

Christmas Celebration 2014
Hope Has Come
December 20th & 21st, 2014

Welcome: I don't know about you...but in the Mullenix home there is some serious excitement growing over the days to come! For six weeks now, we've been counting down to the arrival of Beth's parents, who were set to arrive today. On Thursday morning, I was talking to Karlie, who is nine, and she said to me... *"Dad, when Saturday comes, I'm going to spend the day watching out the window for Pa and Maga!"* What she didn't know was that Will and Deb were arriving a day early to surprise the kids! So, they arrived yesterday, and we feel like a party just rolled into town!

So there's joy over family. Then, there are things we do every year to help foster excitement! For starts, every year we begin listening to Christmas music on November 1st because I've calculated that this gives us Christmas cheer for 16% of the year. And this drives some of you crazy just like it drives Beth crazy, but she's gracious! Then, there is Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and the more famous *Buddy the Elf*! Two very similar genres...but there's joy in both? And this weekend, the food making will begin and the whole party will go on for several days until it culminates on January 1st...and then we all go out and purchase gym memberships! And all of this is very good!

You see, I believe that as Christians, we should embrace this season with things like celebration and laughter and generosity because these moments are gifts to be enjoyed!

Even more, regardless of whether you are a Christian or are unsure about Jesus and the Christmas narrative altogether. I believe that if you will take the time to look deeply into the birth of Christ, and the historical events behind what has been celebrated across the world for over 2,000 years. What you discover there will not only stir in you a great deal of celebration and joy. It will change everything about the way you see God, yourself, and the people around you...even the world!

Songs: As I mentioned, one of our favorite things about this season is the music...especially those songs which recount for us the narrative of Christmas. For centuries, composers and musicians have retold the Christmas story through song, inviting us into the celebration. Bach and Mozart composed renditions of *Mary's Magnificat*, in which Mary worships God for choosing her to give birth to the Savior of the world. We have songs about the manger scene in Bethlehem where the Son of God came into the world as a baby; songs of the angels who announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and the wise men who traveled from the East to worship Jesus.

Each of these songs tells us something important about God and his great love for us...so we would do well to listen!

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Today, I want to look at one of these songs, which in my experience is an unfamiliar song compared to many of the better-known tunes that we associate with this time of year. It is known as *Simeon's song* and we find it in the gospel of Luke...

Will you read it with me...from Luke, chapter 2?

"Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God saying, 'Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!'" Luke 2:28-32

In Simeon's song, we find three things that Jesus came into our world to do. Let's look at them together...

#1 – Jesus Came to Reveal God (vs. 32)

"He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" 2:32

Many people today believe that if we're going to determine whether or not a personal God exists, and if there is a God, who he is, what he is like...and what He thinks of us! If we're going to find the answer to these questions, then we're the ones who have to do the searching! (Maybe that's you!)

But, notice the image Simeon uses to describe Jesus! He is a light to reveal God to the nations!

Light – If you're anything like me, you lose things from time to time! I'm convinced that there is a black hole in our home that sucks up objects! Beth would tell you that this is my way of justifying my own propensity for losing things. But, she's wrong! We lose TV remotes and shoes and dog bones and pacifiers and car keys and money! Any of you like this? So, what do you do when you lose something? I'll tell you what I do! After looking in all of the obvious places, I take a flash light and search the house from top to bottom until I find the thing!

As I hold the light, I do the searching! The missing object doesn't search for the one holding the light!

Over and over again, the writers of Scripture tell us that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our world to search for us, to reveal who God is and how we can know Him! I'll show you a few examples.

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Several hundred years before Simeon held the baby Jesus, the prophet Isaiah spoke about the arrival of a child...

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. (Who is the light? Keep reading in verse 6)...For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:2, 6

Who is the child that Isaiah spoke of?

Year's later (around the time that Luke writes his gospel), Matthew, who was a disciple of Jesus, wrote a historical biography of Jesus' life. In it, he recorded the moment when an angel appeared to Joseph, telling him not to break his engagement with Mary, but instead to name their child, 'Jesus'. Listen to Matthew's words...

"All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: 'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us.'" Matthew 2:22-23

A few years later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Apostle Paul described Jesus this way...

"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God." Colossians 1:15

The author of Hebrews writes...

"The Son (Jesus) radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God..." Hebrews 1:3a

Every one of the biblical authors agree that we're not the ones who go looking for God, because God already came for us, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

C.S. Lewis was one of the greatest thinkers, writers, and theologians of the 20th century. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis humorously describes how he came to faith in Jesus after being an atheist for many years.

"Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about 'man's search for God.' To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat."
C.S. Lewis

Lewis is saying. If you're asking the question, *"Who is God? What is He like? Can I know Him? Those are good questions to ask!"* However, don't think that you have to hunt God down! Look at Jesus, and see in the manger the One who came as a Light to

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reveal God to you! Jesus, the visible image of the invisible God who radiates God's glory and character, came for you and me!

That's the first thing we learn from Simeon. The second thing we see is that Jesus came to bring hope to the hopeless!

#2 – Jesus Came to Bring Hope to the Hopeless

One of the reasons that Simeon's song isn't familiar to many of us is because it's been captured more through art than music.

Rembrandt – The most well known piece was painted by Rembrandt around the mid 1600's. In fact, many believe that this was his last painting because it was found unfinished in his workshop the day after he died. Notice how Rembrandt portrays Simeon in his old age. He's tired, virtually blind, yet hopeful.

Now, the only thing we know about Simeon is what Luke recorded for us in this brief encounter. Look at verse 25...

"At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord." Luke 2:25-26

Here is Simeon...on the doorstep of death. Everything that our culture considers worthwhile – health, beauty, wealth, success – Simeon had none of it!

Yet...as he takes Jesus in his arms, he sings...

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised." Luke 2:29

Ask yourself, "What was it about Jesus that allowed Simeon to welcome old age and death with peace and joy in his heart?"

He must have found in this child a living and lasting hope that nothing in the world could take away! So, He looks at Jesus and says, *"Now that you're here, everything will be ok!"*

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Like Simeon...every one of us must find something in life to hope in! You must find something of which to say, *"Now that I have this, everything will be ok!"*

Maybe you're saying, *"If I can just have a relationship...if I can find romance, everything will be ok!"*

Maybe it's beauty... *"If a young man will think I'm attractive and lovely, everything will be ok!"*

How about approval... *"If my mom or dad will just love me for who I am...if my peers will accept me, everything will be ok!"*

Or success... *"If I can reach this point in my career...if I can accomplish everything I've dreamed of, it will all be ok!"*

You might be pursuing financial security, or if you're sick, maybe it's physical health. Each of us is looking at something, and we're saying, *"If I can just have this, I'll have peace in my heart and everything will be ok!"*

Please don't misunderstand me! All the things I just mentioned are wonderful things that can bring us pleasure and satisfaction because they're gifts from God that He intends for our joy! But at the same time, if you've ever lost those things...if you've ever had your career fall apart, or lost financial security, or received a bad prognosis from the doctor. If you've lost a loved one, you know how fleeting those things are!

You see...if we're being intellectually honest, deep down, we know that a day is coming when we will lose our health and beauty! We can battle old age with Pilates, organics, and Botox, but even that gets creepy after a while. We know that someone is going to accomplish more than we did, and our 'Employee of the month' plaque will be replaced with someone else's picture. Our financial security and lifestyle won't last forever, and we're fools if we think otherwise. If you doubt that this is true, live 30 or 40 years, and you'll see...

"Maybe you're saying, Jed I thought this was a Christmas Celebration!" It absolutely is! One great reason that we celebrate Christmas is because it reminds us that without Jesus Christ, we are absolutely hopeless. If our lives merely amount to the sum total of our accomplishments, experiences, or the money in our bank, when those things go away, we'll be heartbroken and empty-handed.

Through Simeon, we see that there is One who is worthy of our deepest hopes! Jesus is the only One we can look at and say, *"I can lose it all – strength, youth, power, fame, wealth, beauty, even life itself – and everything will be ok!"*

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How can we be sure that Jesus is worthy of our deepest hopes? How do we know that He can be trusted? He not only came to reveal God and bring us hope...

#3 – Jesus Came to Bring Salvation to All (vs. 30)

For centuries, the people of Israel had lived under the oppressive thumb of nations like Babylon, Persia, and Rome. Yet, their ancient Scriptures (Old Testament) were filled with promises that, one day, God would send an Anointed One to rescue His people.

Simeon knew the promises. Luke writes that he was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel! And when Simeon laid eyes on Jesus...look at what he said!

"I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people." Luke 2:30-31

I have seen your salvation! Now...Israel believed that the Messiah would ride into town on a stallion, topple Israel's enemies, ascend a throne, and restore Israel as a political and military force. Then...God's people would be free!

But that isn't how Jesus' life played out, is it? If you listen closely, you'll hear as Simeon speaks to Mary about the fate of Jesus, that things are going to go far differently than anyone could have imagined!

*"Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, 'This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. **And a sword will pierce your very soul.**'" Luke 2:34-35*

Birth: Now, I don't know what you're like, but if someone had shown up at the hospital after the birth of my firstborn, pulled Beth aside and said to her, *"Congratulations...he's beautiful...but you need to know that a sword is going to pierce your soul. His life isn't going to play out well...it's going to break your heart."* I'm not sure what I would do, but I guarantee they wouldn't be staying for cake!

Why would Simeon say this?

He was looking beyond the manger to the cross! He knew that one day the child lying in his arms would stretch out his own arms to rescue the world!

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Jesus didn't enter our world as a victorious king! He was born to Jewish peasants from a no-name village, laid in an animal trough, and ran for his life until he was two!

Jesus didn't come as a warrior to crush his enemies! He came to be crushed for his enemies!

He didn't ascend a throne to rule over the world. He ascended a cross to save the world from sin and death!

At Christmas-time...it's appropriate that we gather to worship Jesus, the Christ-child...to marvel at the Son of God, who came into our world to reveal God to us! That truth alone will bring you to your knees in gratitude and wonder.

But when we gather...like Simeon, we look beyond the manger to the cross! Jesus, the Son of God, died the death we should have died to bring us back into the arms of our Heavenly Father!

When you realize that God loves you this much. That He knows you inside and out...and wants you to know Him. He loves you so deeply that He was willing to die for you so that you will trust Him, so your sins might be forgiven, so you might come back into His arms! When you realize this...it will change everything!

Close

Maybe you've been looking for God...and there's anxiety in your heart because you're unsure of whether you'll ever find him, and if you do, what He will think of you! If so...may you see in Jesus the One who came searching for you! And may you rest!

Maybe you've been placing your hope in something or someone other than Jesus! You're hoping in romance or a career or money or beauty or independence or family! You believe that if you can just hold on to those things, everything will be ok! **Maybe you've lost one of those things...and tonight your heart is aching!** May you see in Jesus the One who came to bring you hope! The one who will never fail you! And if you fail him...he will always forgive you!

Maybe you've never heard that there is a God who loves you and came for you. If you've heard, maybe you've never believed that it's true!

If so...tonight can be the moment when you trust Jesus for the first time!

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May you see Jesus...the Son of God who came to reveal God to us! May you see the One who laid down His life to give us joy...and peace...and hope!

Jesus has come...

Pray!