

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 2:22–40

Sermon: “The Gift of Heaven”

This First Sunday after Christmas, a whole one day, the color for paraments is white; it is still very much Christmas!

Our Epistle this morning emphasizes living out one’s Christian life in word and deed, empowered by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, as a chosen one of God. That is, a Christian is to exhibit a separateness from the world of self-centeredness that is lived out by non-Christians.

The Old Testament Reading gives the background for why Joseph and Mary came to the temple in the Gospel: to redeem their firstborn Son, Jesus, as the Law required.

We just celebrated Christmas yesterday, and today we’re back in church to continue our celebration of the gift God has given to the world and most important, to each one of us! namely, Jesus the Christ! With our focus in these days on the amazing reality that at Christmas God came down to earth, the sermon title may sound a little out of season: “The Gift of Heaven”

Heaven isn't just something we get around to talking about at Easter or maybe Ascension, when Jesus, after his time on earth, ascends back to heaven. The birth of Christ Jesus has everything to do with our preparation for heaven. The truth is that for us to be in heaven someday, we need Jesus Christ coming to earth because without his coming we can't have peace with God. And that, peace with God, is the key element of the Gospel and therefore also the key to heaven. We are prepared for heaven because our Savior brings us peace with God.

This peace with God is something that all men, women, and children need. We need this because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All people by their sins have earned eternal death and damnation. This truth of the circumstances of all people is a discordant tune in the eyes of the world. Christmas isn't supposed to be a time of thinking about sins and punishment. It's supposed to be a time of joy and goodwill toward all men. It's a time for holly and merriment, isn't it?

For many people, Christmas is a holiday and time of tradition for the family and nothing more. Many people don't know Jesus as the great gift that God has given to the world. In fact, Jesus sort of gets in the way of the fun and festivity if you take him and his words too seriously. Of course, I'm talking about the grown-up Jesus. The baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in the manger is so cute and adorable. That image of Jesus many in the world embrace and remember in a nostalgic sort of way. Even the Holy Family is an image that's viewed kindly; after all, it's an illustration of family, and Christmas is a time for family.

And, oh, how the people of the world love the gift-giving part of Christmas. Merchants love it because the success or failure of their enterprises often depends on the Christmas shopping spree. The recipients of the gift-giving love it because of the gifts they get, unless they don't get the gift they've been longing for. The sad part about all the gift-giving is a lack of understanding of the great gift that God has given to the world.

Most people don't know they need a Savior. They only see a little baby, remember him for this time of year, and then forget about him until it's time for another Christmas celebration. Truthfully, there are many who don't see Jesus at all, because their Christmas celebrations center around a fat bearded man in a red suit. The majority of the people of the world take no thought and have no knowledge of the eternal ramifications of the birth of Jesus the Christ.

And of equal concern is the reality that some Christians get caught up in the frenzy and glitter of Christmas without taking time to reflect on the gift of God and the eternal ramifications of the gift of Jesus.

The birth of Jesus is a joyous reality because it was prophesied and promised by God for many years prior to its fulfillment. That's why Simeon and Anna were so happy and rejoiced upon seeing the Christ Child. They'd been waiting and longing for the Savior. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple, they didn't just see a little baby; they also saw their Savior. They saw the Savior of mankind. Simeon and Anna, by the power of the Holy Spirit, saw and knew the great gift of God to them and to all mankind.

Simeon points out the universality of God's grace when he states in what we know as the Nunc Dimittis, ***“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel”*** (vs 29–32). Notice that this salvation is not only for God's people Israel (the Jews) but also for the Gentiles. We know this to be true because God tells us that he desires all people to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.

Remember, we are prepared for heaven because our Savior brings us peace with God! The birth of Christ is a great blessing because Jesus, true God, became incarnate so that he might live perfectly under the Law and satisfy that Law for all mankind. Jesus had to live willingly, perfectly under the Law of God as a man in order to experience the Law of God in the same way that we experience it. He had to be able to be tempted as we are tempted.

Jesus was tempted in every way that you and I are tempted. He is truly human. Jesus lived perfectly under the Law of God without ever sinning.

And in fulfillment of the Law, he took on the sins of all mankind so that he once and for all could pay their price, completely, on the cross. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. We can say with Simeon that we are able to depart in peace, because through faith in Christ Jesus we know that we are at peace with the heavenly Father and we are certain of our eternal salvation.

And we, as believers in Christ Jesus, are enabled by the Holy Spirit to exhibit goodwill toward our fellow men by sharing with them the truth of who Jesus is. Speak to those whom you know who don't know the eternal ramifications of the birth of Jesus. Help those around you know that preparation for heaven comes through faith in Christ Jesus. Not only the baby Jesus but also the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that the hope of Anna and Simeon is tied up in Jesus' meritorious work on their behalf as well as ours. Christmas must never be divorced from Golgotha, Jesus' death, and the resurrection of Christ and Easter. Anna and Simeon were so joyful because by the power of the Holy Spirit they believed in the Christ and believed in their heavenly home.

And notice from our sermon text that Anna and Simeon then witnessed of the Christ.

God bless you and empower you as you share with others the joy you know in Christ Jesus! The reality that you are prepared for heaven! In Jesus' name.

Amen.