

Sermon – December 27, 2020

“Jesus Makes the Seemingly Normal Abnormal”

Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID

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May grace, mercy and peace be to each of you from God our Father and our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Let's pray

“Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day and for the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let your grace and peace be with us during this Christmas season as we celebrate once again Jesus' first coming ... His birth. We ask this in His precious name. Amen

Luke wrote this in his Gospel ...

“When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (“Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice...“a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” Luke 2:22-24

Basketball fans around the world were shocked over the helicopter death of Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna. One thing that was especially noted by the media was his close relationship with his daughter as her coach and her mentor on the basketball court. He was thought of as a great father because of this.

Parents love to see their children succeed. They take pride in their children when they do well in life. And I have to admit, I pray for my two children to continue to do well in life. It is nice to hear compliments from others when they do well.

Yet, I also have to remember that there are many more important things in life than activities such as sports or other similar things. For activities are not going to get anyone into heaven or save anyone's soul. So, at the end of the day, I really want my children to be faithful to Jesus.

I pray for them to keep their faith and cherish God's Word and the sacraments ... that they would find a God-pleasing spouse and cherish God's Word.

I have to remind myself of this from time to time. It troubles me how so many Christian parents don't see this as a priority in life. For example, they love to post pictures of their kids involved in sports or other activities, but how about posting some pictures of them in Bible study or singing in church?

Joseph and Mary apparently took the religious training of Jesus seriously. They wanted to make sure that they followed the law when it came to how they raised Jesus. So, they had Him circumcised at eight days, and then they brought him to the temple again when He was 41 days old.

This trip was in order to make an offering to purify Mary after having a child, and also to consecrate Jesus to the Lord as their first-born son, as required by the Law.

I got to thinking about this - 41 days after Jesus' birth – that's a long time. Think about what happened on the night Jesus was born. Shepherds came and praised God as they worshiped Jesus in the manger.

They would surely have told Mary and Joseph about the announcement of the angel. But after that, what happened?

Apparently, there is nothing more ... worthy enough to include in the Bible. Joseph and Mary probably got moved into a home. Joseph would have probably gone back to work to make ends meet. What else? Probably nothing unusual.

Life would have seemed abnormally NORMAL.

Here Mary has given birth to the Savior of the world, and nothing miraculous has happened since ... until NOW.

It must have seemed strange to most of the people standing in line with Joseph and Mary to make their sacrifices and consecrate their children that day.

This old guy and this old lady come up to Jesus and start talking about how He's going to save the world - how this is the long awaited and promised Messiah. Simeon even grabs Jesus and holds him in his arms. Imagine coming for a baptism, and having someone you do not know, do that with your child.

Now, in the eyes of everyone there, it would have seemed like Simeon had lost his marbles. This was just a plain baby with plain looking parents, and they were POOR parents at that - they could only offer the minimal offering - not even a lamb - just two small birds.

They would have had no gold or incense or myrrh, for the Wise Men would not show up for some time yet. But here Simeon was saying that Jesus was the Savior, who God had prepared in the sight of all people. And then Anna joined in and told EVERYONE to come and look at Him too, thanking God!

It shows you how easy it is to overlook miracles in life, doesn't it? It shows you how blind we can be, that God could be held in the baby right next to them, and they would have no clue.

How often do we miss out on the miracles of God, because they are hidden under such seemingly common things? Consider the miracle of baptism - the Holy Spirit coming into a child and making His home with him or her adopting the baby and taking it to be His own.

Think about this ... Jesus will actually give us His own body and blood under the bread and wine right here today. Yet, it tastes so bland. It looks so normal. To think that these communion words, which we listen to, are the actual words of God speaking to us.

If God were to come to us in a vision and speak to us face to face, I am certain that we would bow in reverence and listen with the utmost attention. But we treat these words as if they were nothing special.

How we miss the miracles? Just like the other parents that day COULDN'T see God in the baby right in their midst.

But God didn't want them to miss the miracle. So, He chose these two old people to spread the news that Jesus was the Christ. He could have chosen the priest who was doing the sacrifice, but instead He chose two old people. And isn't that similar to what still happens today.

Grandparents encouraging their grandchildren to come to church and see the miracle of life, hear the miracle of the Word, see the miracle of God in the flesh who came to save them.

They want them to stop from the activities of life ... just stop and see Jesus. After all, He is right here!

Simeon and Anna were the picture of faithfulness. Anna kept on fasting and praying, worshiping day and night. Fasting was a sign of repentance. She never grew too old for it. No, the more she was in the Word, the more she realized her sin and her need for the Savior.

She didn't stop praying. She didn't lose her zeal to worship the Lord, even though she was a lonely widow. She had God as her groom, and she was happy with Him.

Simeon's words were cheerful, but they were also rather dark for Mary. This child would provide the light of salvation for the Gentiles. He would be the glory of His people Israel.

But he would also be a sign that would be spoken against. He would reveal the thoughts of many. A sword would pierce Mary's soul because of Him. He would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.

And isn't that the truth? Think about what Mary had to go through as she heard people call Him demon possessed and revile Him. Think of being Jesus' mother, seeing Him crucified before her very eyes, while being mocked and spat upon as a criminal.

Think also about how Jesus revealed the thoughts of those who doubted Him. When He ate at the house of Simon, Simon doubted Jesus was a prophet because he allowed an adulterous woman to cry on his feet, wash his feet with expensive perfume, and touch Him with her hair.

Jesus KNEW what Simon was thinking, and He called Simon out on it, calling him to repent because of his lovelessness.

Think of how hard that is to imagine, that one baby could call the falling and rising of everyone in the world ... that the salvation, or damnation, of a world of sinners would all depend on that baby in the old man's arms. But that's who Jesus is. And that's what Jesus does.

An author went to a Jewish synagogue years ago as a class project she had to do. They had a special speaker that day, and she said he actually referred to Jesus. He said something to the effect, "Jesus caused the ruin of the Jewish race."

It was amazing for the author to hear him say that, and give such power to Jesus, even though he meant it in a bad way.

I think he meant that Jesus stole the glory away from the race of the Jews, because we look to Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies, and not to the Jews as a chosen race.

But how right that speaker was, even though he was trying to demean Jesus by saying that.

Even if you know the Old Testament better than any Christian, you don't get the Bible, if you don't get Jesus. Even if you're the most moral man in the world, you won't be holy and righteous and forgiven ... without faith in Jesus Christ.

Jews don't get to heaven without Jesus, and neither do Gentiles. Jesus really is the One, through which a person falls or stands.

Simeon and Anna may have been half blind, half deaf, and stooped over. They may have been senile and old. But in spite of all of that, they still got Jesus. Why? Because God revealed it to them.

It didn't depend on their sense of sight or hearing ... God made it clear to them. And as long as they had Jesus, it filled them with joy and zeal to spread the Gospel.

Simeon was ready to die. He was at peace with it, as long as he was holding Jesus. You can be too, because He came to die for you by paying for ALL your sin through His sacrifice on the cross.

You do not have to fear dying in a helicopter crash, or dying of cancer, or dying of Covid-19, or anything else for that matter.

You are free to live and die, when you hold Jesus in your arms of faith. And if the Holy Spirit could do that in two old people like Simeon and Anna, don't you think He could do that through you too?

Many of those parents that day probably went to the temple thinking to themselves, "Ok, we have to get this ritual done. Pay our two turtledoves. Show them the child. Let's get out of here."

Mary and Joseph were not showing off their child, they were not telling everyone about the visit of the shepherds or the virgin birth. Nobody would have believed them anyway.

But God didn't want them, or the people there, to leave without a public announcement. So, He chose two weak, old people to let the truth be known.

Here Mary and Joseph were in with the rest of the crowd, and Simeon and Anna go and make a show of Mary's child.

Perhaps some of them thought, "What's the big deal about THAT kid. He doesn't look like anything special. What about MY child?" What would Simeon and Anna have told those parents in response to a comment like "What about my child?"

They would have said, "Your child is but a sinner. He's not going to save anyone. He can't even save himself."

I suspect Mary and Joseph were still trying to fully grasp what was being said about their Son. Jesus is the Savior of the world. It was all true.

And things were far from normal after all. This trip went from being a seemingly normal trip of fulfilling the law to one turned into a wonderful gospel promise. Simeon and Anna revealed Jesus to the world.

And isn't this a microcosm of how we can approach worship? We don't want to get caught up in the ritual of when we stand up and sit down. We don't want to think of a worship service as mere rites to get through, like checking a box.

Where are we? How many hymns have we sung? What time is it? No. We come here simply to find Jesus. We come as sinners who need refuge from our weariness of living in sin and death.

Here's the most attractive thing about Worship ... we get to eat and drink of Him here. And when we get Jesus, we get the forgiveness of sins. We get the assurance that our sins have all been paid for, and we can HAVE peace.

Simeon and Anna, who were close to death, seemed to find the most joy in holding on to Jesus and seeing Him.

They came to the Temple to find Jesus. And just like all the others who recognized Jesus, they also found peace that day.

And so can you and I.

This is a day to rejoice, whenever and wherever we can hold Jesus in our arms of faith.

When we receive the Lord's Supper, when we look at this meal through the eyes of faith, Jesus turns this from a simple eating of bread and wine to receiving a life of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So, Joseph and Mary go to Jerusalem to present Jesus to God at the temple when He was about 6-weeks old.

We know children can bring out the best and worst in parents. We earlier mentioned sports, but sports can get downright ugly - especially when it comes to parents.

They say that people try to live vicariously through their children. So, when their children do well, they take pride in their performance and see themselves in the child. This can be great when the child does well.

But it's not so great when the child fails miserably. Then, the parents yell at the referees. They get mad at the opposition. They get mad at the teammates.

"If only the coach knew what he was doing. Why isn't my son getting any playing time?" Instead of having fun, they are miserable. You always will be when you live vicariously through your children.

But when Jesus enters our life and is the focus of our songs and worship and life, we can and should live vicariously through Him.

Just like Simeon, we can grab and hold Jesus in our arms as well. We get to know that He was successful. He had a job to do, a job of dying for the sins of the world.

We saw Him get mocked. We saw Him spat upon. We saw Him crucified.

But here's the thing ... we didn't yell at the referee, "That's a foul!" You see, in our own way, we too said, "Crucify Him!"

We also do not want to get blamed for our sins.

We want someone else to take the punishment for our sin, and He did. And He rose again from the dead. We now see this through the eyes of faith. My eyes have seen your salvation in this little baby born in a manger ... He's the One.

And that's the reason we come and rejoice in worship ... young and old ... always focusing on Jesus. He makes the seemingly normal abnormal. He gives us reason to rejoice always.
Amen.