

Senior Citizen Prophets

Pastor Kim Engelmann

West Valley Presbyterian Church

Has anyone read the John Grisham book titled, “*Missing Christmas*”. It’s a small little book, not hard to read...but it is about a family that just decided not to do Christmas one year...they decided just to skip it. Too much hassle. Too much money. Too much commercialism. Grishams book is all about the convoluted things that happen as these folks attempt to “skip” this season of the year *intentionally*.

Now I get it. If that’s what you choose to do – go for it. If Christmas is just too much to handle this year, fine. I know. It’s hard to get the tree up, find the wreath, get stuff for people, wrap it all. Every year we do it and if you need a hiatus....for it.

What I worry about is what if we miss Christmas *unintentionally* simply because we are not focusing on what matters most this season, which is recognizing Jesus in our midst, and being filled with joy in his presence

That’s why this morning, I am using a text that is one we don’t often read at Christmas. I want you to hear a more unfamiliar story, ripe with meaning that gets overlooked in the usual stories we associate with Jesus birth, so that maybe

you can see Christmas with some new eyes and recognize his presence with you in new ways

The other reason I chose it is because it's a cross generational story, as it centers around Mary and Joseph who are very young... bringing Jesus to the temple for the very first time, and two senior citizen prophets, Simeon and Anna who meet them there and recognize who their baby actually is - Jesus the Messiah.

Now I applaud Simeon and Anna here because it would have been so easy for them to miss this little humble family walking through the elaborate temple area. There was nothing external that pointed to him as the Messiah at all. It had to be the Holy Spirit in Simeon and Anna telling them that this was the child of promise. This little tiny infant was the hope of Israel. It didn't make sense, but nothing God does usually makes a whole lot of sense to us. That's why spiritual discernment is so important...to see what unusual surprising work God is up to. Cause we can't ever guess on our merits.

Just for background, to give you a context for this section in Luke, Mary and Joseph, in this story, are at the temple doing what the law required for purification of the Mom of a newborn. **Women in Jewish culture was considered unclean after the birth of their first-born son for 40 days after.** (for girls it was 60 days after) **On the 40th day the women had to go with her husband and child to be purified at the temple.**

The woman, the Mom was supposed to make a sacrifice for that purification and it was supposed to be a lamb and a pigeon.

Now notice..

Do Mary and Joseph present a lamb?

No. What do they bring?

Two pigeons which was a kind of concession given in the law for those who were very, very poor – who could not afford a lamb. It was literally called “**The Offering of the Poor**” and Luke...who is a true champion of the poor all through his gospel, wants the reader to know, by including this detail, that Mary and Joseph were simply at the bottom of the ladder – peasants.

It reminds me of the European monarch who worried his court by often disappearing and walking incognito amongst his people. When he was asked not to do so for security's sake, he answered, "I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live." It is the great thought of the Christian faith that we have a God who knows the life we live because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage.

It is also true, that ***Jesus himself was the lamb of God...and although Mary and Joseph couldn't afford a lamb for Mary's purification that day, Jesus himself would provide purification for the whole world, and when he did it would be a free gift through his death.***

So back to the text, here we have this very incognito Messiah in the form of a tiny 40 day old child of peasants, appearing at the temple. Easily missed. Easily overlooked.

How did Simeon and Anna recognize Jesus and know he was the Messiah? As we have said, it was through discernment by the Holy Spirit. It's the only way they could have known.

Please realize that Simeon was not a priest or some religious authority. We don't really know what his post was. Luke doesn't tell us. What we do know is that Simeon was a kind of prophet and has been categorized by some commentators as being a part of a Jewish group of people who were called "**The Quiet in the Land**".

There were a lot of big political revolutionaries at that time, sick of the Roman rule, trying to overthrow this oppressive regime. Some believed that the Jewish people were meant to be masters of the world, and they were vocal about reclaiming all the glory back from the time of David through schemes and plans and acts of violence and they were making a lot of noise about it.

Simeon, and probably Anna too, as part of this **Quiet in the Land** group had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies and of chariots. Rather, "**They believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives they waited patiently upon God – waiting for**

the ‘consolation of Israel’ and the salvation the Messiah would bring.’

(William Barklay)

And I believe its because of this quiet watchfulness, this life of constant prayer, that Simeon and Anna had a special Google maps detector to locate the things of God. Simeon – the name **Simeon means “to hear”** – heard God promise him that he wouldn’t die until he had laid eyes upon the Messiah.

And coming into the temple area –led by the Holy Spirit – he’s hanging around and he sees Mary and Joseph – this peasant couple and this little incognito child and he knows immediately who this baby is. Doesn’t miss him! Doesn’t skip over him as unimportant....as unremarkable as Jesus may have seemed to the common eye.

Now what’s the first thing Simeon does? Prophecies right? No!

What does Simeon do? He takes this little peasant baby into his arms. Holds him. Can hardly believe what he is holding probably...Can’t you just see the wrinkled face of an old man who had been waiting for years for this moment... looking down into this probably brown eyed child who has just arrived on earth.

This is **A very tender image, of the old holding the new**...and it symbolizes this whole idea of God ushering in a new covenant, a new way for people to be in touch with God. The old way of doing things through temples and prophets and multiple sacrifices is over. It’s a new day and Simeon knows it.

And that's why when Simeon does begin to prophecy... the first thing he says, **“Lord, let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen *your* salvation (Yeshua)”**. This salvation – (salvation is the word Jesus so Simeon actually says my eyes have seen Yeshua) is way better than the old!

Its time for me to go – or its time for the law and prophets to go - and for this Messiah to comfort my people. To save them. This has been the longing of my heart for many years! Let the old way go and the new come in. My eyes have seen your salvation – Yeshua – and it is so good!

Often called Simeon's song...or **Nunc Dimittis - Now dismiss** – and you can see how Simeon is ushering in the new era in his prophecy as he says the following:

**Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[d] your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”**

Including all nations, and including Gentiles in this plan of salvation was the new day!

Luke is fond of male and female couples together doing things...so after Simeon speaks of Jesus, then Luke writes that Anna also comes out. Also very elderly a widow for many years and now she is 84.

And we don't know any details about what Anna actually does with Jesus as we do with Simeon...Anna is very old like Simeon...a senior citizen prophet...And Luke is very specific about who Anna is – moreso than he is about what she does. Now when you read the Bible pay attention to weird things you don't understand and look them up...especially when you read Luke, the most brilliant writer of all, because there is a reason that Luke puts everything in there.

So quickly a lot of information in a few short lines to give you a little more insight into this often overlooked passage...

Anna is also translated as Hannah and Hannah was an Old Testament woman who was barren and then by God's grace had a son Samuel that she gave back to God and he served in the temple. **So this parallel to Hannah and Anna is supposed to tell us that Jesus is also a servant of God** – remember later when he is 12 and gets lost he tells Mary and Joseph the temple is his Father's house –**his true home is in the temple “my father's house”**. **He is God's child and a gift from God to barren Israel.**

Luke's tells us her age. Why?

Anna is 84 – who cares? Well **84 was always a number of completion for the Jews. 12X7 – the creation and the 12 tribes of Israel re-created.** So she represents symbolically the fulfillment of the new creation of Israel pointing to Jesus as that fulfillment.

Also Luke tells us that **She is of the tribe of Asher and the daughter of Phaniel.** Of course we generally skip over that part because that means nothing to us.

But do a little research! **Asher was one of what were called the “lost tribes of Israel”** conquered by the Assyrians. **Luke wants us to know that the lost in Christ will be found.** Those rejected will be brought home again – implying also that Gentiles will be brought in.

Finally, the name **Phanuel** means “**Face of God**”. **Anna sees who Jesus is.**

She doesn't skip over him. Because of her prayerful life she recognizes the face of God in this little baby. **Phanuel in the flesh. As Hebrews 1 tells us, “He (JESUS) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”** Anna saw that and spoke of him as being the one who would redeem Israel.

Simeon and Anna did not miss or skip over the presence of Jesus coming to them that day as poor and as small as Jesus was – they knew him. They were the **Quiet In The Land, waiting, watching, expecting, believing...and then... recognizing and noticing** the One who came incognito into their midst...as the Messiah.

It tells us today that noticing Jesus' presence in our midst may take some discernment, as well, especially in times of unrest and strain in our world. Such was the case back then as people clamored to be released from the oppression of the Romans. And such is the time right now, where we have been bombarded with scandals, and lies and chaos in our world to an extreme.

There is a lot of unrest. There is a lot of anger & random violence. There is a lot of uncertainty and fragmentation. And as voices are raised and people make their statements and push their perspectives and chaos reigns...

Noticing Christ among us this Advent season may take some quieting in ourselves, Noticing Christ among us this Advent season may take some

discipline...discipline to wait and watch and believe...quietly and faithfully... in the God whose purposes are always fulfilled.

How do we do that? Well maybe you take the time to make a wreath this morning after church and commit to spending 15 minutes extra each week as you light that candle to study and ponder a part of the Christmas story.

Maybe you take one day off, completely off, unplugged and unbugged, to have a silent retreat with the Lord. To prayerfully seek his presence and hear his voice to you – and go somewhere beautiful to do this. Bring a Bible and sit and reflect. Feed your soul.

Maybe you simply slow down overall, and rest a little longer, enjoy playing a little more, figure out what brings you joy and do it...and learn to pray in a familiar way with a God who is very fond of you.

As we enter this Advent Season as the Quiet in the Land, disciplining ourselves to wait with expectation (despite all the chaos around us)...my hope would be that as we draw near to Christmas we would begin to recognize more and more that Messiah, who comes to us incognito ...in unassuming and humble ways... and by getting online with the Holy Spirit, we will this Christmas with Simeon declare, **“My eyes have seen your salvation.”** And rejoice! AMEN