

Seeing Salvation
Advent 5; Senses of Christmas Series
Menno Mennonite Church
December 29, 2019

Purpose: To celebrate the revelation of Emmanuel

Message: As people of hope, we are invited to declare the coming of God's presence and example in the world

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40 (I Will read), Isaiah 61:10- 62:3 (please read), Psalm 148, Galatians 4:4-7

Synopsis: This is a time celebration, a time to declare the coming of the shining face of God in the form of the Christ child. Most of the time, we would just as soon stay silent about what is going on within our faith. In a time where hope and revelation is so desperately needed, we are challenged to name the wonders that we have seen in the coming of Emmanuel. We owe it to ourselves, to our community, to our world to declare all the God with us has brought into the world as an opportunity to celebrate. We are invited to share our visions of God with us where and when we can.

Luke 2:22-40 ²² When 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"), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." ²⁵ Now 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. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then 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 ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too." ³⁶ There 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, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At 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. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

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There is a phenomena we are all acquainted with when we are behind the wheel. After a little while of behind the wheel, our brains go into cruise control. We have familiar roads with not all that much happening on them there you have it. The particulars of who is where and what might be coming on our left takes a bit of a less priority in our task of the driving, as our brains go into visual filter mode, altering us, hopefully, to the important bits of information when it comes up, but otherwise allowing our focus to be on the road without necessarily perceiving each and every jot and jolt of the way. I am sure it is common in these parts. We are especially prone to this where long distance and little traffic conspire for great views, and a pallet for the mind to just wonder against. Living out in the country side in Saskatchewan there was potash mine that heralded it was soon time to turn off the highway toward Drake, with its tell-tale piles of tailings about 10 kilometers before you got to Drake. More than once I arrived at its unmistakable outline without knowing, really, how it was it had really happened, more than a bit surprised to be there. All that's left is to shake ourselves awake, and give a short prayer of thanks that non of the shadows in the ditches turned out to be moose or deer this time.

Most of the time, this isn't just how we drive; it's how we live. We only see what we are looking for. We go through life without much careful attention to the moment or what is going on in between the major landmarks of our navigation. We wake up and do things different perhaps when something like Christmas comes along, but then quickly go back to the way things normally are. We have come again through the season; we have decked the halls, made our plans and wrapped our gifts. All of our anticipations are now well realized; we have supped our Christmas dinners, sang our favorite carols, and gotten the one's whose tune is just so common that it firmly lodged in your head for at least a week more. But beyond that that is pretty much it. Our focus moves as things return back to the ordinary, and we quickly are lulled back into our normal filtered existence until the next big deal comes on.

Within the church we are no different. We hear these same stories and part of their wonder are their familiar wording, solid stability of the happening of so many years ago. We tell the story, as we should, as we must. Christmas would not be Christmas without it. There is something comforting in the cadence, the twists and turns of the extraordinary birth of the extraordinary child. I think we end up listening to the story as much to hear the melody of the songs with which we are well acquainted as much as we are attempting to capture the notions of

what it might have been to be in attendance on such a holy night when God came and moved into the neighborhood once and for all. These words are the common, ordinary soundtrack of our holiday, but lacking much by way of surprise, intrigue, or revelation for the familiar, especially in relation to the newness that awaits us at home snuggled in stockings, tucked away under the tree.

Even as we move beyond from the extra ordinary stories of angels being heard on high, in a little town of Bethlehem on a silent, Holy night, those stories with which we live and breathe, we are invited to take another look. We are given a glimpse of the very normal goings of devout, observant parents and their first child. Going to the temple to dedicate your first born is the law; its what you did to be purified and to commend the life back to God. These were not particularly Holy acts, or anything specially arranged for this peculiar child of theirs with the odd visitor list; merely the right and proper thing to do within the normal course of events. Yet they become pieces of the ongoing revelation of the full importance of the child that they were caring for. All it took were the people with the right vision to see it.

Simeon and Anna, these prophets, are the very embodiment of the people of Israel at their best; engaged in prayer and worship, on the lookout for what God is going in the world. God's blessing comes in the form of a single child, helpless and harmless, in a single moment decades in the making, a moment so mundane as to easily have gone unnoticed. But they were looking for what God was going to do, trusting that God would, in time, come near and change everything. In their waiting, they were given the eyes to see what was going on. They were invited by the spirit to see and declare God's work. Theirs is a vision born of knowledge of the God who has come near, who is near, for whom is watched out for. They anticipate it, hopped for it, and knew it when they saw it

So might it be with us. Immanuel has come, and we are invited to new sight, sight that holds no promise as impossible, no hope as beyond holding; that sees beyond pragmatism and practicality but see the possibility of love in even the unlovely. God has come in the form of a child embodying God's love; how can we look at the world with the same sight again?

I wonder: what would it mean for us to take on new sight, and recognize the newborn baby in the Christmas manger as "the one who reveals God's dream for this world"? What if we would recognize more clearly the face of Christ not only in the midst of the glitz and glamour of the Christmas season, of the sainted baby in the manger, but also in the face of the homeless person we pass on the street, the problem child in our class, the diametrically opposed brother and sister, whether literal or metaphorical in the church, the fractured friendship that causes such pain? What would happen if we would retain our vision for Immanuel well after the carols have been sung and the tree has become mulch? What would we see? What would we do? How would we respond? Where would we see God's hand at work where we now only see problems and headaches? What revelations of new sight might be granted if we simply looked for Immanuel's loving hand in all of life and living and not just when we are reminded to look in season? We need to maintain our awareness of Immanuel the whole year long, keeping the easy road weariness at bay. What's more, we need to have our brothers and sisters recount that which they have seen of Immanuel as they have seen it too along the way. Like good co-pilots they can see what we ourselves might be too busy, too grief filled, too distracted, too blind to see and say "there too is God".

The point of this season is not solely the marking of tradition and story, of remembering what has been so long ago. It is an active and open invitation to take on a new sight and new vision, looking for the coming and active moving of God's hand, eyes that have been changed and moved by the encounter with the living God with us. May we each be granted the grace to be able to say "My eyes have seen the coming of God's salvation."