

January 3, 2020 – At-Home/email Worship

A blessed new calendar year to you, and welcome to worship for our second Sunday of Christmas ☺ Today we focus our learning and scripture study on the Gospel of Luke, and the narrative of Simeon – and it is my hope that we will be able to land this scripture in such a way that you can see your own faith journey, and indeed your own life journey in Simeon's words. We will also sing some of our favourite, familiar Christmas hymns. Thank-you for joining us to celebrate the life of our saviour, Jesus ☺

Our November 2020 Lamplighter indicated an in-person Annual General Meeting (AGM) tentatively scheduled for January 31st, in the sanctuary following worship. With our current provincial lockdown, which lasts until January 23rd, it may be unlikely that we will have the AGM in-person. Church council will meet this Wednesday January 6th, so please stay tuned for updates on our AGM.

This Sunday, your worship service is available to you:

- in print copy (if you prefer to receive it this way, please call Bonnie Scott at the church office, 519-653-4721),
- As an online service you can go through at your leisure, with music links provided via our St Peter's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdxKUbGybZj4PN_R36KPeiw/videos), or
- As a live, gathering of people for worship on the Zoom video/audio conferencing platform.

We are still experimenting on Heide's Zoom service for live online worship. This allows us to gather together for worship from our respective homes. We want to ensure this is the best package for our use before the church invests in our own Zoom subscription. **You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of the Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply):**

1 587 328 1099 or
 1 647 374 4685 or
 1 647 558 0588 or
 1 778 907 2071 or
 1 204 272 7920 or
 1 438 809 7799

Use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked.

Heide Emrich is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting for Sunday Worship

January 3, 2021 10:00 AM.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88434467314?pwd=NGc4Vi9kUzMrcW5TSjBEV2oyVExuQT09>

Meeting ID: 884 3446 7314

Passcode: 670919

With the provincial lockdown, in-home visits are being avoided. If you need a phone call or distanced outdoor visit, please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721 ... The church office is closed, but walking visits, brief front porch/screen door visits, video phone visits or regular phone visits remain available ☺ Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if I may be of help or support in these times!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

A Word from Lorre:

I want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who has generously allowed the use of your photographs in the making of our videos for use in our online worship services. I will still take any scenery photos you'd like to send along to be included in future videos. Full credit will of course be given. And also I want to thank everyone who has sent words of appreciation for the efforts of Brad

and his guest singers to make our worship the best it can be. We have all learned quite a few new tech skills throughout 2020 and each video gets better than the ones that came before. Thank you for bearing with us and for your words of encouragement. God bless you all during this holy season.
—Lorre Calder

Click for land acknowledgement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart, centre yourself for worship.

Gathering Hymn: Love Has Come #292

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9Xw4KrnCzQ&t>

Text Ken Bible; Music F. Seguin; Tune Un Flambeau; © 1996, 1997 LNWhymns.com; LNWhymns.com; Administrators: Music Services, Inc.; Used by Permission. CCLI License # 11098609

Greeting:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: All powerful God, you give us mortal and eternal life, granting the gift of unity with Jesus in mortal life to quench all fears of death. Through Jesus you restore all people onto yourself, regardless of tradition. Help us to trust in your generosity and power through Jesus; help us to have confidence in the restoration of which we are assured: in, with and through Christ. Amen.

The Lesson: Galatians 4:4-7

But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, “Papa! Father!” Doesn’t that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you’re also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

(The Message Translation)

Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation: Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child ELW #297

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59JlsulUmcl>

Text African American Traditional; Music African American Traditional; Contributor: Jeffrey Radford; arr. Bradley Moggach
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The Holy Gospel according to Luke 2:22-35

C: Glory to you O Lord.

Then when the days stipulated by Moses for purification were complete, they took him up to Jerusalem to offer him to God as commanded in God’s Law: “Every male who opens the womb shall be a holy offering to God,” and also to sacrifice the “pair of doves or two young pigeons” prescribed in God’s Law.

In Jerusalem at the time, there was a man, Simeon by name, a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would see the Messiah of God before he died. Led by the Spirit, he entered the Temple. As the parents of the child Jesus brought him in to carry out the rituals of the Law, Simeon took him into his arms and blessed God:

God, you can now release your servant;
release me in peace as you promised.
With my own eyes I’ve seen your salvation;
it’s now out in the open for everyone to see:
A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations,
and of glory for your people Israel.

Jesus' father and mother were speechless with surprise at these words. Simeon went on to bless them, and said to Mary his mother,

This child marks both the failure and
the recovery of many in Israel,
A figure misunderstood and contradicted—
the pain of a sword-thrust through you—
But the rejection will force honesty,
as God reveals who they really are. (The Message Translation)

C: Praise to you, O Christ.*

Sermon:

(The link for the live recording of the sermon will be sent out following our Zoom service.)

As a child, learning how to swim, I remember my swimming teacher standing just about where I would have to paddle for a few strokes to reach him. He would encourage me to let go of the wall and swim those few strokes to him. Once I let go of the wall and began swimming, he would take a few steps back, thereby making me swim a little more. Eventually, I could swim a lap, then laps upon laps, then up to and even more than a mile. But it is always easier to go the distance when one begins in small increments, building up one's confidence for the distance that lies ahead. So, even to this day, when I go to swim at the pool, I tell myself, just a few laps, finding ways to motivate myself in small increments, so that eventually, I have swum a mile or more.

It is easier to go the distance in small increments.

So it is for us ... Christmas celebrations, different though they were from non-COVID years, gave us something to look forward to, something to work towards figuring out ... and now we face a whole year – maybe more, likely more – of living with some of our current realities ... and if we think about the whole journey maybe we might just give up ... so figuring out our small increments is a good way to approach a long journey that may feel arduous at the start of a new year. Welcome, 2021 ☺

Today's gospel reading provides us with one such small increment: in the life of Jesus, and the life of a faithful man named Simeon ... but it is one of those small increments that helps us to travel the long journey ... interesting sidebar: in all the gospels, this account only occurs in the Gospel of Luke – the telling of Jesus' circumcision ceremony, a Jewish practice seen as a covenantal commitment of the people of Israel to their God.

So, following the Jewish customs, Jesus is taken to Jerusalem to have this purification or commitment surgery done, and there his path intersects with Simeon. The gospel of Luke says: Simeon was "a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would see the Messiah of God before he died. Led by the Spirit, he entered the Temple."

This is where things begin to get a bit unusual ... because as Jesus' earthly parents bring Jesus into the temple for the ritual of circumcision to be done, Simeon gathers up the eight-day-old baby into his arms and blesses him ... his blessing basically has three parts – and to each part, I have a question for you:

- First he says basically he is ready to die now! "release me in peace" ... and I wonder how many of us can honestly express the sentiment Simeon expresses: I am ready now?
- Second, Simeon identifies that he has witnessed his salvation ... bearing in mind, Simeon doesn't have to his credit the end story of Jesus life of ministry, death on the cross, resurrection and ascension. All he has is an 8-day old baby ... but based on THAT witness, Simeon identifies that he has witnessed and KNOWS he has witnessed his salvation ... and I wonder how many of us can honestly claim that in Jesus, we witness a salvation that makes us ready to die?
- Finally, in his blessing of God (the 8 day old baby version), Simeon identifies the light who has come not only to the people of God (Israel in his context), but to all people, which he captures in the phrase

“non-Jewish nations” ... and to this I wonder how many of us can claim THAT faith, the faith of knowing that God has come not only to those of the tradition WE know: Christianity, but to ALL people??

When we put the things Simeon says into this context that relates to our own lives, how do we answer??

- Are you ready to die because you know you have eternal life in Jesus? (if you are ready, the possibility of your own COVID death ought not scare you)
- Are you confident in the salvation we bear witness to in Jesus? Or, put another way, do you believe truly in all we claim Jesus has done for us: dying for our sins, assuring us of life everlasting? And do you believe ENOUGH that you are ready to die now, to be released into peace?
- And do you believe that the light of Jesus is for all people, not just those of our tradition? (a corollary or follow up question to this might be, therefore do you believe that Jesus has brought everlasting life to ALL? Because if you do, then the possibility of anyone else's COVID death ought not scare you)

Hmmm, easier said (or asked) than done eh?? ☺

Let's put the context back in Simeon's court ... now he has gone and said these strange blessings of God (the eight day old baby), and Jesus's parents are, per gospel of Luke: speechless with surprise.

I can just see the memes that would go with this:

- Say what?
- Hey mister, don't be touching my baby.
- (and in our context today) don't be touching my baby with your COVIDy hands!

Simeon does not ignore their surprise! In fact, he offers a three part blessing to them (or Mary) also – and in this blessing as well, there are questions for our context:

- This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel ... Simeon identifies that Jesus will demonstrate not only the failure of the Israelites, so called faithful and traditional people of God, but Jesus will also mark their recovery ... Can we say the same? Has Jesus in today's context demonstrated our failure and provided a pivot point for recovery? I can illustrate what I mean by failure with a little more questioning ... are we being faithful and traditional people of God in maintaining a church building, this huge square footage of winter heated space, while so many in our community experience homelessness and inadequate shelter? Might we mark a recovery of our faithfulness by allowing the homeless Jesus to lay in our manger?? In our building? Perhaps repurposed in some way??
- Secondly, Simeon says of Jesus “A figure misunderstood and contradicted—the pain of a sword-thrust through you—” ... have we understood Jesus and do we do what he has asked of us? Love each other (not just the each other that we like or who are like us, but all others) the way Jesus has loved us? Or have we contradicted Jesus' message, piercing him with a sword again??
- Finally, Simeon says of Jesus: “But the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are.” ... if we are branches of the tree, but bear no fruit, are we really branches? If we say we are Christians, but fail to live by Jesus' examples and teachings, when circumstances rip our traditions away, who does God reveal us to be? Christians or traditionalists??

You see, we each have one up on Simeon ... his witness story occurs in chapter 2 of the Gospel of Luke ... but we KNOW the end story ... and we know the steps in between ... we know how Jesus did NOT turn his back on those all of society ostracized ... the blind, the crippled, the lepers, the women of ill-repute and menstrual problems, the tax collectors ... in our context, who are the ostracized? Those who pitch tents on our river banks in the winter, and access the 8.30 am to 4.30 pm warming centre at 150 Main Street, only to be turned back out into the freezing night ... those who seek solace through a needle in their flesh, or drink, or whatever they happen to be smoking ... those whose mental health makes working impossible ...

We KNOW the end story ... of Jesus' betrayal by his disciples, yet Jesus' faithfulness in coming back to walk with them, even when they do not recognize him, or will not believe ... We know his body was broken for us, we know his blood was shed for us.

So as we head towards Epiphany this coming Wednesday, I encourage you to introspect a little ... reflect on your own heart:

- Are you ready to die today, because you know Jesus has claimed you, precious child of God?
- Are you ready to restore the good news of an overflowing, non-judgmental love in the place where old buildings and hypocrisies currently stand?
- Are you ready for God to reveal who you really are: a child of God, an heir, with complete access to the Kingdom of God?

If your answers are yes, then indeed we can sing:

We first saw Jesus a baby in a crib.
This same Lord Jesus today has come to live
In our world, he is present, in neighbours we see
Our Jesus is with us, and ever sets us free.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: All Earth is Hopeful #266

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEQsD6X35jY&feature=em-share_video_user

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Prayers of the People

In the spirit of this season let us now confidently ask our God for those things we need and seek:

For ourselves as we participate in this Christmas as beloved children, holding all of our griefs and losses.
God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For our families and friends, that they may be sources of constant help and support. God, hear our prayer.
And in your mercy, answer.

For all the people we have loved who have died, that the love that never dies may sustain us. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For our family and friends, that you may bless them with love, peace, and joy. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For peace throughout the world as proclaimed by the Christmas Angels on that faraway hillside. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

For greater understanding of the lessons of love and grace as taught by Jesus your Christ. God, hear our prayer. *And in your mercy, answer.*

God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Christmas, the blessing we seek, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Let us share the peace of Christ:

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation.

You are invited you to prepare your table with bread and wine, or crackers and juice, whatever is available to you, so that you may participate in the meal. All are welcome.

Meal:

Click here if you are accessing YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RnRfJoYmjs>

Prayer after Communion.

Emmanuel, God with us,
 you grace us with life and breath
 and give us bread for the journey.
 Send us out in service to this world that you love,
 telling the amazing news of your coming
 to be Savior and Lord of all.
 Amen.

Sending Hymn: #267 Joy to the World (No link for this carol)

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
 Let earth receive her King;
 Let every heart prepare him room,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven and nature sing,
 And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
 Let all their songs employ,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrows grow,
 Nor thorns infest the ground;
 He comes to make His blessings flow
 Far as the curse is found,
 Far as the curse is found,
 Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
 And makes the nations prove
 The glories of His righteousness,
 And wonders of His love,
 And wonders of His love,
 And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.
 May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.
 May God look upon us with favor
 and give us ☩ peace.
 Amen.

Dismissal: Go with Jesus who is in our midst. *Thanks be to God.*

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