

Sunday, January 1, 2017

PRELUDE

"Three Kings" - Patricia Lou Harris

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 27 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;

Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:

To live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,

To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;

He will conceal me under the cover of his tent;

Because he will set me high on a rock, I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy!

“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

The Lord will lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Let us worship God beginning today with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... In this joyous Christmas season we have felt the brush of angels' wings upon our hearts, and we have heard out of the unseen their songs of rejoicing. As we begin the journey of a new year, Grant that our vision of peace, given us by the Christ Child, may grow strong and bring forth peace in all our relationships. In the quiet of this hour, may we be born again into a better mind and a more worthy life. May this hour be for all of us the beginning of a new life of obedience and commitment to you; for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand and join in singing our opening hymn, “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”, #31 in our *Hymnals*.

The liturgist should step back from the lectern for the singing of the hymn.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”

The Hymnal #31

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

*CALL TO CONFESSION

How often have we chosen to go our own way, when God would lead us on a better road, less traveled. With a penitence born from an awareness of our sinfulness and a faith born of our experience with God's grace, let us confess our sins before God and one another using the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, you have given us so much to celebrate in the birth of Jesus, and yet the wonder of Christmas is fading fast while we grow ever more aware of the brokenness which still mars our living. We find ourselves so mired in the problems of today that we cut short our celebrations. We so dwell on our unworthiness and the the unworthiness of others, that we cut ourselves off from the joy that you intend for us. So fill us with faith and hope that the joy of Christmas may bubble up past our faults and failings and give us a vision of the life that you intend for each of us. Help us to turn from the darkness of our past toward the brightness of the future you hold before us. Keep us mindful that your love destroys only to rebuild better and finer than before. Send your grace to disturb us with dreams so

magnificent that only eternity can answer them. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God's promises continually bring light into our darkness with the dawn of a new day in Christ. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". In turning and returning to Christ, we are forgiven and freed up for joyful celebration and service in Jesus' name... Friends believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Peace, Christ brings to you; His peace He gives to you. He does not give to you as the world gives. So do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Ms. Karen.”

The liturgist will take a seat.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Hold up a picture of Father Time, and ask the children if they have ever heard of this imaginary bearded old man. Let them know that he’s not the same bearded man who delivers presents at Christmas! Point out that he carries an hourglass, which reminds us of the constant passage of time, and sometimes he carries a scythe, which points to the end of life. Ask them if they know what Father Time does today, on New Year’s Day. Explain that he hands over the duties of time to Baby New Year, who starts his work today and will grow into Father Time through the year 2006. Stress that this passing of responsibility happens in real life as well, and today’s Scripture lesson tells us that a righteous old man named Simeon realized that his work was done when a baby named Jesus appeared in the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-35). Let them know that Simeon might have been sad to see his own life come to an end, but he was very happy that Jesus had come into his life, and would be doing God’s work in the world. Close by encouraging the children to welcome Jesus into their lives in the year 2017, and to grow up along with Jesus in the time to come.

As the children leave, the Liturgist will step to the microphone and say....

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

What seeds are we sowing for the sake of a more righteous and just world! Who will witness to God's intention that we live together as heirs to a rich, full life! It is our duty and our privilege to give our best that Christ may be revealed to all. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

“Noel for Flute Stops” - L. D’Aquin”

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

The Hymnal #592

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... Loving God, we marvel at your awakening us to the light of a new day, your fulfilling of promises, your saving love for us made so visible in the gift given to us in Jesus. We rejoice with this offering of ourselves and our resources in service in Jesus' name. Bless these gifts and this time of celebration, in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

The Preacher will return to the pulpit and say, "This morning we would like to sing a hymn that is not in our hymnals. It contains the old and greatly loved music of our past, while incorporating new elements that give voice to the experiences of Christians today. Our Sing a New Song Group, led this morning by Jessica Arnold, will come forward for a bit to lead us in the singing of this new/old song."

SPECIAL HYMN

"Amazing Grace/My Chains Are Gone"

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear & grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

My chains are gone! I've been set free!

My God, my Savior has ransomed me!

And like a flood His mercy rains unending love, amazing grace!

The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

My chains are gone! I've been set free!

My God, my Savior has ransomed me!

And like a flood His mercy rains unending love, amazing grace!

My chains are gone! I've been set free!

My God, my Savior has ransomed me!

And like a flood His mercy rains unending love, amazing grace!

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow; The sun forbear to shine;

But God, Who called me here below will be forever mine.

Will be forever mine. You are forever mine.

After the soloist finishes, the liturgist will return to the lectern & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our Scripture lesson this morning is taken from the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, beginning with the twenty-seventh verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 620 of your pew bibles.

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he

increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation. The preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our sermon text today is taken from the second Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the twenty-second verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #889 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Our thanks be to God!

THE SERMON

“The Bucket List”

A couple of years ago, a movie was released with the title “The Bucket List” starring Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson.

Jack Nicholson is a rich corporate executive and Morgan Freeman is a mechanic. They meet in the hospital and I believe both are diagnosed with a terminal illness. Nicholson’s character is grumpy and angry about his condition. Freeman’s character is hopeful and positive.

They decide to leave the hospital and embark on a journey to fulfill their “Bucket List.” The Bucket list is the things they want to do before “kicking the bucket.”

Since the movie, people have compiled their various bucket lists—things they want to do before they die-- & I suppose we all have a bucket list.

Some would like to climb Mt. Everest.

Some would like to find true love and get married.

Some would like to go skydiving.

Some would like to meet a famous person.

I want to go to Scotland and see the roots of my ancestors, the place where the seeds of our faith were planted and first took root before being brought to this country to plant new orchards of Presbyterians in a new world.

Simeon had a bucket list as well. Legend has it that Simeon was close to two hundred years old when Mary and Joseph brought their new son Jesus to the temple for the first time, about 6 weeks after his birth in Bethlehem. But generations before, when he was one of the oldest members of the Sanhedrin and a witness to the assertion of Roman power in Judea, the rise of Herod, and the Pharisees gain in political power in Jews’ chief governing body, he fell ill.

Simeon was broken by age, illness, and political misfortune. He shared a common faith with the land in which he lived and which he loved. He could see that it too was broken. It had lost its way, trading their freedom for safety and finding neither. Abandoning the eternal God for temporal success and earthly gain.

So God in his mercy gave him a vision, a vision so real it obsessed him for the rest of his life. God promised that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. To Simeon, the coming of the Messiah meant the salvation of his people and the world. It meant the triumph of peace and justice. He might not live to see the coming of such tranquility, but seeing the Messiah was enough. All of the things he longed for would follow him as surely as the bright noon day would follow the dawn.

But years passed. Decades passed. Generation after generation faded into oblivion. And this old man, who was old and infirm when our story began must now make a daily pilgrimage to the temple. His hands and knees and hips arthritic and swollen. It took everything he had to make it up the temple steps. But once there, he would find a bench in the courtyard, and rest himself for the trip home or to welcome the Messiah, which ever was his lot for the day. And for fifty years or so, it was a disappointed trip home that provided the reason for his resting.

Still he went, hoping each day for a glimpse of the child whose coming as the fulfillment of the law, would be brought to the temple to fulfill the first of its commands-- the offering of the sacrifice of the firstborn-- every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and must be redeemed by a sacrifice of at least a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

On this day however, the trip had not seemed so arduous. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, it was as if he was a hundred again. His steps were light and easy, and he couldn't help but wonder if this day was to be the day. Would this be the day when he was able to cross off the last item from his bucket list.

Christmas today is big business, but in Jesus' time there was no celebration. Nobody was ready for the Messiah to be born. Herod was caught off guard. The rich and powerful didn't know it happened. The ruling powers in the world from Rome to Asia had no clue.

Even the religious elites in this temple, they didn't see anything significant about this baby. He was just one more baby coming through, a peasant child born to peasant parents.

People had an expectation of the Messiah, but they were probably looking among the households of the wealthy, those who could afford lambs for sacrifice.

Their time was terrifyingly like ours today. The people of that time were being heavily taxed, and faced every prospect of a sharp increase to cover expanding military expenses. The threat of world domination by a cruel, ungodly, power-intoxicated band of men was ever just below the threshold of consciousness. Moral deterioration had corrupted the upper levels of society and was moving rapidly into the broad base of the populace. Intense nationalistic feeling was clashing openly with new and sinister forms of imperialism. Conformity was the spirit of the age. Government handouts were being used with increasing lavishness to keep the population from rising up and throwing out the leaders. Interest rates were spiraling upward in the midst of an inflated economy. External religious observances were considered a political asset, and abnormal emphasis was being placed upon sports and athletic competition. Racial tensions were at the breaking point. In such a time, and amid such a people, a child was born to a couple of faith who were soon to become political exiles. And the child who was born was called, among other things, Immanuel.

It seemed that nobody was ready for the coming of the Messiah, nobody except a couple of devout people, one of whom was Simeon.

God's plan doesn't follow the usual script. Who was it that got the "inside" information on the most important news to the Jewish nation? Was it Herod, the King? Was it the chief priest? Was it Nicodemus?

No, it was poor, faithful, old Simeon. Wow, who does God look for? The faithful. You can't control where you end up or how you're promoted, but you can be faithful to God.

Faithful old Simeon took his seat on the same bench upon which he had found comfort for fifty or

more years and was hardly settled in before two parents of obviously humble means entered the Temple to dedicate their child, holy to the Lord, and offer the sacrifice required. His old cataracts cleared long enough for him to see the child as he felt the nudge from the holy spirit at his shoulder and he rose. He slowly approached the couple and child, motioned his request to hold the child. The mother held him out for the old man. Imagine how Simeon's aging heart leaped within him. In a voice that had been for so long little more than a hoarse and gravely imitation of its former self, shared a song that has been repeated through the ages-- "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people Israel."

Mary and Joseph were amazed at his words as he blessed them. And old Simeon wasn't finished yet. He went on, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon had achieved his bucket list. He was ready to die. Death is not a subject any of us want to talk about, is it? And yet if you've seen Jesus, if you know the Messiah, you're ready for death. You welcome death.

This is similar to Jacob's words to Joseph in Genesis. He begged Joseph to "let him die" because he had seen his son. I want to ask you today, "Have you seen the Son? If you have, you're ready to die."

In fact, I dare say that until you're ready to die, you're not ready to live.

If you've met the Messiah, you can slip from this Earth in peace. And Simeon did.

Simeon's words contain powerful truths about the Gospel. First he says that his eyes had seen Salvation. Salvation is not a thing or a religious term. Salvation is a Person, that Person is Jesus, that little baby who grew up to become a Man and become sin for you and me.

Simeon knew he wasn't just a Light for the Jews. He was a Light for the entire world. You see, Israel's purpose was to be God's light to the unbelieving nations.

And so it is that this Gospel of Christ, the story of Christmas is not a Jewish story or a Gentile Story or an American story, but the story for all mankind.

Jesus didn't just come for a select group of people. Jesus came for all of mankind, all who would believe.

That's why the Christmas story isn't just about a few Jewish people 2,000 years ago. It's about you. Jesus came to this Earth for you and for me.

What's on your bucket list?

#1 on mine is that I want my children, and my grandchildren to know Christ and to trust in Him completely. I don't want them to have to go through a heathen period like I did. Of Course it means that I have to share what I have with them. I have to tell them what I believe and why I believe it. I have to share the experiences that I have had, the experiences of my mother and my grandparents, all of which were passed down to me and gave me added reason to believe that God loves me, and that for some unfathomable reason known only to him, I have been chosen in Christ to know, love and serve him.

I want my children to have faith, and that means that I have to share it with them. And certainly not in words. I need to read my bible daily. To pray AT LEAST daily. To attend church and Sunday School and Wednesday nights at every opportunity. As badly as I want them to have faith in my lifetime, I know it will not happen if they do not see me practice the faith I profess.

What's on your bucket list? For Simeon it was to see Jesus. For Paul, his only goal was to know Christ more. Is that yours? Paul also said he wanted to stay here and win the lost or go to Heaven and be with Christ. Is that your mindset? That if you go, you're in peace, but if you stay you are in peace. I submit to you that Jesus should be your bucket list. He should be your reason for living.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, our Father, as this year comes to an end we remember all its days. We give you thanks for

every happy hour and every happy day; every new thing we have learned and seen and done; every new friend we have made, and the old friends to whom we are closer than ever.

We remember and give thanks with joy for everything which was difficult to face or hard to bear, but out of which we came, wiser in mind and stronger in character; we thank you for every failure and disappointment that has kept us humble and for everything that has shown us how dangerous life can be, and how much we need you. We remember and give thanks with joy.

For every task in which we failed; every temptation to which we fell; every person we hurt and failed and disappointed; every word and deed for which we are sorry now. We remember & confess with sorrow.

We pray that all those for whom this has been a thrilling, exciting, and successful year, that they may remember to give you thanks;

We ask that all those for whom this has been a sad year, and who come to the end of it lonelier than they were, may find comfort and courage to go on;

For all those for whom this has been an ordinary year, when nothing special seemed to happen, may they know that it is in life's routine they win or lose their destiny:

Bless them all. And help us now, made wise by the lessons life has taught us, to go on to higher heights and nobler things to the glory of Christ, who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION “As With Gladness Men of Old” *The Hymnal #63*

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE “Song of Simeon” *The Hymnal #603*

Lord, bid your servant go in peace; your word is now fulfilled.
These eyes have seen salvation's dawn, this child so long foretold.
This is the Savior of the world, the Gentiles' promised light,
God's glory dwelling in our midst, the joy of Israel.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis