

12.31.2023 Christmas 1

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Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

“With the Spirit in your hearts”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today on the last morning of the year, Paul’s words about “*the fullness of time*” remind me that this year is ending. Paul writes, “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son.*” What began twelve months ago as an unknown and uncharted year has reached the fullness of time.

Have you had a good Christmas? Have you again welcomed Christ into your heart? During the brief Christmas season, we remember that Jesus, born of Mary in Bethlehem, fully shared our human lives and time. Paul’s words about “*the fullness of time*” remind me of the fullness of Jesus’ life – his birth and ministry, his cross, resurrection, and ascension. He is the fulfillment of God’s time that fills our moments, days, years, and lifetimes. He is the fulfillment of time who will fill your life with his Spirit of grace and peace.

Of this Paul writes, “*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father!’*” The Spirit of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God who fulfills all time, lives in your hearts. The Christmas season is about a divine birth into the *chronos* of human time, the time we measure in moments, days, and years that fills our lifetimes. Jesus is born to share our humanity.

Nowhere do we see this as strikingly as in the figures of Simeon and Anna in Luke’s gospel who praised God when they saw the baby Jesus. Both Simeon and Anna were advanced in years, yet spoke as if they had seen the one for whom they had been waiting all their lives. Simeon said, “*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.*” We might call the moment Simeon saw Jesus as “Simeon’s Christmas Day,” for Simeon had seen Christ Jesus and was at peace in his life because Jesus now lived in him.

Simeon’s words, “*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,*” meant that Simeon could now die in peace with faith, having seen the promised Messiah. The baby that Simeon saw would grow into adulthood, becoming a rabbi who taught, healed, comforted, and forgave, and who welcomed and gave his life for many. Jesus shares our humanity so we also might heal, comfort, forgive, welcome, and give our lives for others.

Have you had a good Christmas? Have you again welcomed Christ into your heart? The English poet and Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, John Donne, preached about this on

Christmas day in 1626. Donne had the following to say about Christmas day as the day of welcoming Christ,

To be able to conclude that you have had a Christmas day, a manifestation of Christ in your souls, you shall have a whole Good Friday, a crucifying and. An. “it is finished”... You shall have temptations, and a Resurrection and an Ascension... Make good your Christmas day, that Christ be born in you, and he who died for you will live with you all the year, and all the years of your lives, and inspire into you, and receive from you at the last gasp, this blessed acclamation, “Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace...”

The baby that Simeon took into his arms would carry the cross with his arms and would say the words, “*It is finished.*” Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s salvation prepared in the presence of all peoples.

Have you had a good Christmas? Have you again welcomed Christ into your heart? Like Simeon, the bread that you hold in your hands in the Eucharist today, and the cup that you drink is the fullness of Christ. It is the Christ who was born, died, and was raised for you. Hold this bread and take this cup like Simeon, saying, “*my eyes have seen your salvation.*”

Long before our cultural Christmas customs, Simeon reminds us of a “Christmas Day of Salvation.” Simeon did not fear dying because he knew that he would depart in peace by the Gospel of Peace – and would go to the God of Peace. Perhaps like Simeon and Anna, you have also waited for years to be freed from some need, some regret, some fear, some addiction, some illness, some challenge. Perhaps like Simeon and Anna, you have spent long moments in prayer, or lived in a dark place, hoping to see the light of hope.

The Day of Christmas is that moment when the light of Christ that enlivens all people comes to you unexpectedly, perhaps without the carols, or the presents, or the foods, yet he comes in the fullness of time, just in time, into your heart. This is the meaning of Christmas Day, and such moments allow us, like Simeon and Anna, to hold Christ in faith and trust that I also shall be released into the peace and salvation promised in the presence of all peoples.

Yet we may not always hear God sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. The noise of the world, the distractions of life, and the worries of work and family can make it difficult to notice the breath of God’s Spirit in our lives. We may be disheartened by a world that never ever seems to be able to live and let live. We may be angry with God, lamenting the scale of human suffering that relentlessly comes to us via the news and across our computers & devices. Yet the noise,

disheartenment, worry, and anger do not mean God is not present in this world.

There are moments when, like Simeon and Anna, suddenly we see and touch the fulfillment of time, moments when we know he lives in me. The miracle of Christmas is Christ dwelling in you – and through you – in this world.

This is the meaning of Christmas: Jesus shares your lifetime so that you might share him with those in need, hurting, mourning, homeless, on the margins, or invisible. Jesus shares their humanity so they are never outside of his love, never invisible to his grace. Jesus shares your humanity and theirs not only this season but every moment, day, and year.

Quieting the noise of the world, healing the anger, and lifting the disheartened, begins in your heart so that your days, years, and lifetime, might be the fulfillment of time, who is Jesus Christ.

*Have you had a good Christmas?* With the Spirit of Christ in your heart, Christmas Day will last a lifetime.

“Make good your Christmas day, that Christ be born in you, and he who died for you will live with you all the year” – John Donne (Christmas, 1626)

A blessed New Year to you all. Amen.