequences.</p>
<p>Day 3 Genesis 6-9; Psalm 3 Things get so bad that God “un-creates” and begins anew with Noah.</p>	<p>Day 4 Genesis 10-11; Psalm 4 As soon as the humans get off the ark things turn dark again. This time, they try to build a tower to the heavens.</p>
<p>Day 5 Genesis 12-14; Psalm 5 God embarks on a new plan to redeem humanity and creation. It will begin with one man, Abraham, and his wife, Sarah.</p>	<p>Day 6 Genesis 15-17; Psalm 6</p>
<p>Day 7 – Reflection</p>	

Sermon Notes

December Book Recommendation

Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible (NRSV)

St. Andrew will be reading and preaching *Thru the Bible* next year. Many of us will be using the new *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible (NRSV)* put together by Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, and others. The *Renovaré* team has tried to combine the best of a study Bible and a devotional Bible in a single volume. The introductory materials and the book introductions are particularly helpful.

We have gotten copies of this Bible at a much reduced price. What a gift idea for Christmas!
Copies are available at the St. Andrew Bookstore: *Inspiration*

Winter Bible Academy starts January 9 – in a week! Class information and registration is on-line at www.standrewccl.org and www.standrewumc.org

Classes include *The Practice of Meditation* (Tuesday evenings with Rev. Kathryn Self), *Introducing the Old Testament* (Monday evenings with Scott Engle), *Confronting the Controversies* (Thursday lunch with Rev. Dough Meyer), *The God Who Saves: Exodus and New Exodus* (available at two times: Monday mornings and Tuesday evenings, with Scott Engle), and *1 Corinthians: By the Grace of God* (Thursday mornings with Frankey Commer)

This would be a great time to take a Bible Academy class. Please join us!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Today's Scripture passage is a good occasion to reflect on the place of ritual in the Church. Christians are all over the place on this. Many Pentecostals and Baptists have stripped virtually all ritual out of their churches. Many Roman Catholics and Orthodox, on the other hand, embrace rituals and liturgy which have been part of their churches for centuries.

What is the place of ritual observance in your own Christian life? Prayer before meals is an example of a ritual practiced each day by some Christians. Do you think of it as a ritual? Why or why not? What are some other examples? Alan Culpepper writes, "Essential to Judaism is the praise of God in all of life. The Jewish Law taught that God was to be honored in one's rising up and lying down, in going out and coming in, in how one dressed and how one ate." The trouble was that such "requirements" could hide a darkened heart. Hypocrisy on the part of some, though, does not diminish the value of the practice.

Culpepper goes on to say, "We meet Christ in the ordinary experiences of life. . . . The challenge to modern Christians, therefore, is to find effective rituals for celebrating the presence of God in the ordinary." How can we do this? Should we? What are some rituals we could practice that would celebrate the goodness of God and of life?