



SERMON ON LUKE 2: 22-40

In researching today's Gospel I came across a sermon by the Reverend Joel Pankow, a Lutheran Minister from Wisconsin. I liked the family reference he makes to Mary and Joseph having a son, named Jesus. I therefore decided to use this sermon as the basis for today's. Most of what you will read is his. Some is my experience.

Parents love to see their children succeed. They take pride in their children when they do well in life. And I have to admit, I liked it when my own children did well in sports and in their other activities such as band and cadets. It's nice to hear compliments from others when they played and performed well. It's much more fun watching your child perform well than it is when they have difficulties.

Yet, I also have to remember that there are many more important things in life. Sports and Cadets and Band aren't going to get them into heaven or save anyone's soul. I'd much rather have my child be faithful to Jesus. I pray for them to keep their faith and cherish God's Word and sacrament: that they would find a God pleasing vocation and cherish

God's Word. I have to remind myself of this from time to time. It troubles me how so many Christian parents don't see that as a priority in life. They love to post pics of their kids on Facebook doing sports, etc. How about some of them in Bible study or singing in church?

Joseph and Mary took the religious training of Jesus seriously. They wanted to make sure that they followed the law when it came to how they raised Jesus. So they had Him circumcised at eight days, and then they brought him to the temple again when He was 41 days old. This trip was in order to make an offering to purify Mary after having a child and also to consecrate Jesus to the Lord.

41 days - it's a long time. Think about what happened on the night Jesus was born. Shepherds came and praised God as they worshiped Jesus in the manger. They would have told Mary and Joseph about the announcement of the angel. But after that, what happened? Joseph and Mary would have moved into a home. Joseph would have probably done some carpentry to make ends meet. And what else? Nothing! Life would have probably seemed abnormally NORMAL. Here Mary has given birth to the Saviour of the world, and nothing miraculous has happened since until NOW.

It must have probably seemed strange to most of the people standing in line to make their sacrifices and consecrate their children that day. This old guy and this old lady come up to Jesus and start talking about how He's going to save the world - how this is the long awaited and promised Messiah. Simeon even grabs Jesus and holds him in his arms! Imagine coming for a baptism and having someone do that with your child!

Now, in the eyes of everyone there, it would have seemed like Simeon had lost his marbles. This was just a plain baby with plain looking parents, and they were POOR parents at that - they could only offer the minimal offering - not even a lamb - just two small birds. They would have had no gold or incense or myrrh, for the Wise Men would not show up for some time yet. But here Simeon was saying that Jesus was the Saviour who God had prepared in the sight of all people. And then Anna joined in and told everyone to come and look at Him too, thanking God!

Doesn't it show you how easy it is to overlook miracles in life? Doesn't it show you how blind we are, that God could be held in the baby right next to them and they would have no clue! How often do we miss out on the miracles of God, because they are hidden under such seemingly common things? If we ever stopped to consider the miracles of baptism - the Holy Spirit is coming into a child and making His home with him or her adopting the baby and taking it to be His own.

Think about that Jesus would actually give us His own body and blood under the bread and wine right here in this day and age! Yet it tastes so bland. It looks so normal. To think that these words which we listen to are the actual words of God speaking to us! If God were to come to us in a vision and speak to us face to face, we would bow in reverence and listen with the utmost attention. But we treat these words as if they were nothing special! How we miss the miracles, just like all the other parents that day couldn't see God in the baby right next door!

God didn't want them to miss the miracle! And isn't that a wonderful thing!?! So He chose these two old people to spread the news, Jesus was the Christ! He could have chosen the priest who was doing the sacrifice, but instead He chose two old and revered people. And isn't that similar to what still happens today. Grandparents try to keep encouraging their grandchildren to come to church and see the miracle of life, hear the miracle of the Word, see the miracle of God in the flesh who came to save them. They want them to stop from the ritual of life, the sports and the schooling and the work: stop and see Jesus. He's right here!

Simeon and Anna were the picture of faithfulness. Anna kept on fasting and praying, worshiping day and night. Fasting was a sign of repentance. She never grew too old for it. No, the more she was in the Word, the more she realized her sin and her need for the Saviour. She didn't stop praying. She didn't lose her zeal to worship the Lord, even though she was a lonely widow. She had God as her groom, and she was happy with Him.

Simeon's words were cheerful, but they were also rather dark for Mary. This child would provide the light of salvation for the Gentiles. He would be the glory of His people Israel. But he would also be a sign that would be spoken against. He would reveal the thoughts of many. A sword would pierce Mary's soul because of Him. He would cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.

And isn't that the truth? Think about what Mary had to go through as she heard people call Him demon possessed and revile Him. Think of being Jesus' mother, seeing Him crucified before her very eyes while being mocked and spat upon as a criminal. Think also about how Jesus revealed the thoughts of those who doubted Him. When He ate at the house of Simon, Simon doubted Jesus was a prophet because he allowed an adulterous woman to cry on his feet and wash his feet and touch Him. Jesus KNEW what Simon was thinking, and He called Simon out on it, calling him to repent because of his lovelessness.

Think of how hard that is to imagine, that one baby could call the falling and rising of everyone in the world: that the salvation or damnation of a world of sinners would all depend on that baby in the old man's arms! But that's who Jesus is. That's what Jesus does! He really is the One through which a person falls or stands.

Simeon and Anna may have been half blind, half deaf, and stooped over. They may have been senile and old. But in spite of all of that, they still got Jesus. Why? Because God revealed it to them. It didn't depend on their sense of sight or hearing: God made it clear to them. And as long as they had Jesus, it filled them with joy and zeal to spread the Gospel. Simeon was ready to die. He was at peace with it, as long as he was holding Jesus. You can be too, because He came to die for you too, for ALL of your sins. You don't have to fear dying in a car crash or dying of cancer or anything else for that matter. You are free to live and die when you hold Jesus in the arms of faith. And if the Holy Spirit could do that in and through two old people, then don't you think He could do that through you too?

Many of those parents probably went to the temple thinking to themselves, "Ok, we have to get this ritual done. Pay your two pigeon doves. Show them the child. Let's get out of here." Mary and Joseph weren't showing off their child, telling everyone about the visit of the

shepherds or the virgin birth. Nobody would have believed them. But God didn't want them or the people there to leave without a public announcement. So He chose two weak and old people to let the truth be known.

Here Mary and Joseph were in with the rest of the crowd, and Simeon and Anna go and make a show of THEIR child! Perhaps some of them thought, "What's the big deal about THAT kid! He doesn't look like anything special. What about MY child?" What would they have said? "Your child is nothing but a filthy sinner. He's not going to save anyone. He can't even save himself." But Mary and Joseph, they both wondered at what was being said. Jesus would be the Saviour of the world. It was all true. Things weren't so normal after all. This went from being a seemingly normal trip of fulfilling the law and turned into a wonderful gospel promise. Simeon and Anna revealed Jesus to the world.

And isn't this a microcosm of how we can approach worship? We don't want to get caught up in the ritual of when we stand up and sit down. We don't want to think of this as mere rites to get through, like checking a box. Where are we? How many hymns have we sung? What time is it? No. Let's not rush it. We come here to find Jesus as sinners who need refuge from our weariness of living in sin and death.

Let's not get caught up in the performance of our children up front. Here's the most attractive thing: we get to hold Jesus here. We get to eat and drink of Him here, be bathed in Him here. And when we get Jesus, we get the forgiveness of sins. We get the assurance that they've all been paid for, and we have peace. Simeon and Anna, who were close to death, seemed to find the most joy in holding on to Jesus and seeing Him! They came there to find Jesus. So also, those who came for Jesus, they also found peace that day. And so can you. This is a day to rejoice, whenever and wherever we can find Jesus and hold Him in the arms of faith.

Joseph and Mary go to present Jesus at the temple. Children can bring out the best and worst in parents. Sports can get ugly - especially when it comes to the parents. They say that people try to live vicariously through their children. So when their children do well, they take pride in their performance and see themselves in the child. This can be great when the child does well. But it's not so great when the child fails miserably. They yell at the refs. They get mad at the opposition. They get

mad at the teammates. "If only the coach knew what he was doing. Why isn't my son getting any playing time?" Or, they complain because my child isn't the lead clarinetist or lead Corporal in Cadets. Instead of having fun, they are miserable. You always will be when you live vicariously through your child.

Even when children are brought to church, they are the center of attention - how they're dressed: how they're singing: what their facial expressions are. Children grow older. They aren't as cute. Most of them won't play in college. Almost all of them will never make it to the professional ranks. We don't make a fuss over the adults.

But when Jesus is the focus of these songs and Jesus is the focus of life, we have something to be happy about. You can live vicariously through Him. Simeon grabbed Jesus as if He belonged to Simeon. And Mary let him hold Jesus. Maybe she realized that Jesus wasn't just being born for her, but for Simeon, and for the world. So we get to hold Jesus here. We get to know that He was successful.

He had a job to do, much more than a game, a job of dying for the sins of the world. We saw Him get mocked. We saw Him spat upon. We saw Him crucified. But we didn't yell at the ref, "That's a foul!" We too said, "Crucify!" We didn't want to get blamed for our sins. We wanted someone else to take it, and He did. And He rose.

Now we see this through the eyes of faith. My eyes have seen your salvation: this little harmless baby: He's the One. And that's the reason we come and rejoice: young and old: ugly and pretty: focusing on Jesus. He makes the seemingly normal abnormal. He gives us reason to rejoice.

Amen.