

December 31, 2017 Co-Stewards of the Future Luke 2:22-40 Rev. Ross Leckie Caledon East UC

If your home is anything like mine after the Christmas holidays, things are a bit topsy-turvy. We have had extra visitors and Christmas gifts have not yet all found a home. We have had a number of meals around tables much fuller than normal with relatives and friends and special foods, some of those special dishes having family stories to go along with them. There may have been awkward outbursts by the grandchildren or inappropriate comments by uncle Harry, but the mood of joy and thanks has dominated the mood. The credit card bills haven't arrived yet and the weather has cooperated for driving to visit others. There has been a mostly 'cosy' atmosphere with the presence of loved ones and even a renewed hopeful attitude toward the future.

Our churches were closer to being 'filled' on Christmas Eve, not only in numbers but in 'feeling' as the familiar nativity scene was illuminated by the participation of children. Many of us participated in the 'mystery' of Christ's presence through the sharing of Bread and Wine and remembering the extraordinary powerful influence and effect of Christ's life, legacy, and continued presence in our time.

Such an inflated, buoyant atmosphere is 'pricked' by a much different scene from Scripture this morning.

Imagine yourself standing on the Temple steps in Jerusalem, watching as Mary and Joseph come to present their new-born child. As soon as they appear and begin to climb the steps, I follow them through the various courtyards, watching them pause to buy the two birds (the appropriate offering for a family living in poverty). I see them line up behind other couples who have come also with their new-borns. I watch as they come before the priest who is on duty that day, and give him the child. I see that priest hold the child over the fire, bringing to mind for a moment those terrifying times, long before, when people fell into the practice of child sacrifice. Then I see the parents receiving the child back. In this place, Joseph hands over the two inexpensive birds, and they are sacrificed.

I watch as their going is stopped suddenly, first by the arrival of the old man and, then the old woman. I see the old man carrying off the child. I hear him singing of the child's mysterious significance, then giving the terrible warning to his mother that her heart will be broken.

Now I consider those two old people, Simeon and Anna. It is they, in their old age, who have the insight to recognize the presence of God in this moment. We, too, in our older years, must seek God in the present and not merely in the past---in memory. Our prayer is to become the kind of older man or woman who can recognize the sacred Child, the holy birth, in the world of our time, in the church of our time, and even in our own selves. When this happens in someone's older years, it is beautiful to behold.

Simeon and Anna have waited a lifetime for this moment to find perfect peace. For Joseph and Mary it is only the beginning of their stewardship of a favoured life. This is the beginning of a journey of unanswered questions for first-time parents. They know they have a long way to go in their responsibility as parents to fulfill the divine promise of parenthood they have made to God.

Dorothy Grace Jackson

The text tells us that Mary and Joseph, who Matthew says were later blessed with gifts from kings, could not afford to offer a lamb. They presented the gift assigned to the poor, a pair of turtledoves. Over and again, people told them of the blessing they had in their arms. Every day they struggled to make ends meet.

We live in a society where it is hard to understand the blessings of poverty. Mary and Joseph, like many poor parents in our midst today, were trying to be faithful, but the journey was not easy. In the context of capitalism of our generation, it is hard to accept the idea of being blessed but not prosperous. One of the challenge for us to wrestle with is the injustice that many poor people of faith face. They are blessed. They hold new life and future possibilities in their arms. They possess faith, and yet they must

find a way to afford the social expectations of church life. For some of the poor but faithful in our time, this is still a painful reality.

The text tells us that Simeon was “guided by the Spirit” to come into the temple at the appointed time. When he arrived, he saw two young parents who had come a long way, to follow the law of the Lord and offer a sacrifice for their child. These young parents, like many others of that time, could have made the decision to give up on the faith, because it cost too much. Mary and Joseph remained committed to the rituals of faith, even though religion cost them the daily resources they needed for survival.

Consider the position of Simeon—expecting a miracle and waiting for the Messiah. He saw in this child brought by parents of limited means, the Saviour of the world—are we open to looking at such families, such children to have the great potential of ‘saving the world’?

Imagine being a seasoned person of faith, who had the chance to witness a poor teen mom and a dad with the Anointed One in their care. Imagine knowing they had a child with tremendous promise and possibility for an entire people. If you were in such a position, would you do something more for this family than offer a blessing?

As people of faith in a privileged nation, we have an obligation to care for poor families in tangible ways, so they can raise their children with limited burdens. We miss out, as a community, when we do not acknowledge that all children in our midst are a gift to the world. Perhaps we are called to create a society with a positive regard for struggling, faithful parents, because we believe we are co-stewards of the future. Perhaps this text is pleading with those of us in this generation to create a more just society for the children who come into the world through parents of limited means.

Anna, like Simeon was a prophet. And, she, like Simeon, was a person with the wisdom of age, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and a lifetime spent in the temple. Her coming forward added to the power of what Simeon had already said, and she testifies again to the emotional and spiritual investment in the child Jesus and offers praise to God for his birth and life to come. Again, like Simeon she reminds us of the surrounding cloud of witnesses to whom we can turn with our hopes and our fears—and those who will approach us, whether we seek them out or not!

If we “freeze” the scene when Anna gives back the child to his mother we see an interesting scene. At the centre of everything is the child, the Christ. Around him is a group of four that represents the full spectrum of human life stages. Mary, the young woman; Joseph, the slightly older but still young man; Anna, the elderly woman; and Simeon, the elderly man. All respond to the child in their various ways.

This is the point—any time is the right time to say Yes to Christ as Lord.

Could this scene of Simeon and Anna be calling on us to new resolutions for this coming year?

The two saints, Simeon and Anna, in combination with the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary, lead to the case of Jesus himself. With the grace of God and the commitment of his parents, and surrounded by the hopes and dreams of so many, he was launched toward becoming the person God intended him to be. And so should be the case with every child—created in the image of God, surrounded by God’s grace, cared for by faithful parents, and encouraged by supporters, both known and unknown, within the community of faith and others in God’s wider good creation.

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