

Ready for Christmas 5 - The Fulfillment of Christmas

When we read the Christmas story, of course we always read Luke 2 about the taxing, the inn, the angels, and the shepherds. Then we very often read in Matt 2 about Herod and the wise men. It is widely recognized that the wise men coming was not likely to have been right away. What is least likely to for us to hear about in the Christmas season is an event that came *between* the shepherds and the wise men's arrival. This was the dedication of Christ. Christmas was the fulfillment of all the centuries of promises that had been given to Israel. This thought is so well captured in "O Little Town of Bethlehem,"

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how
still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless
sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth,
the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the
years are met in thee tonight.

1. The fulfillment of Christmas

We recognize how thought provoking it is to impose a shadow of a cross on a picture of a manger, but the blessing of Christ at His dedication was an actual Biblical declaration of the purpose of the birth of Christ to be fulfilled in His death. This describes the heart of Simeon and Anna.

Luke 2:25-38 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the

law,

We don't know how old Simeon was, but we get the idea that he was just waiting on death to take him. He had this promise, though, that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Lord's anointed one, the consolation of all the hopes and fears of all the years of Israel. According to the Law, a child was brought to the Temple for dedication. Simeon was moved by the Spirit not only to go, but also to speak by the Spirit.

28Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
29Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
30For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
31Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
32A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

When people use the phrases, "in your face," or "throwing something up in your face," or "coming face to face," they are referring to being confronted with something in an explicit and inescapable way. That is what Simeon was saying here. Jesus was going to grow up before the face of all the people. There would be no way to avoid Him. Israel was going to have to deal with Him. The fulfillment of Christmas was going to take place beginning over the next 30 years. Jesus was going to become the light to lighten the Gentiles, not only the crowning glory of Israel.

33And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
34And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
35(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that

the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

People treat Jesus like the proverbial elephant in the room. They live and move around something that is so big as if it is not there, but it is so big and impossible to miss. Simeon's prophecy essentially put the Jewish world on notice at this official setting that they were not going to be able to avoid Him.

- Jesus' kingdom is going to rearrange who is considered up and down: "this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."

The religious leaders would fall. The political leaders would fall. The poor would rise. Lowly fishermen, tax collectors, a Samaritan woman, the afflicted, would rise.

- Jesus' kingdom would be spoken against and opposed.

Many will disagree with and reject what Jesus is proclaiming.

Matt 7:13-14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

They want a Jesus with a morality that is fluid enough to accommodate their situational ethic. They want a soft-focus warm and fuzzy spirituality. They don't want the table-flipping Jesus who cleansed the Temple. They don't want the Jesus who derided the Pharisees as white-washed sepulchres.

- Jesus' kingdom would reveal the thoughts that were in the hearts of many.

It is highly likely that many people

you deal with seem so nice as they try to get ahead in life by getting along with you. This all works out pretty well because they are dealing with something they have in common with you. This is especially true of business and work relationships, but it is also true to a degree about social relationships such as friends and even family. It is not until you begin to press upon them the urgent need for being right with God that you discover what thoughts they are harboring. Nancy, for example, found this one day on the way to a Memorial Day picnic when we stopped for a last minute purchase. The cashier was polite enough until she offered him a Gospel tract. He was of a different religious background and was positively threatening against Christians. When people are confronted with the Christ of Christmas, how they respond will reveal their heart.

36And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day.

38And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

When Anna, the prophetess came by, she joined in and crystalized the moment, declaring that Jesus was there for the redemption of Israel.

2. Wait for it...

The title of this message is more involved than it may appear. This all stems from the misunderstanding that the Jews had about the coming of the Messiah. The fulfillment of Christmas was not going to be complete during the

life of Christ on earth. It was only going to *begin* to take place. Simeon and Anna told the people that Jesus was going to bring about the redemption of Israel, but all Israel was looking for the re-establishment of the throne of David. They were looking for the completed kingdom of God. But Simeon and Anna did not actually speak of the time frame that would be involved and we are in the same state that Israel was left in. We are still waiting for the complete fulfillment of the message of Christmas.

The message to Adam was wait, the seed of the woman is coming, but you are going to face a life of labor first. The message to Noah was wait, there is judgment by flood first. The message for Abraham was wait, a descendent of yours will indeed be sacrificed, but keep looking for a city whose maker is God. The message to David was wait, you cannot build a temple but your great descendent will create heavenly mansions and temple. The message for Malachi was wait, the forerunner shall appear. The message for Simeon was you were waiting and now here He is! The consolation of Israel.

Israel waited for their Messiah and His kingdom, but they had missed part of the message. According to Isaiah and Daniel, Messiah was going to be cut off and make a sacrifice of Himself for our sins. I do not imagine God falling over Himself to encourage us to be patient saying, "Oh, just hang in there a little longer. Be patient with Me, please believe Me, the Kingdom is coming!" I feel more of a command, almost a reprimand to be patient. When the disciples met with Jesus before Pentecost, He instructed them to wait for the next thing that was going to happen.

Acts 1:4-7 And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me.

5For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many

days hence.

6When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

They pressed Him, and He corrected them. We cannot tell if this was a rebuke or a clear instruction, but it definitely sounds firm. He left them with a charge they *were* supposed to tend to.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

And then, as they gazed on as He ascended, the angels essential message was wait for it:

Acts 1:9-11 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

It had been 5,000 years since the world began waiting. Jesus had arrived, but there is still some waiting that has had to be done. Imagine the frustration Simeon might have felt if he had lived long enough to witness the crucifixion. He knew that Christ was the redeemer for Israel, but the ultimate redemption

will not take place until the Millennium. The world has capitalized on the waiting to scoff over this. They look at the time that has passed and have become emboldened. Peter covers this with a warning.

2Pet 3:1-12 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

3Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

4And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

5For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the

elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Some of us have been challenged about how we preach Jesus is coming back. They look at our warning without realizing that He is going to come when no one would ever expect it, like a thief in the night. They look at us as one who cries wolf. They might scoff at this idea, but Jesus *is* coming back. A hundred years ago they scoffed at the idea that there would be a resurrection of Israel, and then God turned the world upside down and Israel was reborn. The ultimate fulfillment of Christmas will take place on God's timetable. He is not slack as some men count slackness. In God's timing our thousand years is only like a day, which is what we would expect from Someone who inhabits eternity. God is not willing that anyone should perish so He is not going to rush His plan.

As you read through the Bible, you see God moving inexorably forward. Wait for it! Many have risen or fallen depending on how they have responded to Christ. Many hearts have been revealed. As Peter concludes,

11*Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness,
12Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

As we work our way through this world, we let this blessed thought guide and control us in holiness. The fulfillment of God's plan began at that first Christmas and will not be stopped. Our preparation for serving Him by studying and praying, our witness for Him, our looking for Him should not grow old. If anything, we should rejoice that we can squeeze in more time for the

sake of the lost world. If that plan is not realized in our time on earth, then we will have had the blessing of a full and maximized life for Him. Depending on what point you are at in your spiritual life, what is your next step? Salvation? Baptism? Getting committed and involved? Getting right with God and back on track?

1. The fulfillment of Christmas Luke 2:25-38, Matt 7:13-14
2. Wait for it... Acts 1:4-11, 2Pet 3:1-12