

First Sunday in Christmas

We need to ask ourselves, what is so important about this encounter that Luke records in his gospel this day, one week after we ended Advent and moved into Christmas celebrating the birthday of Jesus. That Sunday was enough to give you liturgical whip lash—

Today, we are in the First Sunday of Christmas, just after “ eight days” after Jesus’ birth. Here are two, relatively young parents, Mary and Joseph bringing their new born son to the Temple in Jerusalem. They are there to fulfill the religious law that states **all** first born males be designated as **holy** and a sacrifice given on their behalf (Lev. 12:2-8). Joseph and Mary, being poor bring the minimum...two turtle doves.

Turn for a moment and look at the cover of our bulletin. What strikes you about this picture...that makes it a little unusual?

There is a drawing of two elderly *people* focusing their love and attention on the one we know to be Jesus. They recognized him as the promised one they have been waiting for- so- long- a -time! The new born baby Jesus is being held by and elderly man, with a look of **love** on his face and an equally old woman, looking on with **joy**. This is a scene of utter **peace**. This artist’s rendering shows faithfulness of two people who lived for years in Occupied Israel in deep **hope** that the “consolation of Israel,” the promised one would come in their life time. And, He did! The Advent themes are fulfilled! Love, Joy, Peace, Hope.

Simeon was considered a wise and just man and had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would live to see the one who would be the “consolation of Israel”.

Simeon takes the baby Jesus in his arms and praises God...and saying those words that have become for us the Canticle: “Song of Simeon”

*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
your word has been fulfilled.....*

*a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory your people Israel.*

Luke writes that the parents were amazed at what Simeon had said.

But he is not done!

Simeon turns to the young couple and blesses them and then says to Mary that her child is destined for the “falling and the rising of many” and will be opposed, regardless of who he really is!

One writer points out that the term **falling and rising**, is the reverse for how we usually see the personal and political trajectory. It is the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, the Rise and fall of so many human empires and enterprises—from businesses to nations. And then there are individuals who seem to be rising “stars” and then fall from grace.

But here, the prophetic statement is that the “falling” comes first in the big picture of this new faith. It came not only through the life and death of Jesus’ ministry among people but in his “rising!” His presence never leaves and affirms the claim—that the Holy Spirit embraces us and is there within as well, as it was from the very beginning of time. God’s spirit had never left us....

Not unlike Anna and Simeon, in these “in-between-days,” we are called to be hopeful, and never give up. For the love of Jesus the Christ will prevail and that there will be joy, but we are not there yet!

Then Simeon tells Mary that a “sword will pierce your own heart/soul too.”

At first we might see this prophecy for what we know will happen to Jesus, and pain Mary will know seeing her son crucified. But perhaps Simeon is also predicting the way in which will Jesus form a new, extended family for all his followers. It **would** be hard to raise a child and then have them move out of from home to create a family of friends and say that they are as important as his birth family. It could feel like rejection at first.

In some ways, most children grow up and move on and no longer depend on their families to guide them. But, Jesus takes this a step further. Mary will hear directly from Jesus that he has brothers and sisters outside of his birth family and they too are as beloved. This will be an embracing of the whole family of human kind....

Here is a love that knows NO boundaries —that goes out to all peoples and becomes a “light to the Gentiles” (even as Abraham was promised by God

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to be the ancestor of a multitude of nations)..this Emmanuel is for all peoples. Simeon is warning them that Jesus will go out into the world to create something new and this will cause opposition and therefore divisions.

So, a few days after Jesus birth, a picture that is being painted that foretells a challenging and difficult path that this infant will take when he matures and that he will call others to come and join him on this journey of dangerous love for all.

Anna, the prophetess we are told will proclaim this new born's mission to all who sought the redemption of Israel.

In many ways, this encounter gives us a reminder about the very special treasure we have in our lives, be they nieces/nephews; sons/daughters, grandchildren and God children...all children....

Kahlil Gibran in his book, *The Prophet*, has a few verses "On children"

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
they come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

That is not an easy message to hear while you now hold your 8 days child nor your child of 20, 30, 40 or 50!

But Gibran goes on to write that the parents are like **bows** from which their children are like **arrows** that got forth. And even as the **Divine loves the arrow that flies, so he loves the bow that is stable.** And Mary and Joseph provide a home for Jesus so that he becomes "strong and grows in wisdom."

So today, in this on going in-between-time, we too can take comfort in knowing that God does fulfill promises. We too have faced the challenges of children, of aging, and the pain of separation from those we love. We have known our dearest, even the young ones leaving us too early and our parents and partners too soon as well! Yet, like the last Sunday in Advent, with its theme of love, we are reminded that this LOVE is the bridge

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between all peoples, those still with us **here** and those gone before us and yet somehow still part of us.

Hold fast to that knowledge that we are called to love one another
giving thanks for those like Nancy who gave so much as we hold up all who are in our hearts forever and caring for all children

As the cover of our leaflet reminds us: New Year's is a time of remembering our past and looking forward to the birth of a New Year with Hope.

Let us continue together to follow the path of love set before us with Christ's light as our guide!