

First Sunday after Christmas
December 27, 2020

Psalm 148:1-6, 14
Luke 2:25-35

Sermon: The waiting is over

The Charles Dickens novel, "A Christmas Carol", was a fictional story. Dickens invented the characters and storyline. The setting was based in a real place, the city of London in the 1840's. The characters may have been based on real people that Dickens knew. However, the qualities and characteristics of the Spirits of Christmas were derived from Dickens's imagination. The Christmas theme of peace and goodwill toward others comes from Scripture. The story of Ebenezer Scrooge is not biblical however it can be treated like a parable to teach the biblical truth of redemption. We can think of it like the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Some people, including scholars, say the accounts of the birth of Jesus are also fiction. They claim they are a compilation of tales and myths derived from centuries of pagan traditions. Some of these people may believe Jesus was a real person but they cannot accept the wondrous events that are part of his birth. These include the appearance of angelic messengers, fulfillment of prophecies, the virgin birth, and the most important truth about the birth of Jesus: He

was conceived by the Holy Spirit and therefore is both divine and human.

Have you ever wondered how this account of the birth of Jesus as written by Luke came to be? Who kept a record of these events, words, interactions? What sources provided the information? Dr. Luke, the author, was not likely present to witness any part. But he was an investigator. Luke was a medical doctor by trade, a companion of Paul during missionary trips (as recorded in the Book of Acts which Luke also wrote), and had access to other apostles who knew Jesus and witnessed his life, death, and resurrection.

(Luke 1:1-4 NLT Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.)

When we read over Luke's narrative, there is a central witness: Mary, mother of Jesus. Verse 19 of Chapter 2 tells us she "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." She kept Christmas well, preserving the memories that were precious to her. Chapter 2 also informs us that the shepherds told others, all they met after finding the infant, which obviously included Mary and Joseph. Mary, in addition

to her own experience, treasured the witness of the shepherds: the appearance of the angels and their message about the baby Jesus. Surely the others who heard the shepherds' account and the amazement in their voices shared what they heard with Mary. Unlike "A Christmas Carol" there is nothing fictional about these accounts. It took place in a real location, with real people, and within the context of history.

Luke's narrative in Chapter 2 continues in today's passage. Even after Jesus was born, the Holy Spirit continued to testify through other people that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah.

Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be consecrated to God according to Jewish tradition. There they met a man named Simeon.

Simeon lived his life anticipating the consolation of Israel, the Messiah foretold by the prophets who would deliver Israel from hundreds of years of suffering under pagan kings and oppressive governments.

Luke tells us he was righteous and devout; living in expectation, not wavering. He is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture.

Simeon had a righteousness unlike the Pharisees, Sadducees, and teachers of the Law. Their righteousness was self-defined by religious acts. They missed the significance of Jesus even as an adult. In spite

of their knowledge of the Law and the Prophets, many Jews failed to recognize what was happening. They were too entrenched in their history and traditions. There was much anticipation that the time was near, but they expected an earthly king like David.

Simeon's righteousness was honored by God through special knowledge given by the Holy Spirit. He would live to see the Messiah. We don't know if he received this message late in life or as a young man.

When he saw Jesus, he knew the promise revealed to him by the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled. He was now prepared to die, even though he would not live to see the completion of Israel's salvation. He was rejoicing to know that this child of Joseph and Mary was the one that would complete God's plan of redemption.

Simeon imparted words of truth to Joseph and Mary that were marvelous and troubling. Jesus would not only be the salvation of Israel, but also for the Gentiles. This plan of redemption would not be easy. It would be challenged by those who should have embraced it and embraced by those considered unworthy. Those who believed would be lifted up. Jesus would be a stumbling block to the unbelievers. He prophetically announced this child would be pierced by a sword, at the heartbreak of his mother. Simeon was not afraid to speak controversial truth because the Holy Spirit was with him.

Simeon believed the message given to him by the Holy Spirit and rejoiced at it's fulfillment.

Jesus was only an infant and had yet to grow up in body, mind, and spirit. The fulfillment of God's plan would occur according to God's timing. Galatians 4 says, "4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

These words written by Paul, confirm the accounts recorded by Luke about the birth of Jesus.

Simeon believed that Jesus would be the promised Messiah.

Because he believed it, he shared it openly and readily, without hesitation.

How much of THE Christmas story do you believe? How much of your Christmas rejoicing involves sharing what you really believe?

Why do we, 2000 years later, believe in something that people of that day failed to believe?

Probably because like Simeon, we have received the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He received it before Jesus was born. Those who believe in Jesus since then have also received the Holy Spirit.

“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” 1 Cor. 2:12

We can believe like Simeon because of the Holy Spirit.

Mary believed because she lived it, from his birth to his death and resurrection.

The birth of a child is a memorable event for a mother, especially the first child. Consider the conditions in which Mary gave birth to Jesus. Far away from home or family after a long journey walking or riding a donkey while pregnant, in a dark stable among smelly animals, unsanitary conditions, no medical attention, the pains of giving birth. Certainly memorable, but not in a good way.

How much of our Christmas celebrations occur in such humble conditions?

We insist on celebrating Christmas according to our traditions,
(seeking experiences)

We celebrate With family members, Usually In a brightly decorated house (or church)

We enjoy Plenty of good food and drink

There is Music, conversation, good cheer

We are Relaxed, comfortable

There is an Exchanging gifts

Nothing like the first Christmas when Jesus was born

To do Christmas well, we must also develop a humble location for Christ to be born. We must make room for him in a humble heart. Separate from the traditions, the people, the distractions, and allow the Son of God to be born within.

Hear the words of the shepherds and the message of the angels.

Wonder at the things that were said about this child.

Praise God for your Savior, not conceived of a man's desire, instead, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born to fulfill God's will for the redemption of all creation, even you.

Unlike the world around us that has changed Christmas into a secular celebration, devoid of spiritual meaning, we must maintain the truth about the real meaning for celebrating the season and be the Christmas light that shines into the world.