

My Eye have seen God's Salvation

Menno Mennonite Church
December 31, 2023

Purpose: To celebrate the revelation of Immanuel

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, Psalm 148 (Please Read), 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. Often, we would just as soon stay silent about what is going on within our faith and the things that appear to us along the way. Yet 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 Immanuel. 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.

Luke 2:22-40

²² When the time came
for their purification
according to the law of Moses,
they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to YHWH

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 YHWH,
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.

It takes quite a bit to break through the noise of the ordinary. We live noisy lives. Our phones beep at us consistently through the day, enticing us to come, look and reconnect to the feed of the moderated reality that they present. I am always more than a little bit amused when my phone gets desperate. For a variety of reasons my Facebook feed is not a place where I spend a lot of time. As much as I like catching up and grabbing the most recent memes, it is just not where I go when I am navigating my world. What is fun about that is that the longer you neglect it, the more panicked the app becomes for attention. Give it 24 hours and it will give you a nice “here is what you have missed”. Give it about 3-4 days—not uncommon for me when I am duly preoccupied with other things—and you start getting a pop up about every 30-40 minutes about who said what to whom with the utmost urgency. I am not sure whose attachment we are trying to feed here- theirs or mine. Mostly I just let those reminders go on in the background; one more thing to swipe out of the way and keep on going. Little wonder that the true emergency alerts require horns and sirens that just won’t stop to get our attention to what is trying to be communicated. It takes something quite earthshaking to really grab our attention with sufficient force to move us outside our patterns of normalcy to really take note of what is going on.

Christmas is a season where there can be a change in the routine. It at least replaces the bubble of the usual with a bubble of the traditional. We wait for it, anticipate it, long for it as much to reconnect with the vision and ideas that we know make Christmas for us then necessarily giving us something new. But this is now done too, and we have sung our songs, exchanged our gifts, and had our rituals observed. Even our treat exchange today has a bit of finality to it. We get to share and enjoy, but with a bit of a last hurrah in mind as well. Outside of pinching ourselves for the coming day or two to be reminded that it is indeed 2024 (which boggles the mind), the usual noise seems to be on the rise yet again. We are going back to the ordinary at least for the time being until it is time to set out the decorations again in a year’s time.

All of which makes this text entirely well suited for the day. Because amongst all the declarations of the Spirit and the identity of the baby who would be destined for the rising and falling of many, what we have is rather completely ordinary by most standards. They were doing the ordinary stuff—the things that the law required of them as new parents of the first born. You may recall it yourself: the first week’s of a child’s life is full of joy and wonder at the miracle that has arrived and placed itself in your lap with complete trust and utter abandon. But there is

also a good deal of paper work too. Forms to fill out for official registrations, connections to get things setup to allow their bureaucratic lives to begin and all the rest are right there alongside adjusting to diapers and no sleep. With the kids we had to start pretty early with passports (do you know how hard it is to get a 6 week old baby to take an acceptable passport photo) and the other elements that had to be in place before we could take our kids to meet their family on the other side of the border. Mary and Joseph were doing all of that—the stuff of the ordinary—when all of this breaks in.

Anna and Simeon too are doing their ordinary rituals as well. They were constantly in the temple, Luke tells us, praying and being about the work of devotedly waiting upon the Lord that they were long anticipating. Theirs were lives of waiting and worshipping—the rituals of the pious of the temple. They are noted as those were about the stuff of the temple life—not a whole lot more. It is the fruits of that life—the fruits of the Spirit that had developed in them over long practice and sincere seeking--that allowed them insight into the possibility that this child called Jesus might carry such a weight. They had gained their insight through the practice of anticipating the Holy by being in proximity to the holy, knowing the habits and paths that the Holy Spirit trod. They were the ordinary people doing the ordinary things on an ordinary day who were prompted that in the midst of this lay the one on whom they waited so long and so well. They were given eyes to see and words to proclaim what they know to be true: this one is the one long promised. This one innocent as he presently is, will be the one for the rising and falling of so much and so many.

In the wide arc of the Christmas story this is where it winds itself up; in the functions of the ordinary. We are given to the expectation that as far as God is concerned there must be the trumpets flaring, the booming and crashing of drums, and the singing of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in order for the holy to arrive. We are primed and pumped to see the coming in this way and on those terms. Even our fairly low-key cultural understanding of the revelation of the special seems to beg for the bombastic when it speaks of every event that surprises as being apocalyptic.

Yet as we sit with the working of the story in the real we are offered far more modest circumstances. More times than not God comes not to take center stage and demand all lights on what is about to happen. Instead God comes to the edges of life, away from the centers of power to speak through the blood, sweat and tears of ordinary life to make appearance. We are reminded that God is with us in our joys and pains, our ups and downs, our laughter and our

tears, our grieving and our celebrating simply because Emmanuel has come. God has come in full force and full humanity and planted the kingdom here and now. Jesus is here with us not to make us better people, to bright us to smile despite what ails us or to enact the agenda of the long promised king. Instead, God with us resurrects us and the death-dealing world in which we are so haplessly enmeshed within into something new and different; something holy. We would rather stick with the babe away in the manger, but instead we have the promise of a God who will not let us go nor turn away because things didn't go as planned or are somehow now meeting expectations adequately. God comes and Emmanuel is here; that is true in the high hold days and it is true today as the ordinary resumes its seeming drone. God is with us, and what is more God is for us, walking beside us, working beyond us, whether we are able to apprehend God's presence and declare it like Simeon and Anna or not.

We are tempted to limit our possibilities when it comes to God. We pre-suppose that the world is just too unalterably broken to see any redemption. We assume that our lives are just too messy for God to deem them worthy, even the best of us. We anticipate God in the big and never in the small. Yet for all of this the good news of God with us is what is. As inclined to apologize for the world as it is found—far too untidy and far too broken. Like the unexpected guest who appears at our front door, we would rather close the door and beg for a 5 minute tidy before we consider the presence of the holy in.

But God chooses to be with us. Right here. Right now. As we are. Where we are. Our incarnated lives are infused with the life of God with us, but often that is the last way we see the world. Realism and the demands of 'the way things are' require us to look on the world with a skeptical if not fully jaundiced eye. We are far more inclined to see our failures, the world failures, and the mess that we are in as evidence that what we celebrate today is mere history of thousands of years ago. We reason that because things are as they are, we cannot have seen a great light, nor witnessed any coming of one that would change the world. We feel like we must need the rarified vision of Anna and Simeon to apprehend this truth. Instead we are invited to note it and share it all the time, living the reality of incarnation and God with us for all time and forever more, and even more so as we return to the ordinary in these weeks to come.

As we sit on the threshold of one year passing to the next, we are enjoying the recounting of what has been. Everyone's top 10 of everything is making the rounds filling an accounting of how things were as we wrap up 2023. You may be doing some of this yourself: filing away the

things of the past 12 months to be put away and filed, at least metaphorically as you look forward to the new. You may find yourself considering the highlights and challenges of the year, deciding what it is you want to treasure, and what it is you may just as soon ascribe to the historical dustbin.

I would like to offer you another filter to consider as you go about your work of filing things away. I wonder where you have seen Salvation in this time? Where have you received grace when you most needed it, either within yourself or from others? How have you borne witness to the coming of God with you and yours in this time, whether it was the moments of joy or moments of heart break? How have you seen God's presence working perhaps where you least expected it? I invite you to sit with these questions and ponder them—truly. For it is in their consideration that we exercise the hopeful vision of God where we want to see God most. It is when we stop looking, or look only in the bright and shiny moments and not in the day-to-day ordinary that we can convince ourselves that perhaps there is nothing, actually to be found. Instead we are invited time and again to look for Emmanuel long after the nativity has been packed away for the year.

My eyes have seen God's salvation. May we each in our own way join with our forebearers in declaring the vision of our Lord in all that we see and do. Amen.