

December 22: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Message: Song of Salvation

Scripture: Luke 2:28-35 (Simeon's song)

Text: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."
-Micah 7:7

Memory Verse: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations." -Luke 2:30-31

Theme: Simeon was a faithful man who was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was sent by God to meet the newborn Messiah. Simeon was overjoyed and sang a song over the child. The salvation that Jesus brings is not only for the Jewish people, but for all Gentiles as well.

Blurb: We're coming up to Christmas now, merely days away. And from this close, we begin to see that the joy of Christmas comes with a dark side. The baby born on Christmas came to bring salvation, but that means He had to die on a cross. This Sunday we'll learn to sing the songs of Christmas not with shallow merriment, but with a thread of lament.

Incorporated Carol: "Go Tell It on the Mountain" *UMH* 251

Opening Song: *Angels from the Realm of Glory Sing* -Sanctify

Welcome: -David

Memory Verse: -David

"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations."
-Luke 2:30-31

Worship Music Set: -Sanctify

Joy

Angels We Have Heard on High

Is He Worthy?

Worship Prayer -Andrew

Serve Moment: -Andrew

Christmas Camp

Christmas Offering

Offering: *O Holy Night* -Sanctify

Baptism: Greta Lily [Rought] - David

Advent Candle & Kid's Time: Candle of Salvation -Andrew

Prayers: - Andrew

Bumper: Songs of Christmas

Message: Songs of Christmas: Song of Salvation

PP#1: *R:* Go, tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere
 Go, tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born!
 3: Down in a lowly manger Our humble Christ was born
 And God sent us salvation That blessed Christmas morn. *R*

Here's a newer Christmas carol that has risen to the rank of classic: *Go, Tell It on the Mountain*. It is an African American Spiritual from about the time of the Civil War. It was then adapted by the civil rights movement a hundred years later. The first verse is about the shepherds watching their flocks, and the second verse is about the angels above them. But today I want to look at the third verse.

Since we're experiencing the songs of Christmas, let's try singing this together, shall we? I think you may know it.

[<i>Sing:</i> R: Go, tell it on the mountain	Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain	That Jesus Christ is born!
3: Down in a lowly manger	Our humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation	That blessed Christmas morn. <i>R</i>]

So many Christmas songs simply tell what happened on that first Christmas, telling the *story* of Jesus' birth, like the shepherds and angels. But this carol, in the third verse, takes it one step more. It sings the *meaning* of Christmas, its significance.

Turn to the Christmas Story in Luke 2. Let's see what's going on. First the uprooted poor couple end up in a stable in the far-off village of Bethlehem. She's in labor and gives birth to a beautiful baby. Nice story. That's through verse 8. Not sure yet what it means. It's just the facts. But then, off in the rolling hills around the town angels appear to the shepherds and announce the significance. We sang about that last week. The Savior for all peoples has been born: He is Christ, the Lord!

Our carol sings this significance. Down in a lowly manger - can you hear the connection the Black slaves made that the Savior was *lowly* and *humble*, came *down*. They got it! God comes to the lowly, especially the oppressed and those considered unimportant. Each word carried great weight: "Our...humble...Christ...was born." And to sing out and declare the significance, the next line pushes through: "And God sent us salvation That blessed Christmas morn."

Songs of Christmas: Song of Salvation. Micah 7:7, "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."

Christmas is this week. We usually look at the Christmas story, which is the first part of Luke chapter 2. But today, just like we jumped to the third verse of the carol to see the significance of Christmas, so we're going to jump to what comes *just after* the usual reading of the Christmas Story, after Luke 2:20, *also* to see the significance of Christmas.

Forty days after Jesus' birth, a man and woman sing a song at the Temple that describes why Christmas is just so amazing. Look at verse 21. On the 8th day after Jesus' birth, according to Jewish custom, Jesus is given His name and circumcised like all Jewish boys. It's included in the Christmas story because it fulfills the Law. Everything about Jesus fulfills the law.

As does the next part, verse 22. Birth involves a lot of blood, and everyone involved becomes unclean because of it. So, according to the law, after 40 days, they must go to the Temple to present themselves to be declared clean again. Verse 22, “When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

Besides the purification required for every birth, there was also a special ritual that was for the first boy born to a family. This goes back to the Exodus, and the plagues of Egypt. The last plague was God calling up His rightful claim on the first born male of every family - the one in whom the family identity and possession resided. God owns all people, you see. All people belong to God. And the Egyptians defied God, so God called up His rightful claim. Usually, you must understand, God graciously, generously, gives back this claim to the family, and lets the oldest male take position and possession in the human family system. But the Jews, to never forget to whom they actually belonged, offered the first born male to God at the temple during the right of purification.

To “buy back” the oldest boy from God, the parents were required to offer a sacrifice in his place. It was usually a lamb, but God’s law had a clause that if that were too expensive for the family, they could offer instead two doves or pigeons. And since we see Joseph offering the birds, this tells us that they were in the very poor category.

Now, it is right here, at this moment, that something amazing happens: a song is sung proclaiming the meaning of Christmas. Verse 25, “Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God”

When the family is at the Temple, out of nowhere comes this man who scoops up their baby and starts singing! I can imagine Mary and Joseph, stopped in their tracks, staring at him wide-eyed and puzzled. I don’t think they would be scared, because every day, all day long, couples would bring their babies into the temple, and it was customary for older people to hang out there and bless the babies. So, he may not have been the first to approach them.

But, we have a brief intro of the man, which probably Mary and Joseph didn’t find out until later in this encounter, or perhaps even after. It doesn’t tell us the normal stuff, like where he lived, his age, marriage status, what he did for a living, who his family were. Instead it give his spiritual description. It does give his name, Simeon, but it calls him just a normal, average guy. He wasn’t a priest or pastor. An regular person. And this is one of the ways this story fits with the rest of the Christmas story.

Here they are in the Temple, in the capital, and the royalty, the country’s leadership, the spiritual hierarchy, the religious leaders, all totally miss what’s going on! The priest who performed the ritual seems to have treated them just like everyone else: didn’t even notice God’s Son right in front of him. All the hustle and bustle carried on like normal, when the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords arrives in *His* capital, and is brought into the Temple that was dedicated to Him. No one notices! Just like back in Bethlehem, 40 days earlier. No one knew about His birth, except when angels announced it to lowly shepherds. A star announced it to foreigners. And here in the temple, God’s Holy Spirit moves an ordinary man to proclaim it at the religious center.

Simeon, an average man living in Jerusalem, is described as “righteous” and “devout.” “Righteous” describes how he treated other people. He treated people with right-ness. He was fair, kind, helpful and generous. This describes his character. Honor. Integrity.

“Devout” describes how he treated God. He was serious in his faith devotion and living for God. He lived by the greatest commandments. He loved God and he loved other people. Devout and righteous. I think this is the greatest description a person could hope for. I want this said of me! That’s what I’m working toward.

Then, it tells us what Simeon was doing. It says that he was waiting for the coming of the promised Messiah. He was watchful, hopeful, anticipating. I think this may be like how we, today, are to be waiting for the *second* coming of Jesus. Well, Simeon was actively and eagerly waiting for the *first* coming of Jesus! This was his focus.

Now the most significant thing it says about Simeon was that the Holy Spirit was upon him. Today, we all have the Holy Spirit on us. We know what it is like to experience God directly in our lives. We have the Holy Spirit moving us, nudging us, shaping us, calling us to holiness. But before Pentecost, it was only given to a select few, to people who had special work to do for God.

You know, if we all have the Holy Spirit now, it must mean that we all have special work to do for God! Better not shirk your work, eh, church!

The special work that God had given Simeon was that the Holy Spirit revealed to Him that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. Now, I don’t know how the Holy Spirit revealed that to him, but evidently, somehow, he knew.

And on this day, the Holy Spirit also compelled him to go to the Temple. Evidently he felt called to be there, and so I would guess he was anxiously watching and waiting, looking closely at each person, perhaps going to each baby being brought in that day.

And when he saw Mary and Joseph with their baby, something inside of him exploded! He erupted over to them, wide-eyed and intense. I imagine his hands shaking as he reached out for the baby. Now, I stutter when I’m excited, so I imagine Simeon stammering and talking in quick, garbled words. And I bet Mary and Joseph sensed God was doing something there, and helped him a bit by putting Jesus into his arms. And at that moment, the Holy Spirit takes over. Simeon’s incoherent babbling becomes clear, and Simeon sings!

So, what shocked Mary and Joseph was not *that* Simeon approached them or wanted to hold their baby, but rather it was *the song* he sang over their baby. You see, people would normally bless *the baby*, praying for him: for health, to grow up strong, a good wife and family, wealth, long life. But Simeon proclaims about God!

And here is one of the key songs of Christmas. Verse 28, “Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’”

Simeon praises God—in singing—proclaiming that God has fulfilled His promise that Simeon would see the face of the Messiah before he died. Now Simeon can die in peace. Peace? Not just because the promise is fulfilled, but also because God had brought the solution to death. Death is no longer scary. It is now safe. Simeon holds the conqueror of death! He can die in peace. This is what Christmas was all about: the coming of salvation! It’s for all nations! A Light to the Gentiles, the glory of Israel. Such amazing news! Simeon’s song joins the songs sung by the heavenly hosts!

Of course, as verse 33 says, Jesus’ parents were moved by this amazing song! “The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about Him.” How did this man know all this about their

son? It was a God thing! Again!

Simeon then blessed the parents, and then God's Spirit brought a grim and chilling revelation to Simeon. Verse 34, "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'"

Oh my goodness, their breath just caught in their throats! Their child, the Messiah, will cause many Jews to stumble, He would become a stumbling block for many. Others will rise up and join Him, and be saved. He brings peace, but as the Messiah He will divide people. Many will speak against Him. We know this came true, don't we! He was rejected! Condemned! And so many missed that He was the Messiah. Paul, 60 years later, reflects that the Gospel is foolishness, a stumbling block, to the self-righteous. It is good news that the Savior has come, but His salvation brings a wake of stumbling, condemnation, and betrayal by the very people He came to deliver. Simeon looked into Mary's face, and knew that one day she would look into the face of her dead Son.

Salvation had come, but through the anointing of by the Holy Spirit, Simeon also saw into the deep sadness and terrible cost of that salvation.

You know, Christians aren't always happy. We have the Holy Spirit, like Simeon, and that gives us inner joy and peace. But as we are linked with God, we also come to realize the great grief and suffering of our God. Our hearts, joined with God's, break for the lost. Our souls weep for those who walk away, just as our God weeps. We share in God's joy, but we also share in His sadness.

Christmas is about joy, but that joy is laced with sorrow. He was to be a suffering servant, a Messiah who takes on Himself the sin of the world.

And I think this is why Simeon sings. The proclamation that the Messiah had arrived, he could have done in words alone. But Christmas is not that simple. This baby came to die. This interweaving of joy and sorrow is too deep for words, too complicated, to jumbled. Only a song could convey the mixture of joy and sadness. Simeon had to sing, because the Holy Spirit touched his mind, his heart, and his body, it was a full body experience, and it was experiencing a wide array of emotions.

I think this is why the African American spiritual is a good way to sing a Christmas carol. Spirituals are a way to keep many feelings together, happiness and hopefulness, sung from within the bonds of slavery and pain. Freedom comes at a cost, a terrible cost. Think of the Civil War. Think of Jesus dying on the cross. Yes, freedom is just so wonderful, but it is also just so painful.

Let's go back to this carol, one more time. Normally, we sing it happily, fast and bouncy. But a Spiritual has within it the ability to express joy *and* sorrow, salvation *and* grief. This time, let's find that complexity in this song. Let's sing it a bit slower, with our minds envisioning the cross as our eyes look into the eyes of the Baby. Perhaps the mountain in this song could be the hill of Calvary.

We've heard the song of Simeon, the song of salvation. Salvation has come! We are made whole! But it comes at the greatest cost to the God who loves us so. Let's sing the carol of salvation:

[Sing: R: Go, tell it on the mountain	Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain	That Jesus Christ is born!
3: Down in a lowly manger	Our humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation	That blessed Christmas morn. R]

Amen.

Closing Song: *O Come, All Ye Faithful* -Sanctify

Memory Verse: -David

“For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.”
-Luke 2:30-31

Announcements: - David

Christmas Camp

Christmas Eve services: 4:30p and 11:30p

No Wednesday evening programming - Christmas Day!

Check mailboxes - Christmas cards in mailbox

Benediction: - David