

FOLLOW THE PROMISE
A SERMON BASED ON LUKE 2:21-35
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2019
'Christmas Eve - 7 p.m. & 10 p.m.

I'm going to let you in on a secret.

Well it's may not so much a secret,

as much as it is a fun fact that we've forgotten.

I consider it a liberating, life-changing, piece of knowledge,

that for some of you

could result in the recovery of your freedom.

The secret, the fun-fact, is this.

There are only 12 days of Christmas.

Not a month of days, not six weeks of days, not year round of days.

Just 12 days, like the song says.

The other fun fact, is that in the church year calendar,

Christmas has just started. Now. Tonight.

The lighting of the Christ candle was the starting gun.

In the church year,

Christmas starts tonight, and will end on January 6th.

What this means, is that those of you
who have been subjected to Christmas's tyranny
since mid-November, are free.

This means, as a purist, all through most of December,
you can say it. "Not Christmas yet."
Don't have to put Christmas lights up.
Don't have to put a Christmas tree up.
Don't have to bake, shop, or wrap.
Not Christmas yet."

You'll be less popular than a skunk under the porch,
but you can say it.

You'll be correct, pungently correct,
but neither will anyone want to be around you.
And if you have people who care for your well-being,
they will tell you to knock it off
and get the decorations on the tree.

I tell you this fun fact, of 12 days, mostly as justification
for choosing a Bible passage that you may not be used to hearing
on Christmas eve.

You would typically hear about Mary and Joseph,
about angels, shepherds and wise men.

If the preacher was in a particularly philosophical
and theological mood,
you might hear the first chapter of John 1.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God and the Word was God.
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

But tonight, I wanted you to meet Simeon.
If you keep reading in Luke, you would also meet Anna.
In fact, it seems likely that Simeon and Anna met Jesus
well before the wise men did.

Part of the reason I want you to meet Simeon and Anna,
is because we are in danger of peaking too early
when it comes to Christmas.

By the time we get to December 25th,

many people are finished. Done.

The tree has been up since mid-November.

Baking is now done

The shopping is done.

The wrapping is done. Well, except for a few of you.

The diet got blown up weeks ago because

people have been bringing treats to work.

Daily, and it would be rude not to try.

By the time we get here, we are kind of done.

But really, we are starting the first day of Christmas.

If we peak to early,

if we aren't willing to wait,

if we are already taking down the tree,

and wrapping nativity scene baby Jesus

back into his bubble wrap

and putting him back into a box under the stairs,

if we go home early,

we miss it.

Simeon and then Anna.

They were willing to wait.

In our aging, in our waiting, we can risk losing patience.

At the time,

Jeanne Calment was the oldest living human

whose age can be verified.

On her 120th birthday,

she was asked to describe her vision for the future.

“Very brief,” she said.

Simeon was willing to wait.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel,

for the comfort, the solace, the reassurance, the promise.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit,

that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

On the 8th day after his birth, as was custom, Jesus was circumcised.

Then, within 40 days,

he was taken to the temple to be consecrated to the Lord.

Simeon had the stirring in his gut to get himself to the temple,

the day Jesus' was brought by his parents.

In being willing to wait for it,
in not peaking too early,
in not packing it up before it was time,
Simeon saw the promise.

Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus
to be presented to God at the temple.
Simeon was lead to be at the temple,
lead to Jesus and saw him,
saw the Lord's Messiah, saw the promise.

Simeon saw Jesus and saw the consolation of Israel,
a light for the Gentiles.

Simeon took Jesus into his hands.
He had his vision confirmed.
He saw the grace and promise of God.
He experienced the days of Christmas

Anna was nearby.

Scripture calls her a prophet.

At 84, in that time, she was positively ancient.

She had been widowed after only seven years of marriage.

She was possibly on her own for over 60 years.

She lived her life at the temple,

in worship, praying and fasting, day and night.

Living in the poverty of widowhood,

hers was a life in the hands of God.

When she saw the infant Jesus,

she too had her vision confirmed and restored.

She gave thanks to God,

and spoke to all about the redemption of Israel.

These two, very old, had waited.

Holding Jesus, seeing Jesus

they had the truth in their hands.

This infant boy, God's Messiah,

was their comfort, their strength, their future,

their consolation.

Keith Harris, preacher says,

‘As Simeon and Anna held the Christ in their hands,

they saw the reality,

this same baby they were holding

was the one who actually held them in God’s hands.

The baby held them and was their consolation.

For those of us who can tend to push ahead to ‘get on with it.’

This waiting to receive a Messiah can be counter intuitive.

Simeon and Anna in their aging years,

saw and embraced their infant Saviour.

One who by appearances had no power,

no influence, no status,

but in their willingness to wait,

they could see who it was in front of them

So they put out their hands to him,

and received Jesus.

They didn’t seize the day,

they received the day.

They received the promised consolation.

God is at work in each stage of life.

Sometimes we are impatient,

peak too early and are tempted to just move on.

Simeon and Anna waited on the promise.

Our willingness to wait on God's grace,

our willingness to receive the consolation

that is taking Jesus into our arms and into our lives,

that is where we will discover

God's promised peace.

When we wait long enough for God to appear,

he will. He did. He does.

It's his promise.

When we embrace him and hold him

we will see it.

Our consolation, our salvation,

something not of our own making,

nor achieved by our own doing,
or acquired by carrying our own weight,
or by seizing the day and moving things along.

Our salvation is in God's hands,
a promise for us to receive,
and hold
and look upon with wonder and with thanks.

Don't rush past it in order to pack it all away.

Wait. Anticipate. Pay attention.

The angels declared good news of great joy.

'Today, in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you.'

The promise given to Simeon has also been given to you.

You will see the Lord's Messiah.

A light of revelation for the Gentiles.

Don't pack it up

or pack it in so soon. Wait. Anticipate.

It's the first day of Christmas.

The promised Jesus is just getting started.

Amen.