

December 27, 2015

“Comfort and Joy”

Luke 2:22b-23, 25, 36, 38 NIV

Joseph and Mary took him (Jesus) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord")...

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

There was also a prophetess, Anna ...Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon and Anna are not part of the Nativity scene. They weren't there with the shepherds on the night of Christ Birth, yet, they are very much a part of the story of the infant Jesus. They had been waiting for the birth of God's Messiah or Christ and they got to see Him, and at least in the case of Simeon he got to hold him in his arms.

We dedicate children to the Lord as we witnessed last week. At the time of Christ according to the Jewish law the first born son was to be presented or dedicated to the Lord.

Exodus 13:1-2 NLT

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Dedicate to me every firstborn among the Israelites. The first offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, belongs to me."

Well, the very day that Joseph and Mary took their now 40 day old Jesus to be presented, dedicated or consecrated to the Lord, the Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to be there. And Anna was there too, but of course she was always there when the doors of the Temple were open.

Simeon was waiting for comfort and Anna was among those looking forward to redemption. Waiting and looking forward are the same word in the Greek. I was thinking about how the time before Christmas is a time of waiting or looking forward. Like these actual letters written by children to Santa Claus...

Dear Santa Claus,

When you come to my house there will be cookies for you. But if you are real hungry you can use our phone and order a pizza to go.

Dear Santa,

I want a Puppy. I want a playhouse. Thank you. I've been good most of the time. Sometimes I'm wild.

Dear Santa, (From a 4-year-old)

I'll take anything because I haven't been that good.

Dear Santa,

I'm not going to ask for a lot. Here's my list: The Etch-A-Sketch animator, 2 packs of #2 pencils, Crayola fat markers and the big gift...my own color TV! Well, maybe you could drop the pencils; I don't want to be really selfish.

Now it's the last Sunday of December and we wait and look forward to the New Year. But what are we actually waiting for? What can we expect and what to we look forward to receiving?

Simeon, we are told, was waiting for consolation: comfort
Anna, we are told, was among those who were looking forward to redemption: deliverance or forgiveness. And these two things, comfort and forgiveness were found in this child, Jesus Christ.

I was thinking about those two things, comfort and forgiveness. I thought those are two things we will need in this New Year and they can be found in Jesus Christ.

Simeon was waiting for comfort:

Things weren't going real well for the nation of Israel. People were living in fear, under Roman rule and especially under the rule of the cruel King Herod. They hadn't heard from God in many years, and many wondered if the Messiah would ever come.

Yet Simeon had hope and anticipation and for good reason: **(Luke 2:26)**

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Simeon's expectation focused on the comfort that Christ would bring. Among Jews of Simeon's day one of the popular titles of Messiah was Comforter. Like many of the Christmas songs we sang during Advent, they were longing for the Messiah to come and bring His comfort to them.

It strikes me that the desire to be comforted is a universal human need. We all struggle with hurt, loss, loneliness, emptiness, insecurity, even desperation.

The Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to go to the temple courts at just the right time on just the right day that Joseph and Mary were bringing their infant to the Temple. When Simeon looked at the baby Jesus, now about 6 weeks old, he knew that God's promise had been kept. Here was Immanuel, "God With Us," to make everything right, to provide significance by His presence, and to eliminate rejection, fear, and loneliness.

Verse 28 tells us that Simeon reached down and took Jesus out of Mary's arms and began to praise God. As he broke out into praise, he acknowledged that God had not only fulfilled the individual promise to him, but also the promises of the prophets to send the Anointed One to comfort all people.

Jesus said in this world we will have trouble. I wonder what trouble we will face in 2016.

I can tell you this from experience, whatever trouble might come your way, God will be with you and you will find comfort in Jesus Christ. Several scriptures come to mind let me share a few:

Psalms 23:4

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

Psalms 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

Psalms 119:76

Now let your unfailing love comfort me, just as you promised me, your servant.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

Matthew 11:28

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

Anna -- Waiting for Forgiveness

After her husband had died, Anna had dedicated herself to fasting and praying in the temple. In fact, the Bible says that she never left the temple but worshipped day and night. This means whenever the doors of the temple were open she was there.

She was looking forward to the same person as Simeon was, but with a different orientation. Instead of looking for comfort, Anna was looking for forgiveness. Take a look at **verse 38**:

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

The word redemption is related to the idea of captivity. The Old Testament Passover and the release of Israel from Egyptian slavery stood in Anna's day as the ultimate redemption and the symbol of God's power to release captives. Ultimately, Passover pointed ahead to that day when God would provide deliverance from

the slavery of sin.

When Anna saw Jesus, she gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who were waiting for redemption. Here, at last, was the One who would save His people from their sins.

What sin do you need deliverance from? What sin or addiction holds you captive? What do you need to be delivered from? As we face a new year it's time for a clean slate. And ...

Jesus Provides What We Need

When Jesus came, He provided the very things that Simeon and Anna were waiting for -- God's comfort and His forgiveness. Let me ask you a question. What are you in need of? Whatever it is, Jesus can give it to you.

Can any of you identify with Simeon? Some of you are really hurting right now. You feel lonely, empty, afraid, and maxed out. Do you need some comfort? Some consoling? Do you need a fresh sense of God's presence? If so, you can find what you're looking for in Jesus. He came to console us right where we're at.

Or, do you identify more with Anna? Are you plagued with guilt because of something you've done or the way you've been living? Do you feel like you're trapped in a pattern of sin that you can't break out of? If you need forgiveness, Jesus can give it to you today. I can think of no better time than now, just before a new year to do just that.

Action Steps

There are three action steps from this passage that will help you experience God's comfort and forgiveness.

1. Be a Marveler

Luke 2:33 NIV

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

Marvel can also be translated: admire, have in admiration, be amazed , wonder.

Are you a marveler? Does God amaze you? Are you ever in awe and wonder of the love and greatness of God? Do you take time to worship God in admiration? Or, are you too caught up in the busyness and stress of life? Have you been running around or are you taking the time to slow down, to be quiet in God's Presence? Are you spending adequate time with Him in the Word and prayer, in worship and praise allowing Him time to amaze you. Has your faith become too predictable, too familiar that God no longer astonishes you?

2. Be a Mover

Luke 2:27 NIV we read this about Simeon:
Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

Luke 2:38 NIV we read this about Anna:
Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God

Both Simeon and Anna were movers. They were in tune with the Holy Spirit and when the Holy Spirit prompted them to move, they didn't sit still. Actually, if you think about it every one of the Christmas characters responded to the Spirit's leading with the exception of Herod:

Mary was ready to move when she said to the angel, "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)

Joseph moved when he did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. (Matt 1:24 & 2:13)

The Shepherds were movers as well when they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened..." (Luke 2:15)

And, the wise men saw the star and moved out to find the King that had been born.

When God prompts you to do something, you need to do it. It might mean salvation for some of you. It might mean full surrender for others of you. Or, maybe the Spirit wants you to be more involved in serving people. Do you sense Him asking you to do something today? Are you willing to move? If not you may miss out on a miracle this new year.

3. Be a Messenger

Interestingly, as we work at becoming marvelers, we can't help but become movers. That leads us to the final action step from this passage -- become a messenger. Notice verse 38 again: "...she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

In 2016 you are going to come upon people, family, friends and strangers who will have longings that represent an inner search for comfort and forgiveness -- those things that only the Messiah Jesus can provide. God wants each one of us to become messengers to them of the Comforter and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

As you and I become amazed - marvelers, the wonder of Christ will astonish us. Then, as we become movers, our needs for comfort and forgiveness will be met. And, as we take our role as messengers seriously, we'll be in position to introduce others to the Christ of all comfort and joy; so that they in turn can find what they have been waiting

for. They will discover that once you have the Son, you have everything.