

Devotions for the Week of December 24, 2017

LARGE-PRINT

4th Sunday of Advent

Christmas Eve

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, December 24, 2017 - MORNING

4th Sunday of Advent

Read Luke 2: 1-40.

Read of that first Christmas night, when the angels came and announced the birth of a Savior, the Lord. The shepherds hurried off and found Mary, Joseph, and the Christ child, and *“they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. The Bible tells us that “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”*

When the time for purification rites came, Mary and Joseph take the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. According to Leviticus, *“Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord,”* by offering a sacrifice of a lamb, or if one could not afford a lamb, two turtledoves or two young pigeons. The animal[s] would be offered as a symbol of recognition that all life comes from God.

It is there they are welcomed by the righteous and devout Simeon and the prophet Anna. Simeon, in seeing the Christ-child, was prompted by the Holy Spirit, and heard the *“sweet, not far-off hymn That hails the new creation.”* Simeon heard *“the music ringing and it [found] an echo in [his] soul.”* Simeon lifted his voice in song and praised God, *“For my eyes have seen your salvation.”* The Bible tells us that Mary *“marveled at what was said about [Jesus].”*

I love the song, “*Mary Did You Know.*” Mary certainly could not have completely understood what awaited her and her child, what Jesus would have to go through to bring about the salvation of the world. But the prophet’s words, the angel, the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon and Anna, and others, spoke to her and hinted of the future this Christ-child would hold, what He would mean to Israel and to all nations.

I cannot imagine what she must have felt, how scared she must have been, how often she must have fell to her knees and prayed for strength and understanding, for God to calm her fears and give her courage, or how she must have felt to be so loved and held up by God that God would choose her to bring His Son into the world.

I don’t believe anyone says it better than Mark Lowry and the lyrics he wrote. Deb and I had the privilege of seeing Lowry in concert and heard him sing “*Mary Did You Know.*” Afterwards, he humbly commented, “*I still can’t believe God gave me that song.*” Take time today to reflect on the words.

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will one day walk on water?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will save our sons and daughters?*

*Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you.*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will give sight to a blind man?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy
will calm a storm with his hand?*

*Did you know that your baby boy
has walked where angels trod?*

*And when you kiss your little baby,
you have kissed the face of God.*

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear
and the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak,
the praises of the lamb.*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy
will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.*



Sunday, December 24, 2017 – EVENING

Christmas Eve

Read Luke 2: 1-20.

Tonight, Christmas Eve, we light the candle at the center of the Advent Wreath, the Christ Candle. We remember that the “*light of the world*” arrived, Christ was born in a manger.

Take time today to read the Christmas story. Read it aloud

to your children, with your spouse. Reflect on that night, two thousand years ago, the “*Prince of Peace*” was born...the night the greatest gift ever conceived came to us and was found by the shepherds in the humblest of places.



Monday, December 25, 2017 – CHRISTMAS DAY!

Take time today, tonight, this Christmas Day, to sit with Christ, to reach out and up to God in prayer. Make room for the King! Invite Him in. Just get quiet for a half-hour and spend time with Him.

Merry Christmas and Peace to All on Earth!

Tuesday, December 26, 2017

Read Luke 2: 22-40.

This week, let's take a look at Simeon, perhaps the first person after that “*Night of Nights*” that Christ was born to put their faith in the Savior and be saved. After seeing Jesus,

Simeon says to God that he can now depart this world in peace, “*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*” Take a moment and pray for those who, unlike Simeon, have not opened their eyes to the Savior, have not put their faith in Christ.

Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and sings, “*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.*”

Remember, it had been revealed to Simeon, years before, by the Holy Spirit, that before he died, he would see the “*Lord’s Messiah.*”

God can be trusted to keep His promises, and God does keep His promise to Simeon. He is now holding God’s Son, the Messiah, the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and spoken of by the prophets for thousands of years. Can you imagine?

Experience that moment as if Simeon were speaking, remembering:

I waited...and waited...I knew that God would stay true to His promise...God had revealed to me years and years ago that I would not die until I had seen the Lord. What a privilege. What an honor. Me...who am I that God would bestow upon me such an honor?

I tried to be devout...tried to live a righteous life...and I lived with anticipation believing in the prophecies of old...believing God would provide a Savior, a Messiah...God would send the promised One.

When Mary and Joseph came into the Temple compound that day to present the baby Jesus, I was there. Immediately, I knew.

I took the child in my arms and I knew I was holding the Son of God...I was holding the Savior...the promise spoken by the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah...the Christ!

I could hold it in no longer...I had to sing, to shout, to praise God, "I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel."

Who am I that God would bestow upon me such an honor, that I would hold in my arms the Messiah?

I held Him in my arms.

You and I may not be able to hold the Christ child in our arms, but He holds us in His...We may not be able to hold His hand in ours like Simeon, but we can hold Him in our heart. Open your heart to Him tonight...imagine holding the infant Christ...invite Christ into your life and your Christmas.

Wednesday, December 27, 2017

Read Luke 2:22-40; Isaiah 9:1-7; Matthew 4:12-17; and John 1:4-9; 8:12; 12:36.

Simeon tells Mary and Joseph that Jesus would be "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*" Echoing Zechariah's song, "*Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness.*" Echoing the prophet Isaiah, "*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light...a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.*" Jesus would later echo the same, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will*

have the light of life.”

Jesus is the light...ready to shine His light into the darkness...into the darkness of humanity...the darkness of our world...the darkness in our lives. When we invite Jesus into our hearts, He shines His light...showing us those areas we must deal with and bring in line with His Word. When we invite Jesus into our hearts, He shines His light and opens our eyes to the injustice, heartache, pain around us...to the immorality and evil that exists, so we may stay clear and fight against it. When we invite Jesus into our hearts, He shines His light into the dark times and issues of our lives...bringing hope in the midst of heartache, joy in the midst of sorrow, healing in the midst of sickness, and new life in the midst of despair.

What area of your life do you need the light of Christ to shine? Ask Christ to shine His light into that area tonight? Who do you know who is “*walk[ing] in darkness*” and has yet to see the “*great light*” of Christ, who does not know that the “*light of heaven [has broken] upon us?*” Who can you tell about the light of Christ this Christmas?

Thursday, December 28, 2017

Read Luke 2: 22-40; Isaiah 8:14; Hosea 14:9; and I Peter 2: 4-12.

Simeon also tells Mary and Joseph that “*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.*” Not everyone will accept Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon, 1862 sermon, “*No Room for Christ in the Inn,*” writes, “*Have you room for Him? Never mind what the past has been; he can forget and forgive. It matters not what even the present state may be if you mourn it. If you have but*

room for Christ, he will come and be your guest. Do not say, I pray you, 'I hope I shall have room for him'; the time is come that he shall be born; Mary cannot wait months and years. Oh! Sinner, if you have room for him let him be born in your heart today."

Have you made room for Him this Christmas, amidst the presents, the glitter, the family gatherings, the cooking, the decorating? Are you one who will "rise" in 2018 with Christ, having surrendered your heart, your life, fully to Him? Are there those you know who have rejected His message, His invitation? Can you reach out to them this Christmas, this New Year? Allow these questions to lead your time of prayer as you sit with Him tonight.

Friday, December 29, 2017

Read John 3:16; Romans 10: 9-10; I John 1: 1-12; Romans 6:23; and 2 Timothy 1:9.

Take time to reflect on God's greatest gift, His Son, Jesus Christ, and may the knowledge that His gift is for you, make you want to sing.

Saturday, December 30, 2017

Read Luke 2: 22-40; Luke 12: 49-53; John 1: 1-18; and Acts 2: 1-41.

We cannot celebrate Christmas, remember the Christ-child, without also remembering that the Christ-child grew up and became a man, teaching and healing many. We cannot celebrate Christmas and just think of a tiny baby laying in a manger. We must also remember the man who, out of love for you and I, went to the cross, had nails hammered through His hands and feet, and hung between earth and sky, that you and I might have

eternal life, forgiveness, grace...a relationship with our Heavenly Father. As someone once wrote, *“Jesus chose to go through hell for you, rather than spend an eternity without you.”*

Simeon continues by telling Mary that the child, Jesus, will lead to a *“sword”* piercing her own soul...Nowhere is this depicted better than in *“The Passion of the Christ,”* when Christ falls, carrying His cross, and we see Mary, remembering him as a small child falling and scraping His knee, and she runs to Him.

Mary must have had her heart ripped open watching her son die. She must have hurt deeply for Him and prayed that there could be another way that humankind could be redeemed. It is no wonder many lift her up so highly for she also offered her son as a sacrifice...she also suffered so we might be forgiven.

Simeon saw the shadow of the cross hanging over the tender child he held and His mother, Mary. So many would reject her son...so many would turn away...and His own people would crucify Him. Yet, Mary, and Jesus, did not turn back.

Reflect on the life of Christ...from His humble birth to His amazing sacrifice for you...Reflect on the sacrifice of Mary, His mother...recognize that the manger, Christmas, must be overshadowed by the cross and resurrection, Easter. We cannot have one without the other...that is the mystery of faith. Let it *“pierce your heart”* that *“Christ is born, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”*

**DON'T FORGET:
INVITE SOMEONE TO CHURCH TOMORROW!**