



Saint John United Methodist Church  
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Message for December 26, 2021  
"Images of Christmas: Hope Fulfilled"  
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb  
Scripture: Luke 2:21-40

### Reflecting on the Day Just Past

I hope you made it through okay. We had a wonderful time. I ate way too much. How about you? How about that weather? It was like we were in Florida. I wore shorts the whole day. I loved all my gifts. I am not at all ashamed to wear my new sweater. "*It's a beaut, Clark.*"

### Two Faithful Souls

Today, we consider two faithful souls who lived with the hope that Christ would come. Their names are Anna and Simeon. We read about them as Luke wraps up his account of Christ's birth.

Let's read first about Simeon.

#### Luke 2:21-32

*When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."*

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*"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.*

### Every Reason to Be Hopeful

Mary and Joseph wanted to do right by Jesus. When the time came for Jesus to be presented in the temple for Purification, they took him to Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord. They were greeted by Simeon who lived with the belief that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Messiah.

Upon taking Jesus in his arms he essentially said, “Okay, Lord, you can now dismiss your servant in peace.”

Simeon knew he was in the presence of the One the Lord had promised.

That One would be “*a light to the Gentiles and bring glory to Israel.*” He was “*destined for the rising and falling of many.*”

Simeon dedicated his whole life to waiting. He put his hope in the Lord. He lived with the firm trust that God would not let him down. The prophet Isaiah states famously in Isaiah 40:31, “*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.*”

God does not fail us. Expectation, anticipation, and hope put us to trusting in God and his divine purposes for our lives. Hold fast, just as Simeon did, and you will not be disappointed. There is every reason to be hopeful.

Next let’s read about Anna. She is the second of our two faithful souls.

#### **Luke 2:36-40**

*There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

#### **Stay Focused and Be Thankful**

Anna was one who placed her **hope** in God to the point of sacrifice. Hers was a matter of deep commitment. She never left the temple. Hers was a regular practice of praying and fasting.

She too longed for Christ. The scripture tells us that she was very old when first met Jesus. Hers was not a response of “*what took you so long,*” but one of thanksgiving.

What about you? As you pull away from Christmas, are you just worn out and let down, or are you thankful for having met Jesus? If you are just worn out and let down, maybe you were after the wrong things? Maybe your focus was misplaced? It is never too late to meet Jesus.

Take your cue from Anna.

- Stay focused.
- Be thankful.
- Seek to tell everyone.

Anna, just like Simeon, remained hopeful and in the end was not disappointed.

#### **Living With OR Without Hope**

All through Advent and Christmas we have been considering the images of Christmas—the voice of the angel, the prayers of a mother, the faith of a father, the joy of the shepherds, and, of course, the birth of a baby.

What images of Christmas have you had? I am sure there have been many good ones and some not so good.

There have been two that have particularly heartened me. They have served to contrast what it means to live with hope and to live **without** it.

**First**, I found myself overwhelmed by the enormity of gifts that were amassed for the Angel Tree this year. In loading one of the bags with gifts to take over to the Red Cross it dawned on me what a big deal this was.

For so many, Christmas only heightens a sense of hopelessness that permeates everyday life. The gifts we shared worked to counteract that. The gifts aside, we essentially said, “*We are with you. There is always reason to hope. You do not have to go it alone*”

**Second**, I was just as overwhelmed by the outpouring of generosity toward those who are suffering in the aftermath of the recent tornadoes in the western part of our state. Last week we sent a check for \$24,000 to UMCOR and another for \$5000 directly to First United Methodist Church in Mayfield.

I can only begin to image the sense of hopelessness many are experiencing in the wake of the losses they have experienced. Our gifts and the gifts of thousands of others go a long way in saying, “*Hey you are not alone. There is hope. You are going to make it.*”

You and I are not alone either. God has acted in a powerful way. He has intersected history with the gift of his Son, giving us all hope. It was that way for Simeon and Anna, it is that way for us. We have every reason to be hopeful.

### **The Already, But Not Yet**

Many mornings, particularly during winter, I find myself while running along the river in some degree of fog. Sometimes the fog is so thick that all I can do is put one foot in front of the other.

That's much like it is, particularly as we continue to move through the Pandemic. We have coined the phrase, liminal time. Liminal time is an uncertain time. We don't so much know how things will end up.

Recently, our bishop, Leonard Fairley, wrote about liminal times in a brief advent devotion.

*“We may be traveling through a liminal season, but for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, God knows where we are going. We can trust God’s narrative in the coming of Christ once again in the fullness of time.*

*We trust the coming of Christ enough to place one foot at a time into Jesus’ footprints, which always leads to **hope**.*”

In that sense, you and I find ourselves in “*the already, but not yet.*” “*Already, but not yet*” is always the way of the Christian life.

Hope is already a part of our experience. Christmas reinforces that in a resounding way. “*Christ is born.*” That’s the “*already*” of our Christian walk.

“*Christ will come again*” is the not yet part, and because of that we have hope for the future. The promises of Christ assure us of that.

The great good news for today is that in between the “*already*” and the “*not yet*” is hope for the here and now.

A man went to a little league game one day and asked one of the young players as he passed by the dugout what the score was.

The boy replied, “*Eighteen-zip, we’re behind.*”

“*Oh boy, I bet you are discouraged,*” said the man.

“*Why would I be?*” said the boy. “*We haven’t even been up to bat yet.*”

Sure, we may experience disappointment, hardship, failure, grief, and tough circumstances, but we are a people of the “*already, but not yet,*” and that gives us hope.

We have the hope of God right now. He is with us and provides exactly what we need to get through with joy and thanksgiving.

We don’t live in darkness because we know the light. If we have learned that this Christmas it is this. We have every reason to be hopeful.