

Sermon for December 30, 31

We often talk about the miracles that Jesus performed during his very short ministry. The readings that were chosen today speak to the miracles of the birth of Jesus. When I read Isaiah, and much of the Old testament, I hear of promises of Christ. After all, I am reading them through the lens of the New Testament. The prophets speak to the miracles of the life of Christ. He will live as a man, walk the earth, perform miracles, but he will suffer, die and rise again. All true miracles.

The life of Jesus starts as a miracle.

Jesus is born in a stable. His is a lowly birth. Mary and Joseph are not wealthy. They were by most standards, poor. Mary and Joseph are faithful Jewish people. They had gone to Bethlehem for the consensus. They go to the temple to dedicate their first born son to God. The offering they sacrifice is that allowed for the poorest of families according to Leviticus 5:7. A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Luke wants us to understand a few things about this family. They follow the law of Moses, they love God and they are poor. Our Messiah comes from a fairly normal, regular, low income family. The expected King comes from a lowly household. Not from royalty as it was imagined.

When I first read this lesson this week, I read the words ``Simeon took him in his arms and praised God." I remembered the birth of our first born. Not that I am likening Joey to the Messiah. But that feeling, the overwhelming feeling of love when you first hold your baby. I never knew that was possible. If I can feel that for my son, for our children,our grandchildren,

how much more does God love me? My heart is overwhelmed just thinking about it. So, I imagine Simeon feeling that same thing. He even declares that he can die now. "For my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon recognizes the Christ Child and he declares that Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Simeon understands that this king is more than a king only for Israel, but for the whole world. That is a big proclamation! Especially for a devout Jew in the Holy Temple.

When Simeon blesses them, he tells them "this child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel." He is sharing his prophecy for Jesus. He will die as a man and then raise as a king. That language of falling then rising brings to mind that this is not a normal king, right? This is the king who will turn the world upside down.

Then there is Anna, elderly Anna. The daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. Notice how Luke declares her lineage. We don't know more than that, but it's important. She's important. And she praises God and speaks about the child as the redeemer of Jerusalem. Luke is claiming her importance alongside Simeon. We have the viewpoint of both a man and a woman. Luke pairs men and women throughout his storyline. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, now Simeon and Anna. There are more in the book of Luke.

As one writer said, "These pairings reflect Luke's uncommon regard for women in that patriarchal society."

Let's talk about promises. This time of year we tend to make new year's resolutions. How often have we been so determined to lose weight, eat better, sleep better, change our attitudes, spend less? And how often do we forget those resolutions after a week or two? I am not good at New Year's resolutions. I'm not sure why. I have finally given up on them. I keep my promises,

just not to myself. I used to tell my kids, I don't make promises that I can't keep. My best response to most requests from kids is "I'll try" or "we'll see".

God makes promises. He made promises in the prophecies. And He made good on those prophecies. The one promise that I believe in the most is the one I shared with the kids. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the bible tells me so. It's one of my favorite hymns, believe it or not. So much so that I want it sung at my funeral. This promise, that Jesus loves me, is one that I try to allow to reside in my heart all year long.

What fulfilled promises do you cherish? My mom never heard the words I love you as a child. Coming from a stoic German Family, it just didn't happen. And the woman who raised her was her stepmom. It was a marriage of convenience. But I loved my Oma. As a parent, my mom made sure we heard those words every day, I love you. Even when she was sick and failing, I had to go sit on her lap so she could say I love you to me. I love that promise she made to herself and to my sister and I.

In this new year, what promises can we make individually? Let's not call them resolutions but promises. Can we promise to study scripture more often or at all? Can we promise to love our neighbors? Can we share the love of Christ with others? Can we respect the needs of others?

What kind of promises can we as a congregation make? We ended the year pretty well. Chris and Sarah filled the food pantry with your offerings. We supplied gifts for so many families at the Harbor House. For SPAM night the other week, we collected 65 pairs of socks for the Harbor House. Of course we had a snowball fight with them first. But these were new socks in sizes from mens to kids. These are promises that we can make together. Reach out to our neighbors. Feed the hungry. Invite people. Invite people to be loved and embraced by you, by this

congregation. Welcome the stranger. Welcome the stranger knowing that you are welcoming a child of God. This is how we can dedicate ourselves to God on a daily basis. As with Mary and Joseph this dedication is required of us. To be followers of Christ, we love, invite and we serve others.