



*from*  
**GENERATION**  
*to*  
**GENERATION**  
*devotional*

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# FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION *Devotional*

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## From Generation to Generation

*“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 the glory to your people Israel.”  
(Luke 2:30-32)*

In my school district, there are regulations regarding staff e-mails. The golden rule of e-mail use is “Thou shall not use the ‘Everyone’ e-mail address unless thou needest to distribute information to all staff. Thou shall not use the ‘Everyone’ e-mail address to sell Cardinal tickets, to give away puppies, or to announce the arrival of fund raising goods.” The “Everyone” e-mail address does exactly what it sounds like it would; it sends an e-mail to every district staff person, from the superintendent to the building level aides, cooks and custodians. To break this rule is to bring public humiliation and biting sarcasm from much of the staff upon the sender.

Every year, and typically more than once a year, someone will incorrectly use the “Everyone” e-mail. When I open one of these, I feel pity for the sender. Over the next couple of hours, his inbox will fill with e-mails ranging from people who are angry they received the e-mail in the first place, to people who are sarcastically correcting the error and admonishing the sender for his faux pas, to others who offer correction in a much kinder, gentler way, to still others who may even be interested in the contents of the e-mail. Then later the sender will hear whispers among the staff: “Can you believe someone sent that? I bet he got

in trouble. Why would you send an e-mail to everyone about trying to get rid of your gerbil in the first place?" People can get very protective of their inbox, especially if they receive a large volume of e-mail in the first place.

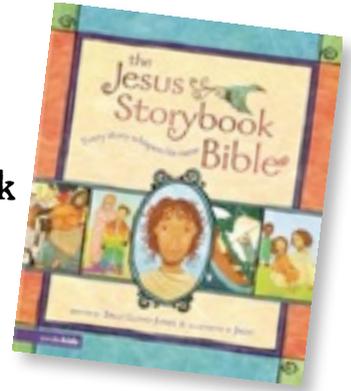
I once used the "Everyone" e-mail. I was extremely nervous about pressing that innocent little Send button. The content of the e-mail was for almost everyone who had e-mail, and I was pretty sure that I was justified in its use. But as my mouse hovered over the Send button, I began to have doubts. Was there another way I could send the e-mail? Would there be angry replies from the one or two people the e-mail didn't apply to? Would the technology department reprimand me for its use? I closed my eyes and clicked. The e-mail was on its way to everyone in the district, and I had only a short window of time to retract it if I wanted. I remained resolute. Evidently the e-mail was deemed worthy of an "Everyone" e-mail because there was no angry backlash; there were no reprimands.

From the beginning of time, God has had a message for His people--a message of love and forgiveness, a message of salvation and adoption, a message for people from all walks of life, from all cultures, from every generation--and God didn't hesitate to use the "Everyone" e-mail address to get out His message. Much like the reaction commonly seen by the "Everyone" e-mail in my school district, God gets a varied response from his invitation to us. Some embrace His invitation while others reject it.

For the past two years, our church has set aside time to study together. We first studied some of the people instrumental in the Christmas story, and then last year we studied about the gift of salvation and how it affects us. This year we turn to some of the "second string" players in the Christmas story. I don't say that to down play the importance of these people but because we just don't know much about them; they are given only brief mention in Scripture.

Despite this, I think you will find that we can learn quite a bit from their stories. These, perhaps more than all the others, understood that the story of the Christ child is for all of us, from generation to generation.

Each week, we will also suggest a reading from the Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name (<http://amzn.to/pA8pk7>) that is available at Amazon as well as many other bookstores. We encourage you to take some time each week with your kids to read from the Jesus Storybook Bible and discuss the story of Jesus. It is the most important story that you can share with them.



So, in this Christmas season, may we grow together in our understanding of why Christ came to Earth and who He came for, and may we never grow weary of using the “Everyone” e-mail address as we show love for one another and our community.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Do you hesitate when sharing with others about Christ and what He means to you? Why?

# WHAT IS ADVENT? by Craig Tanner

*“How can God stoop lower than to come and dwell with a poor humble soul? Which is more than if he had said, such a one should dwell with him; for a beggar to live at court is not so much as the king to dwell with him in his cottage.”—William Gurnall*

Have you ever heard of something or even participated in something and never really stopped to consider what it is or what it means? Every year as we approach the Christmas season, our church celebrates Advent. In fact, this devotional guide is part of our celebration of Advent. If you are anything like I am, you may have heard about Advent, and even participated in it, without understanding what Advent is all about. So, what is Advent? The dictionary provides several definitions: ad•vent (ad-vent) 1. The coming or arrival of something extremely important. 2. The coming of Christ into the world. 3. The period beginning four Sundays before Christmas, observed in commemoration of the coming of Christ into the world. 4. The Second Coming.

Typically the celebration of Advent begins four Sundays prior to December 25 and ends on Christmas Eve. The point of it is to help us focus our attention on the birth of Jesus Christ. The term itself means “coming” or “arrival.” We take the time to prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of the arrival of the Messiah. It’s a way for us to remove the distractions that surround the holiday season so that the birth of Jesus becomes our focus, as well as the joyful expectation that He will once again return.

Four weeks before Christmas, everything begins to change at Temple Baptist Church. Decorations go up, the music changes to Christmas carols and

songs, the Sunday morning messages take on a new theme, the choir intensifies its preparation, Sunday School classes begin to teach the familiar stories of Mary, Joseph, and the coming of Jesus, “born a child and yet a king.” Everything we do this time of year centers on God’s great story of redemption. We proclaim the “good news of great joy that will be for all people” (Luke 2:10). This is how we celebrate Advent.

We are not simply marking an event in history that occurred over two thousand years ago. We are recognizing and celebrating truth about God. Jesus Christ broke into human history in the incarnation, became the means by which we might be reconciled to God, and gave us the promise that He will once again return. So, while we celebrate His first coming, we eagerly anticipate His second coming. To that end, we remember the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrate redemption found in Him alone, and await, with great joy and expectation, the day that we will see Jesus face to face.

Advent brings a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, and of longing. In it we are reminded of the true meaning of Christmas for we are compelled to think of the birth of Christ. With that being said, I believe it would be one of the greatest absurdities of all time to simply observe Advent one month out of the year. The season of Advent should simply serve as a reminder of that which should continually remain in our hearts and minds. Our thoughts should continually light upon the coming of Christ. I pray that you would have today and tomorrow, yes even all the days of your life, the everlasting joy found in knowing Jesus Christ our Lord. In the words of Charles Spurgeon, may you continually “possess the high and consecrated bliss of Mary, that you may not only read her words, but use them for yourselves, ever experiencing their meaning: ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.’”

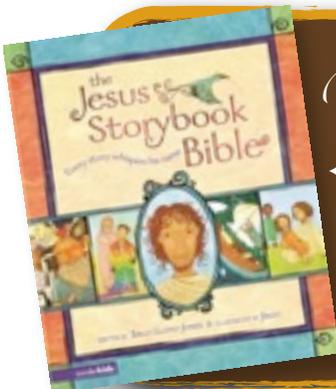
**“Christmas has lost its meaning for us because we have lost the spirit of expectancy. We cannot prepare for an observance. We must prepare for an experience.” - Handel Brown**

*Week One*

# PROPHECY

by

*Ted Moore*



*This Week's Reading with Kids:*

- ◆ This week read "Operation 'No More Tears!'" starting on page 144. You will read about the letter from God to His people and His messenger, Isaiah.

*The focal passage for these six sessions on prophecy is Isaiah 9:2-7. What an incredible prophecy. Six verses tell the story of God's redemptive plan. I considered a theme focused on the irony of how sin brought us a Savior and this incredible time of celebration called Christmas, but that is only part of what these verses tell us. They're also about the transformation that God ordained and Jesus delivered. Here is what I found (in no particular order) as I began unpacking these verses: Deliverance, Revelation, Patience, Victory, Peace, Mystery, Hope, Salvation, Rescue, Promise, Grace, Comfort, Prosperity, Goodness, Love, Transformation, Joy, Justice, Mercy, Freedom, Righteousness, Redemption. I'm sure there's more. I have been blessed with a new perspective of how profound God's words "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" truly are. Hopefully you will be, too.*

*For reference, I am including the text of Isaiah 9:2-7 taken from the ESV.*

- 2. The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them a light has shined.*
- 3. You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*
- 4. For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

5. *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*
6. *For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
7. *Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

## *Day 1 – WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS PROPHECY?*

Who wrote this prophecy? Had to be Isaiah, right? Actually, that's a trick question. We know that all Scripture is inspired by God. This prophecy is from God, given to the prophet Isaiah for delivery. Unpacking the verses in this prophecy really does begin to give us some insights into God's nature.

The first eight chapters of Isaiah paint a gruesome picture of a people in rebellion to God. It was almost like a tug of war. God could have very easily and justifiably said He was done with these people and cut them off. We begin

to see His nature as we see that He chose to deal with them as He would expect us to deal with a rebellious child.

- ◆ He loved them in spite of their sin and rebellion.
- ◆ He was patient. He spoke to them through Isaiah for 40 years.
- ◆ He taught them the ways and fruits of righteous living.
- ◆ He longed for them to break free of the crushing weight of the law.
- ◆ He warned them of the discipline and destruction that would come for failing to heed his words.
- ◆ He finally stopped counting to three.

There is no way I can look through my human eyes and see how God could continue to hold out hope for people. But as my spiritual eyes begin to focus, and I get a glimpse of things the way He does, I realize that it doesn't have to make sense to me. I don't know why God gives us more than one second chance, but He does. I don't know why God continues to love us in spite of our sinful, broken condition, but He does. I don't know why God is willing to forgive us, over and over, but He does. I don't know why He was willing to give us His only Son, but He did.

What a blessing and comfort to know that I don't have to know why He does all these things. It's enough to know He loves me and wants only the best for me. He wants only the best for all mankind. The prophecy in Isaiah 9:2-7 is a promise from God. It is a promise for those who have seen a great light (2) that there is hope because "unto to us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (6).

What is the assurance of the truth of this prophecy? The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this (7). Who is the author of this prophecy? He is the God of promise, the God of hope, the God who will do this.

## *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Do you have confidence in the truth of the prophecy found in Isaiah?
- ◆ How does your level of confidence change your daily walk with God?

## *Day 2 – WHO DELIVERED THIS PROPHECY?*

God gave this prophecy to Isaiah for delivery. What do we know about Isaiah? Not enough to write a book, but certainly enough to get a picture of the sort of person God used to deliver His message to the people of Judah.

- ◆ Isaiah was a prophet of God, a major prophet.
- ◆ Isaiah humbled himself before the Lord. (6:5, “And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’”)
- ◆ He was obedient to God’s calling. (6:8, “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’”)
- ◆ He lived in Jerusalem.
- ◆ He was the son of Amoz. (1:1, “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”.)
- ◆ He prophesied during the reign of four kings. History places the time of his prophecy during the eighth century BC, most likely from 740 BC to 701 BC.
- ◆ He was married. (8:3, “And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son . . .”)

◆ He had two sons. (the one referred to above and a second son referred to in 7:3)

The first eight chapters of Isaiah make it clear that he was firm, bold, determined, confident, and fearless. He was also persistent, delivering the message during the reign of four kings over a period of almost 40 years. He clearly loved God and God's message. He must have loved the people of Judah deeply, in spite of their sin, to be willing to deliver the message for so many years. The message he delivered was truly from God — everything he prophesied came true.

God had a job that needed to be done, a message that had to be delivered. How amazing that God chose a family man like Isaiah to get the job done. How amazing that he trusts people to get the job done.

Is there a contemporary lesson to be learned here? Of course. God does not need prophets like Isaiah anymore; there's no more to add to the message, but He clearly needs people to deliver the message: people who love Him, people striving for godliness, bold people, humble people, people who believe the message, people who have a heart of love for the saved and the lost, people living transformed lives, people who know that all things exist to bring glory to God.

The next question is obvious. Is this the kind of people we want to be? Is this the kind of church we want to be? There's only one right answer.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ What kind of church do you want to be a member of?
- ◆ How can you contribute to helping create that kind of church?

## Day 3 – WHY WAS THIS PROPHECY NEEDED?

When you see the word *but* or *nevertheless* or *therefore*, you know it signals a transition from whatever came before the word to whatever comes after. Let's take a look at Isaiah 9:1, the verse just preceding the focal passage of Isaiah 9:2-7. "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." This verse in the ESV starts with the word *but*; the NIV says *nevertheless*. Both mean that in spite of what came before, what follows is going to take place.

What came before is contained in the first eight chapters of Isaiah. Take time to read these chapters. It is not an easy read (at least not for me), but you will see sinful, rebellious people in a tug of war with God. I apologize to students of the Old Testament for this simplification of history, but I think it is an okay summary of the events leading up to Isaiah 9:1.

God used His prophet Isaiah repeatedly over 40 years to deliver the message: turn from your sinful ways; turn from your rebellious ways; stop your pagan ways; stop the false worship; follow His commands to live righteously and experience salvation; etc. God used His prophet Isaiah over and over to warn the people of the discipline and destruction that would come for failing to heed His warnings. He warned that there would be judgment, but their hearts were hard, and they would not listen. They would not repent. The God of love, patience, grace, and mercy ultimately had to be the God of justice and wrath. Sin had to be purged from the people. These sinful, rebellious people had to be crushed for a new beginning to be possible.

Wow! Where is all of that in the Christmas story?

God is the God of love, patience, grace, and mercy, but He hates sin. God had a redemptive plan from the beginning, but it could not be fulfilled until sin was conquered. The great promise in Isaiah 9:2-7 could only be fulfilled after sin was conquered.

Why was this prophecy needed? It is God's assurance that sin no longer has a grip on us. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (6).

### *Question to Consider:*

- ◆ What parts of the Christmas story remind you of God's love, patience, grace, and mercy?

## *Day 4* – UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN. UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

Imagine you have witnessed the depravity of your countrymen. You have heard the pronouncement of judgment. Imagine you have just heard Isaiah deliver the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2-7. You heard the promise of darkness becoming light (2), of joy and prosperity (3), of an end to war (5), and of the coming of a king of justice, righteousness, and peace (6-7). What is your reaction? Excitement? Relief? Suspicion? Disbelief? You want all of these promises to be true. You want them to be true right now. How awesome life would be if these promises are true. But wait a minute. Isaiah said this will be on the shoulders of a boy child. What kind of king is that? Perhaps Isaiah has lost his mind. I've often wondered what my reaction would be.

Now, imagine you are Isaiah. You've proven that you trust God and His Word. You trust His promises. You want the promises of Isaiah 9:2-7 to be true right now. However, Isaiah did not live to see any of these promises fulfilled. It would be seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. I have a hard time waiting two minutes for the microwave to finish the popcorn. Imagine having Isaiah's measure of faithfulness.

In spite of all the negative things that surround us, we are blessed to be living at this time in history. We have all of God's Word. We can read it over and over, any time we want. We know that the boy child was born. We know that he was totally obedient to the Father and faced death on the cross but rose again to free us from the grip of sin (Halleluiah!). We know that the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2-7 was completely fulfilled. We can live in the light. There is joy and prosperity in knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. We have a just and righteous king. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace, and, as part of the Trinity, He is Mighty God and Everlasting Father. The zeal of the Lord of hosts did this, as promised.

I love Christmas time. My earliest memory of Christmas is lying on the floor in front of the Christmas tree and letting my eyes go a little out of focus as I looked up at the lights. I still do that. It is the lights that draw me to Silver Dollar City at Christmas time each year, but it's more than the lights. I love the story. I love the multitude of ways we hear the story. I love our cantatas. The story of Jesus' birth is full of mysteries and wonders. Mary got to change God's diapers. She got to tell God what to do. She got to kiss the face of God. The story of Jesus' birth is a testimony of promises fulfilled.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying Christmas. The trees and lights, time with family and friends, the gifts, shopping..., but we must remember the

full context of Jesus' birth. We must understand the full context of Jesus' birth. He came to transform the world. He came to transform you and me.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ What parts of the modern day Christmas celebration remind you of Jesus and His purpose while on Earth?
- ◆ How do you remind yourself of the full context of Jesus' birth at this busy time of year?

## *Day 5* – THIS IS A PROPHECY OF TRANSFORMATION

What does transformation have to do with this prophecy?

Transformation has everything to do with it. Let's go verse by verse.

Let's begin by adding Isaiah 9:1 to the focal passage. "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." Land that He formerly held in contempt, He has now made glorious. He purged the land of evil.

Isaiah 9:2, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shined." Jesus is the light. People who know the Lord have been transformed from living in a land of darkness (sin and evil) to living in the light.

Isaiah 9:3, "You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil." Despair has been replaced with hope, joy, and prosperity.

Isaiah 9:4, “For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.” We know from the first eight chapters of Isaiah that people were mistreated, abused, and oppressed. Jesus came to bring freedom from evil inflicted on man by man.

Isaiah 9:5, “For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.” God purged sin and rebellion from the people by allowing them to be defeated in battle. Jesus came to conquer sin and win that battle for us.

Isaiah 9:6-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” Jesus came to put an end to the rule of corrupt earthly kings. He came to show us that His justice and righteousness will produce lasting peace and good government.

Wait a minute! There are still people living in darkness. There is still despair. There is still war, oppression, and corrupt government. This stuff is far from fixed.

Okay, let’s really talk about transformation. The fullness of this prophecy will be seen only when the whole world embraces Jesus--everything He taught, everything He lived. Is that ever going to happen? Not until Jesus comes again. Then what’s the point? The point is that transformation happens one person at a time. People help other people live transformed lives. Churches get transformed. Communities get transformed. Government begins to see the

light. Am I dreaming? You tell me. Is it a journey worth taking? Oh yes! The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ How have you experienced transformation in your own life?
- ◆ If you haven't experienced transformation in your life, why?

## *Day 6—SIN BROUGHT US CHRISTMAS. SO SIN MUST BE A GOOD THING. RIGHT?*

What is your reaction to the title of this session? Ted has gone over the edge! Not yet. I just want to get you revved up. This title truly is twisted thinking. It is inside out, upside down, and backwards, but it may not be far from the way too many people see sin.

I am awed by Isaiah 5 beginning with verse 8. Here, God is pronouncing woes and judgments on the people of Judah. It is anything but a pretty picture. It is a picture of devastation. For me, verse 20 tells the story of how sin captivates before it corrupts, how it creates twisted thinking. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” Sin has success because of twisted thinking. Sin has success because we allow the deception that evil is good, darkness is light, and bitter is sweet to take root in our lives. The now famous words that you can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig, perhaps

serve as a humorous reminder that sin is sin. It has never produced anything good, and it never will.

The Apostle Paul gave us incredible meat to chew on in Romans 5:20 where he wrote "... But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Does this mean we should sin more so that more grace will flow? How absurd! The answer is in the next verse: "so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Again, it is twisted thinking to believe that sin produces anything good. Jesus had no choice but to come to earth to pay the ultimate price for sin--our sin. To teach us that God's grace and gift of eternal life come only through righteousness.

We live in a culture and time where people just don't want to hear about sin. Why is it so hard to find a preacher who has the boldness to preach about sin anymore? (Thank you God that our pastors are not included). Perhaps it is because sin just doesn't fit with the image we have of God's goodness, or it just makes us too uncomfortable and it's too hard to squirm in padded seats, or people will quit coming to church if we preach and teach about sin, or we're all going to heaven anyway, right? Hog wash!

If you haven't read the first eight chapters of Isaiah, do it. God didn't sugar coat the message about sin. He wasn't afraid to warn us about the horrors of a sin possessed life. He made it clear that sin leads to death. He made it clear that he gave us His Son to conquer sin and death. He made it clear that no one comes to Him except through His Son. There is only one way to deal with sin--head on. We don't have to be harsh, but we have to be willing to talk about the hard stuff. No one wins if we don't. Sin blocks transformation.

So, what about the connection between sin and Jesus' birth? Our study of Isaiah 9:2-7 clearly shows the connection between sin and the necessity for Jesus'

birth, but make no mistake--we are only able to celebrate Christmas because we have a gracious, loving, heavenly Father who gave us His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

*For Your Consideration:*

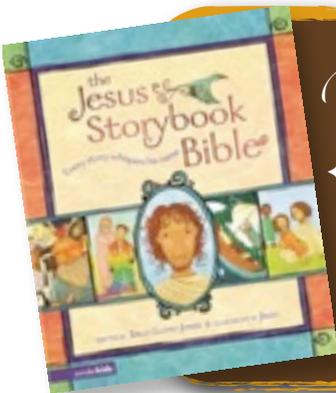
- ◆ When talking with people away from church, do you shy away from difficult topics concerning sin?
- ◆ It seems odd to think of the baby Jesus and the corrosive effects of sin. Thank God for the promise and realization of the Gift of Jesus and his overcoming of sin.

*Week Two*

# PROMISE

by

*Ted Logan*



*This Week's Reading with Kids :*

- ◆ This week read "He's Here!" starting on page 176. You will read about Mary and Joseph and the birth of the baby Jesus.

*Our focus over the next six days will be on the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. All scripture references are from the NIV International Version Disciple's Study Bible. Stop now, open your Bible, and read Luke 1:5-24.*

## *Day 1- WHY ME?*

How many times have you asked yourself “why me?” No matter what the circumstance, good or bad, we sometimes wonder what we did to deserve this. From time to time, I have watched a doe and her twin fawns as they slowly grazed their way across the field on the other side of my lake, a lake that is already in deep shadows while the deer, and the green grass they are standing in, are brilliantly lit by the light of the setting sun. I cannot take this in without being thankful for what God has allowed me to use while I am here. However, I must ask “why me?” What did I do that would cause God to bless me this much?

As I read the story of Zechariah, I could not help but wonder if he and Elizabeth asked themselves that age old question. After all, they were godly people. They followed God's commandments. Zechariah was a priest, for goodness sakes. So why were they not blessed with a child?

Then, as we follow the story, an angel appeared to Zechariah in the temple and told him that Elizabeth was to bear him a child. Of course, Zechariah found this hard to believe since his wife was beyond the age of child bearing. He questioned the angel and was struck dumb. Zechariah may have been better off asking the question I am sure he asked himself later, “why me?”

I find it comforting, that even in this age of computers, no one can compile enough data to make a profile of the type of person God is most likely to pick to do His work. However, I think you will find that, before Christ arrived on the scene, the people God picked to do his bidding were, for the most part, God-fearing, upright individuals. You will also discover that a large majority of those picked asked the same question in one form or another, “why me?”

To be quite truthful, I gave Christopher the “why me?” when he asked me to write for the Christmas devotional again this year. I didn't use those exact words, but it amounted to the same thing. This morning I was standing in the shower wondering how I was going to write six days of meaningful material when it dawned on me that I could not do so without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Immediately following that thought was another, “why me?” Who am I to think that the most holy God would send His spirit to guide me in my struggle to write a devotional that would have some impact on those who read it? Suddenly it dawned on me that my line of thinking was all wrong. It's not about me! It's not about who God chooses to do his work; it's about the work. I am simply the tool that God is going to use. So I write on, expecting that, as lame as it may be, you will be guided by the Spirit to glean something worthwhile from these words. Sunday after Sunday, Scott has been teaching us that we are put here to glorify God. Maybe, just maybe, I am starting to understand what that means.

From now on, when something unexpected happens, whether it be good or bad, instead of “why me?” let's try to ask “why not me?”

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ God made a promise to Zechariah. What promise has He made to you?
- ◆ If you have taken advantage of that promise, what have you promised God in return?

## *Day 2 -* GOD'S PROMISES

Remember when you were in grade school and one of your classmates promised they would be your friend forever? If you do, then most of you will also remember how in a day or two, or possibly a week or two, that promise was broken over a silly disagreement or simply because your friend found a new best friend. Did your parents ever make you a promise they couldn't keep? I am sure they had good intentions when they made the promise, but as parents, we know that good intentions are sometimes washed away by the flood of real life situations. Politicians make promise after promise in order to win elections. These are the kinds of promises that only a fool believes will be kept.

In a world where broken promises are the norm, is it any wonder that we hesitate when it comes to trusting the promises of God? As humans we tend to compare our relationship with God to relationships we have experienced with people. We may tend to forget that God is not like any people we have known or know about. When God makes a promise, it is exactly what the word implies, an agreement or a cause for hope.

Speaking through Isaiah, God promised the people that one was coming to prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). In spite of the fact that it took over seven hundred years for the promise to be kept, the truth of the matter is that it

was kept in the birth and ministry of John the Baptist. I am so glad that I had reason to write about the length of time that it took for God to honor His promise concerning John the Baptist. Now, when Nancy reminds me that I promised to fix a faucet or remove a dead tree, I can remind her that it took God seven hundred years to honor His promise. Knowing that, how could she complain if it takes me a year or even two to get around to honoring my promise?

There was nothing ordinary about John the Baptist, starting with the circumstances surrounding his conception. Elizabeth was up in years and had given up hope of having a child, much less a son. In spite of that fact, Gabriel delivered a promise from God stating that she would bear a son, a special son who would be named John. The name was significant. No one in the family was named John, and it was unusual to pick a name associated with someone who was not kin. God delivered on His promise in a special way and used a special man to do His work so that there would be no doubt that the promise made was a promise kept.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ How careful am I about the promises I make? Making them is easy; keeping them can be hard.
- ◆ Shouldn't the study of the Bible help us to see God for who He is and lead us to see that He is nothing like us?

## *Day 3- A BAD DAY*

Who among us has not experienced a bad day? I mean even the most cheerful, fun loving, and easy-going people have a bad day once in a while. Of course, some of us are not morning people. If we have to deal with these individuals early in the morning, we may think they are having a bad day when really this is how they act every morning. However, sometimes the day may start off a little rough and slowly go down hill from there, causing us to claim we are having a bad day. Unfortunately, when most of us are having a bad day, we tend to take it out on those around us. I am not Dr. Phil, but I suspect the reason for that stems from the fact that if we are miserable, we feel that everyone around us should be miserable. Unfortunately, with very little effort on our part, we can make that happen.

As I read the story of Zechariah in Luke, I was prepared for old Zechariah to question the angel Gabriel about the possibility of Elizabeth giving birth. After all, wouldn't you have some questions? I think I would have several. Like, how did you get in here? What did you say your name was? How did God pick the two of us to be the parents of this John? Why John, what's up with that? By the way, do you think the incense is a little strong this year? The new guy prepared it and may have messed it up, or it may just be me.... I would think the angel would have been prepared for some dumb questions, especially considering that encounters with an angel sent to deliver a direct message from God just don't happen every day.

My theory is that Gabriel was simply having a bad day. I base my theory on Luke 1. In verses 11-17, the angel delivers his message. In verse 18, Zechariah asks one question, "How can I be sure of this?" Read verses 19 and 20, and see if

you agree that Gabriel was definitely a little short with Zechariah. Come on, one little question, and he gets struck mute! By any standard, that is harsh, to say the least. A warning maybe, but mute for more than nine months? Man, that is just overboard.

To aid in the proof of my “bad day” theory, I direct you to continue reading verses 26-38. You will find that the same angel appeared to Mary with some unbelievable news, and she also had doubts and questions. In this case, however, Gabriel was very patient and understanding. Either he was having a bad day, which caused him to be so quick to silence Zechariah, or God had a little talk with him when he got back, causing him to treat Mary a little kinder. You be the judge.

Yes, this has been on the silly side, but there is a message here. As you go about your business this Christmas season, be careful that your “bad day” does not cause someone else to have one, too. A series of events should not dictate how we interact with the people around us. Having a bad day is self-indulgent and does not make for a good witness. I sincerely hope when you read this you will get a little smile that will last all day. How could you not smile when you know that God loves you, and so do I!

Well, don't just stand there; pass it on! You want to go nine months without being able to speak or what?

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ What would happen if God had a bad day?
- ◆ What hope would we have if God reacted to the events of the day like we do? See Hebrews 13:8

## *Day 4-* CASTING LOTS (Luke 1:9a)

Would it make a big difference if you knew exactly what area of service or what job in the church God was equipping you for? Do you ever wonder what it would be like to know exactly what God's intentions are for you? If you have, then you should find today's devotional interesting. A word of warning: if you are not ready to do God's will, then by all means, don't ask him what His will is for your life!

As you read the story in Luke 1:5-24, you probably didn't pay much attention to the first of verse 9 which tells us that Zechariah was picked by lot to go into the temple to burn the incense. Not a big deal, since that was how the individual priests were picked to do the honor of entering the temple with the incense. The casting of lots was not a big deal, but the outcome was. If we believe God picked Zechariah to be the father of John the Baptist, then we must assume that God altered the outcome of the casting to suit his purpose, thereby placing Zechariah in the temple alone to be approached by the angel Gabriel.

Before I get to my point, let me relate to you a true story about a casting of lots. A few years ago, my cousin Ralph found himself without a church home. Due to circumstances, he and his family were searching for a church to join and serve. After attending different churches a few times, he was becoming frustrated and began earnestly asking God to guide him to the right church. Time passed with no real feeling of direction, and Ralph decided to ask God for more specific guidance. He chose a method which he knew was Biblical, casting lots. Here is how he went about it.

Ralph got the name of every church, no matter what the denomination, within a ten or fifteen mile radius of his house. He then took a stack of index

cards and, using one card for each church, wrote the name of each church on a card, folded the card in half, and placed it in a bowl.

Having done that, he asked his brother and a friend to come to his house for a special meeting. He told them what he had done and shared with them his intention to draw a name from the bowl and attend the church whose name was written on that card. He then joined his brother and their friend in prayer asking God to guide the hand that picked the card. The brother took the bowl and began to shake the cards to mix them up. Somehow, on the first shake, one of the cards flew from the bowl and fluttered to the floor. Several seconds of silence followed as all three men wondered how the card could have escaped. Stunned, they wondered if they should pick up the card and put it back in the bowl. As one, they agreed this was no accident. This, they decided, was the pick of God's hand--the church God intended for Ralph to serve in! Slowly, Ralph bent down, picked up the card, opened it, and read the name out loud. It was the name of the church where his brother was a member! He joined that church along with his family, and the Lord greatly blessed their service.

You may tend to discredit the method in which he chose his church. If you heard his personal account of the events and felt the power of God in it like I did, you would come away convinced that God's hand plucked that card from the bowl.

I know, you are waiting for the point. Well, here it is. We do not know God's will because we do not ask. If we do ask, we do not listen for the answer. Most of the time God does not answer in such a dramatic fashion as causing an index card to fall to the floor. Even if He did, would we be astute enough to recognize the sign, or would we simply pick up the card, place it back in the bowl, and draw a card in the way we had planned? I am convinced that God leaves us clues and gives us direction regarding His plan for us that we never pick up

on. It either doesn't fit into plans we have already made, or we simply don't know what to look for.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Do you really want to serve God in every aspect of your life?
- ◆ Do you really want to know what God has in mind for you and yours? If you want these things, then talk to God about it and then listen closely. The answer may not come in the way you expected. God does the unexpected and cannot be put into a box that we design.

## *Day 5 - WORSHIP TIME? (Luke 1:10;21)*

As I read these verses I saw something that made me think about how, after more than two thousand years, some things about the worship service have not changed all that much. Yes, I know we do not send Pastor Scott into the temple to burn incense while we stand outside and pray. However, if we did, I imagine it would go a lot like it did when Zechariah was doing the honors.

Think about it. Zechariah took a little too long, and the worshipers stopped praying and began to wonder what was going on. Sound vaguely familiar? It does to me. Twenty minutes past the hour of nine on Sunday morning, I start to wonder if Scott is going to finish in time for everyone to get to Sunday school on time. At 11:55, Scott loses a large portion of the second service worshipers because they are wondering if they will get out “on time.” At least mine are “righteous worries” since we all know how important it is to start Sunday school on time!

Stand near the back door as people come into the sanctuary and listen to their conversations. You will hear comments about the condition of the street they had to cross to get to the front door. You might hear questions about someone on the prayer list or a complaint about the weather. A sour word may reach your ear concerning the fact that someone is sitting in the wrong pew. You will hear all kinds of things if you care to listen. I imagine, that about now, you are thinking that I have a lot of nerve getting on you about talking before the service when I do the same thing. If you are thinking that, then you might miss the point I am going to try and make in a minute.

A lot of things go on from the time you get up on Sunday morning until you finally sit down in that pew and wait for the worship to begin. No matter what has happened, or is happening, when that first chord is struck, and we stand to sing praises to God, we should be in an attitude of worship. Somehow we have to clear our minds and concentrate on the reason we came to church in the first place. We can't do that if we are thinking about anything else. It doesn't matter if you like the music or not, someone got your seat, Hazel is in the hospital, or whatever other excuse Satan can use to distract you. This is your opportunity to meet with God and give Him praise. This is an opportunity to hear a word from Him, to reflect on God's goodness and mercy. Maybe, if you listen closely, you might actually begin to understand what it is that God has been calling on you to do in His service. You might even forget to look at your watch to see if we are going to get out on time. I know you think you need to worry, but in all the time I have sat under Scott's preaching, there has never been one instance when he didn't reach a stopping place. See, nothing to worry about!

There are some risks in public worship, but when a church full of people joins together in praising God and listening to His word, amazing things happen.

You may not get a great revelation every Sunday or have a life changing experience, but someone will, and I want to be a part of that. How about you?

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Do you make an effort to concentrate on your worship each time we gather to do so?
- ◆ Can you remember the last time you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as you took part in a worship service?

## *Day 6- LOOKING BACK*

As I sat down to write these devotions, it was late August, and now, as I am finishing, September is almost over. I thought it might be hard to write something pertaining to the Scriptures we usually dwell on at Christmas time, especially when it is warm outside, and I am looking forward to cool nights and warm days. (Makes the fishing better!) However, as I began to dig into my assigned verses, it became quite clear that what I was reading had a message relevant any time of the year. The fact that God made good on His promise, and the way He did it, was inspiring then and is no less so all these generations later. Over and over I read the verses in Luke, each time seeing something to think about that I had missed the time before. In the end, the verses I thought would provide little to dwell on proved to hold message after message for me and our generation. As we looked at them together the last five days, I hope you saw them in a new light, or at least a renewed light. As always, I got more from the time I spent in the word than I was able to pass on to you.

Before we leave Luke 1:5-24, let's think about the marvelous way God kept His promise made over seven hundred years before John the Baptist was born. I am sure that a priest like Zechariah would have read about, or at least heard about, God's promise to send the Savior. It does not seem out of the question that Zechariah would also know that God had promised He would send someone to announce the coming of that Savior. However, prior to that encounter, Zechariah never thought for one minute that he might be the father of that forerunner. I can't imagine that when he and Elizabeth prayed for a child they asked for that child to be John the Baptist. Word of God's promise had been passed down from generation to generation, but so much time had passed since Isaiah spoke the promise, the people had surely given up hope of it coming to pass. The couple God chose to deliver His promise had even given up hope of having a child! Is it not just like God to do the unexpected? Remember what I said about trying to put God in a box? It can't be done!

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, it is good to reflect on the greatness of our God. It is my prayer that, as you read the story in Luke, you will be reminded of times God revealed Himself to you, times you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the power of Almighty God could not be denied. If you have not had one of these experiences, then I would have to assume you have not trusted Christ as your Savior. If you have, you know what it feels like to be led by God's Holy Spirit since that is the way God calls us to Himself.

When all is said and done, please keep one thing in mind. If an angel should appear to you with a message from God, listen closely, be ready to obey, and whatever you do, do not ask any questions. I don't know about you, but the thought of going nine or ten months without talking does not appeal to me at all!

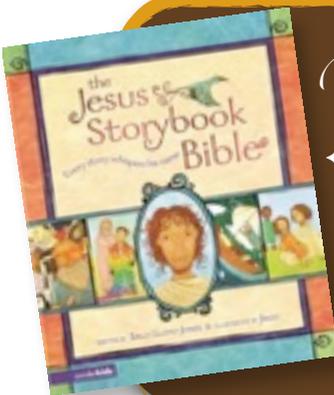
*Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Do you know without a shadow of a doubt where you will spend eternity?
- ◆ Can we truly celebrate the birth of Christ if we have never accepted him as our Savior?

*Week Three*

# PRAYER

by  
*Carol Lueken*



*This Week's Reading with Kids :*

- ◆ This week read "The Light of the Whole World" starting on page 184. You will learn about the shepherds and how they came to know of the Promised Child.
- ◆ Since this week's devotionals are about prayer, you may consider also reading "How to Pray" on page 222.

## *Day 1- ANNA: THE PROPHETESS*

*And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).*

Before considering Anna and the topic of prayer, I must say a few words about Luke. From Scripture and tradition, we know that he was a Gentile, a physician, a bachelor, and a resident of Antioch. He penned more verses in the Bible than any other writer. Luke is said to have died at the age of eighty-four (possibly the same age as Anna) full of the Holy Spirit. What is most interesting to me, given my assignment to write about Anna, is that Luke wrote more about the women involved in Jesus' life and ministry than any other writer. I personally believe that as a Gentile now availed of salvation through Christ, Luke wanted women to understand they had a place in God's Kingdom, too. Everyone was, and is, included in the redemption of Christ. What good news for the women of the first-century and for every succeeding generation!

The only "claim to fame" that Anna has is found in the context of the three scriptures found in Luke's narrative; there is no other reference to her in

the entire Bible. Why did God lead Luke to include this seemingly ordinary woman in his Gospel? Let's look closely at the scriptures.

Anna: what's in a name? Though in our present culture, a name serves mainly to distinguish one person from another, that has not always been the case. For a long time in history, and certainly in the first-century Hebrew culture, a person's name was viewed as equivalent to the person himself. Names were chosen carefully. A person's name signified his person, worth, character, reputation, authority, will, and ownership. The name Anna was the equivalent of Hannah, a name we find in the Old Testament meaning grace or gracious. Just like Hannah, Samuel's mother, Anna, was the embodiment of grace. Grace, in all its forms, was a profound truth to the Gentile Luke.

Anna was a prophetess. Although scholars do not agree upon the exact meaning of the term, to be called a prophetess in the Bible is, indeed, unique. The term is applied in the ESV Bible to only Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (a false prophetess in Nehemiah 6:14), and Anna. Even more interesting, perhaps, prophecy of all kinds had ceased among the Jews for hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, and Luke now attests to not only its renewal, but its renewal through a female voice. Other than his references to OT prophets, Luke applies the term prophet only to Jesus and John the Baptist. He declares that Zechariah prophesies, but he does not call him a prophet. He obviously sensed something very special in what he was told of Anna and something very special about God's call on her life.

Some sources define prophetess as simply a female prophet. Others say these women were likely deemed prophetesses because they were uniquely gifted and devoted to declaring the word of God and pointing people to Him; they could not foretell the future. The ESV study notes related to Amos 3:7 say, "Throughout the OT, God often showed the prophets his own perspective on

the events of history and revealed to them his purposes and actions, so that the prophets could interpret historical events accurately for God's people." In Joel 2:28, the writer speaks of a time when "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters (like Anna) shall prophesy . . . . " God certainly did not want His people to miss the coming of the Messiah, and He used Anna to announce the good news and Luke to insure that everyone heard it.

Joel explains that the ability to prophesy as Anna did comes as a result of being filled with the Spirit. As we will see over the next few days in our study of Anna, she was definitely a woman indwelt by the Spirit of God.

Let me leave you today with some words from D. L. Moody:

I firmly believe that the moment our hearts are emptied of selfishness and ambition and self-seeking and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will come and fill every corner of our hearts; but if we are full of pride and conceit, ambition and self-seeking, pleasure and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. I also believe that many a man is praying to God to fill him, when he is full already with something else. Before we pray that God would fill us, I believe we ought to pray that He would empty us. There must be an emptying before there can be a filling; and when the heart is turned upside down, and everything that is contrary to God is turned out, the Spirit will come. . . .

### *For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ With what are you filled today—concerns about the holiday shopping and festivities; anxiousness about health or monetary issues; emotions of anger, bitterness, or loneliness? Maybe you're filled with "me" and are choosing to ignore the "we" all around you. Pray for God to empty you that you might be filled with the Spirit of Christ, and then pray that Luke's Gospel might be proclaimed this holiday season in "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

## *Day 2 - ANNA: DAUGHTER, DESCENDANT, DEVOTEE*

*"And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four" (Luke 2:36-37A).*

Anna is identified as the daughter of Phanuel. The name of Anna's father, which was translated Peniel or Penuel in the Old Testament, meant face of God. Jacob gave the same name to the place where he saw God "face to face" (Genesis 32:30). While the expression "face to face" may be a figure of speech in the biblical text, there is no denying that the encounter between God and Jacob was intimately personal; the encounter forever changed Jacob. Phanuel's daughter Anna also had an intimate encounter with the incarnate God, face to face, when He was presented at the temple in Jerusalem. Just as Jacob recognized the face of

God, so did Anna. She identified Him as the long-awaited redeemer, an ability given to her by the presence of the Holy Spirit, which we discussed yesterday.

Anna was of the tribe of Asher--Jacob's eighth son. Little is written of the tribe, though it is frequently noted by writers that no hero or judge for the nation ever came from Asher. Additionally, the Pharisees claimed "no prophet arises from Galilee" (John 7:52) which was partially inhabited by the tribe of Asher. Perhaps Luke wanted to note Anna's ancestry to disprove the notion that no one of importance ever hailed from Galilee, or maybe he simply wanted to explain how Anna was different—how she stood out among so many others.

Asher was one of the tribes which split from the House of David and formed the Northern Kingdom. After being conquered by the Assyrians and deported, the Tribe of Asher was listed as one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. For Anna to be identified with the tribe must indicate that either her ancestors had migrated south before the Assyrian conquest of Israel, thus avoiding the deportation, or they were among the exiles who returned from captivity. Either way, she was a symbol of God's grace and faithfulness. He had "saved" her and drawn her unto Himself.

Tradition says the women of the tribe of Asher were renown for their beauty and fitness to become the wives of high-priests and kings. We do not truly know if Anna was a woman of physical beauty, and we do not know to whom she was married. What we do know is that she had been married and widowed after only seven years and had lived as a widow for an extremely long time.

Though under her father's control (and care) until she married, it was not customary for a woman to return to live under her father's roof when widowed. Neither did she receive an inheritance from her husband. Only the property she took into the marriage would have been returned to her. It was assumed that a

young widow would remarry, be supported by her children, or in some instances support herself. However, either Anna chose not to marry a “kinsman redeemer,” or none existed; Anna had no descendants; and it is clear from our scripture passage that she did not pursue a “career” in Jerusalem as she was in the temple continually. Thus, Anna was apparently dependent upon others to take care of her. Of course we see in 1 Tim. 5 that the early church was not expected to support every widow. If Paul fashioned these guidelines for the care of widows after those of the temple, that would mean that Anna was solely dependent upon God to supply her needs for many, many years, for nothing would have required her community to care for her until she was 60. Though Paul would later write in 1 Cor. 7:8 “that it is good for (widows) to remain single as I am,” in order to be single-mindedly devoted to God, it is doubtful that would have been the thinking of most first-century Jews. Anna may have been met with much disapproval among her peers for not remarrying or supporting herself in some way.

Sometimes it is a dire circumstance, like widowhood, that brings about single-minded devotion. James says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

Because Luke makes no mention of the trials with which Anna had to deal, it is easy to overlook them. Consider, however, that she was barren, widowed, homeless, poor, elderly, and alone. Luke was aware of the difficulties Anna faced, but apparently both Anna and Luke believed her trials paled in comparison to the opportunity God gave her to live and pray continuously in His presence. Too often when we Christians face trials, we pray for them to be removed. We

fail to be thankful for the faith they will produce —the kind of faith that will allow us to see God “face to face.”

Anna believed God’s Word; she believed the Messiah was coming, and she believed that God would take care of her until He did, just as He promised in His word. Because of her faith, Anna saw the Savior, and she was given the opportunity to tell others.

### *For Your Consideration*

- ◆ Ask God to help you focus today on the birth of Christ and what that truly means for you and all mankind. Then prayerfully consider with whom, and specifically how, you might share the good news today.

## *Day 3 - ANNA: A MIND SET ON THINGS ABOVE*

*“She (Anna) did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37B).*

Anna’s deep devotion to God is important to her role in the life of Christ. The writer of the ESV study notes for Luke 2:36-37 says, “God reveals his secret purposes in history to humble servants who continually live in his presence.” For Anna, this meant a life spent in the temple, where God dwelt among His people.

It is important to clarify that “the temple” actually refers to the temple complex, not the temple sanctuary. Being a woman, Anna would not have been allowed to enter further than the Court of Women which was where she would have encountered the baby Jesus. Some believe that Anna may have even been allowed to live in a room in the complex as part of the charity she must have received. Whatever the case, Scripture clearly states she never left the grounds of the temple.

Anna’s continual presence at the temple may have been influenced by Malachi 3:1 which says, “And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” With such singleness of mind to be intimate with God, why would Anna leave the complex and risk missing out on the Lord coming to His temple? Do you think much about where you spend your time, about where Christ will find you when He returns? Will your location be pleasing to Him?

What may be of more importance than where she actually spent her time was what she did with her time. Luke tells us she was involved in worshiping, fasting, and praying, night and day. The focus of her life—the center of her attention—was God. Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:2 to “set (our) minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” What is the focus of your life? Around what or whom does your interest, activity, and emotion revolve this holiday season?

We Christians cannot worship, pray, and fast 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in the normal way of thinking, and obviously neither did Anna, or she could not have physically survived 80+ years. However, like Hannah, we can offer all that we are, have, and do to the service of God. Francis Chan writes in *Crazy Love*, “We never grow closer to God when we just live life; it takes deliberate pursuit and attentiveness” (170). We have to set intimacy with God as a goal and then do everything possible to reach it. Because of Anna’s steadfast

devotion, she would witness at least a partial fulfillment of the prophecy unfolding in the life and work of Jesus. Wouldn't you like God to bless you because of your "deliberate pursuit and attentiveness" to learning more about Him and living in obedience to His word?

Luke saw this kind of intentional focus in Paul, to whom he was a traveling companion and scribe. Because Luke was with Paul when he wrote his first letter to Timothy, I have to wonder if Paul and Luke talked of Anna as Paul sought to describe the type of widow worthy of help from the early church. "She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Tim. 5:5). That statement certainly describes Anna, doesn't it?

Both Paul and Luke recognized and appreciated the importance of those who prayed continuously. In Acts 2:42 Luke describes the fellowship of the early believers in this way: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." They had minds "set on the things above"; they were focused on the things of God. Paul tells us of Epaphras in Colossians 4:12 and how he was always struggling in prayer on behalf of the Colossians. We are repeatedly instructed and encouraged to make God the center of our attention while living a life of prayer, either through words, actions, or both.

Being constant in prayer, as Anna was, demands the reading and study of God's word. In Anna's day, girls were generally given only elementary religious instruction. Exceptions existed, however, and considering God's plan to use Anna as a prophetess, she may have been fortunate enough to have had numerous opportunities to learn the scriptures. Certainly, she walked among the priests who served in the temple. She talked with individuals like Simeon and others who came to the temple complex to offer sacrifices, to pray, and to worship.

She undoubtedly continued to learn more and more of the scriptures from those people God sent her way. Are you faithful in sharing God's Word with others so they can grow in their knowledge of Him?

Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." God's word offers guidance to our prayers as it does to our lives. If you feel like you stumble around in the dark, in uncertainty, as you pray, perhaps you need to rely more heavily on Scripture. It certainly will help you to focus more on God and less on yourself; you will have more reason to praise God as you grow in your understanding of Him; your perspective on the things of this world will change; and you will grow to a place, where, like Jesus, you can say "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 24:42).

*For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ Considering what God did through one as ordinary as Anna and one as extraordinary as Jesus, what do you imagine He might be able to accomplish through your surrendered will? As you pray, ask God to help you surrender your all today.

*Day 4 - ANNA: WORSHIPING WITH FASTING AND PRAYER*

*"She (Anna) did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day" (Luke 2:37B).*

Let's continue to consider how Anna spent her nights and days in the temple, by looking first at worship. Luke links worship with fasting and prayer, as well he should, because when Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, He taught them to begin their prayers with worship or adoration of God: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9).

Kay Arthur writes in her Lord, Teach Me To Pray Workbook, "the very fact that you pray is to worship God. Why? Because you are acknowledging that God exists and that you need Him. Prayer demonstrates that you value God for who He is, the one true God! The One totally set apart from man . . . 'I AM'" (29). The reverent love and devotion that Anna had for God was expressed through prayer. As we have already discussed, Anna had been totally dependent upon God to supply her needs for at least sixty years. In her dependence, she made Him the center of her life and, thus, knew Him intimately. She adored Him; she saw Him worthy of worship.

On the very first page of The Knowledge of the Holy, A. W. Tozer states:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . . Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.

How do you feel about God? Is He worthy of worship? Do you have such "high . . . thoughts of God" that you are driven to worship Him in prayer?

Have you ever noticed how often we start our prayers with thanksgiving instead of adoration? Is that because we don't really think much about His character, but we think mostly about what He gives us or does for us? Have we really taken the time required to get to know God? If you're not sure how you would begin a prayer with worship, let me suggest these words from a song entitled "Worthy of Worship" by Mark Blankenship and Terry York: "Almighty Father, Master and Lord, / King of all kings and Redeemer, / Wonderful Counselor, Comforter, Friend, / Savior and Source of our life without end." That's who our God is; take time to praise Him in prayer.

When John MacArthur addresses the subject of fasting in relation to Anna's worship and prayer in Twelve Extraordinary Women, he writes, "The manner of (Anna's) praying, accompanied by fasting, speaks of her own self-denial and sincerity . . . fasting with prayer reveals a heart so consumed with praying, and a heart so eager to receive the blessing being sought, that the person simply has no interest in eating" (137).

Eugene Merrill writes in The Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible, "Inasmuch as food and drink typify life in the flesh and all its demands and satisfactions, their absence or rejection speaks to the reality of a higher dimension, one in which the things of the spirit predominate. The theology of fasting is a theology of priorities . . ." (246). The degree of Anna's devotion is not in question, but perhaps yours and mine should be. What would we honestly be willing to give up to pray and worship like Anna? Paul says we are to give up our lives. He writes in Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . which is your spiritual worship." One's whole life, every part of our being, belongs to God, and yet, we have the audacity to say to God, "I know I should pray more, but. . . ." But what? But we have other priorities? Are our hearts

so totally consumed with “the things that are on earth” that we have little or no time to pray or no desire to do so?

In Crazy Love, Francis Chan states that “The average Christian in the United States spends ten minutes per day with God; meanwhile, the average American spends over four hours a day watching television” (145). Maybe TV is not your “thing”; maybe it’s shopping, hunting, reading romance novels, or watching sports. Maybe it’s your iPad, iPhone, iPod (interesting how those terms all begin with i—just sayin’). Wherever you spend your time, consider spending more of it with God. What a testimony it would be for someone to one day say you never departed from the presence of God.

Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37).

*For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ Ask God today to give you a desire to make spending time with Him your first priority and to help you push aside whatever stands in your way of prayer.

*Day 5 - ANNA: WHAT DOES SHE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?*

*“She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:36B-37).*

We are often given very little information about Bible characters, like Anna, even though they play important roles in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. The reason for that is that the Bible is about God; it is written to help us better understand Him—not those persons He uses to further His Kingdom. So now we need to turn our attention from Anna to God, and see what we can learn about Him from her story.

First of all, God uses all kinds of people, even elderly, poor, Jewish widows, in profound ways. Ages are not a barrier to God. Recall the young David, who slew the giant, the boy Samuel who foretold the demise of Eli's priestly dynasty, and the teenager Mary, who bore God's son. Then we read of the aged Abraham and Sarah who became the parents of many nations, and Simeon, who announced the Savior's birth in the temple. God also uses people of all socioeconomic levels—King Solomon to build His temple and the lowly shepherds to herald the coming of Christ. Additionally, we learn in the stories of the Ethiopian eunuch, the Gentile Syrian Luke, and the Jewish Paul of Tarsus that God shows no partiality to races, nationalities, or cultures. Think of how he used the sick, the dying, even the dead, to proclaim His miraculous powers. God is sovereign, and He chooses whomever He will to carry out His purposes. Do you seriously believe that God has no intended purpose for you? What is there about you (that God cannot change) that would make you unusable to Him? Please allow me to answer that question for you: absolutely nothing!

We also learn that God reveals Himself to those who diligently seek Him. *Worshiping* is a present active participle Greek verb, which means you can place the word continually in front of it and emphasize even further Anna's desire for God; it was continual. She was faithful to the command in 1 Chronicles 16:11 to "Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!"

In Psalm 119:10, the psalmist writes, “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I cannot help but believe that Anna sought God with her whole heart, and because of that, she was allowed to see the face of Jesus, her salvation. How would you describe the manner in which you seek God—wholeheartedly, halfheartedly? Or maybe you’re not pursuing Him at all; perhaps, He’s pursuing you.

Another truth we can recognize in Anna’s story is that God uses those who are obedient to Him. However, He cannot and does not use those of His children who are disobedient. Anna undoubtedly knew the story of Solomon. David admonished his son to “know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind . . . If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever” (1Chron. 28:9). God initially granted Solomon wisdom, wealth, power, and victory over his enemies because Solomon had a heart for God and wanted to lead the people of Israel to live godly lives. However, Solomon became disobedient, and his last years were filled with personal disappointment and hostility on every front. While Solomon had once brought glory to God, he now no longer did. Anna stayed the course. Well advanced in years, she continued to be obedient to God’s calling on her life.

The story of Anna also affirms the fact that God (through the Holy Spirit) guides our lives with His Word. We can neither walk nor worship in the truth apart from knowledge of God’s Word. In Psalm 86:1 David prays, “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. . . .” Think of the faith with which the knowledge of Scripture enabled Anna to pray. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1:20, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” In Old Testament scriptures Anna learned of the promised Messiah. D. L. Moody has been quoted

as saying “Tarry at a promise and God will meet you there.” Anna tarried at the promise of God, and, indeed God did meet her in the temple. We are encouraged over and over by teachers and preachers to “pray the scriptures.” Can you do that: do you know them? Think of how that might increase your faith in prayer. As you “remind” God of His promises, you are, yourself, reminded of His awesome love, mercy, grace, and power.

Finally, we see in Anna’s story that God answers prayers. Jews, like Anna and Simeon, had been praying for the Redeemer to come for hundreds of years. He was sent by God at just the right time in history. God will answer our prayers as well, because He promises that in His Word: “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

### *For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ What do you want for Christmas? Let me suggest a desire to be used by God, a deep-seated longing for greater intimacy with God, a heart of obedience, and a greater knowledge and understanding of His Word. God is willing to give these gifts to you; why don’t you pray for a willingness to receive them?

## *Day 6 - ANNA: A WOMAN TO IMITATE*

*“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not*

*be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).*

I pray that we have all learned a great deal from our study of Anna, but the knowledge will have no value if we do not allow it to transform us. I have truly meditated day and night for the last three weeks on Luke 2:36-38. I have looked again and again at every single word, both in and out of context, from every single perspective imaginable. Now I pose this question: how can we imitate Anna and be used by God in His plan of redemption?

I believe the most important application for me, personally, is in the area of obedience—obedience that is undergirded with patience and perseverance. Serving God generally has less to do with innate abilities, spiritual gifts, and resources, than it has to do with obedience. Think back on what you have learned of Anna. She was elderly, widowed, and poor. She had plenty of excuses to avoid serving God, but she did not use them. You and I have no right to use excuses either.

I had a simple excuse for not writing these devotionals: **I HATE TO WRITE!** And now that you have picked yourself up off the floor, let me explain why. Writing is such an intense activity for me that it always results in head, neck, and shoulder aches along with lots of acid reflux. My mind goes into such high gear that at night I either can't fall asleep, or I wake up with songs, scriptures, and quotations flooding my mind, and I can't fall back to sleep. In addition, having forgotten (due to retirement and old age) but still being aware of countless rules, I have to consult numerous books to assure myself of accuracy in punctuation, grammar, and other rules of writing. Being a former English teacher, I have a difficult time being satisfied with the end

product because I can always see room for improvement. Therefore, I would prefer to do many things other than write.

However, I know that obedience is the only choice I have when asked to write something in God's service. He has blessed me with a natural ability, an education, and experiences that make writing possible. He reminds me "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). How can I say, "No"? To have the abundant life Jesus promised to His disciples, I must say "Yes" to God's demands, just as Anna did.

Next, consider Anna's patience and perseverance in relation to her obedience. The Israelites had been praying, waiting, and watching hundreds of years for the Messiah—from generation to generation—with no results. What caused them to continue to pray? Nothing indicated His appearance might be imminent. Anna might die without seeing her redeemer. What was the point in devoting her life to continual worship, fasting and prayer? However, the doubts did not deter her from her mission; she persisted in prayer. As I consider Anna's patience, I have to ask myself if I am that patient in waiting on the Lord. How many times have I ceased to pray because I failed to see an answer unfolding? How about you? Are you faithful to persevere in prayer?

In Col. 1:11, Paul prays for believers to have patience to persevere in all kinds of situations. I found myself in great need of patience and perseverance yesterday afternoon. After writing and revising non-stop for over three hours, I was within seven words of finishing the last of the six devotionals Chris had asked me to write. My Microsoft Word program locked up, and I lost the 1,000 word file. I knew I could not recreate it; I had no notes; everything I had penned had undergone so much revision, I couldn't possibly remember my final words. I really wanted to cry, get angry, or give up. However, because I had initially put this project into God's hands, and because I had literally gotten

down on my knees every day to ask for His help, I knew I had to get up this morning and write a new devotional, once more trusting God to inspire my writing. No other options existed. I had to persevere as Anna did.

That is how we must view prayer. When Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was not removed, and when Jesus' closest disciples slept as He prayed, it made no difference; Paul and Jesus kept on praying. Persistence in prayer does not insure answers we desire, but it is the key to obtaining those answers we need. Paul and Jesus persevered, and they received the grace and strength they needed to carry out God's Will.

You and I cannot give up based on what we see, hear, or feel. "In hope (Abraham) believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told . . ." (Romans 4:18). We must persevere in trusting and praying the promises of God.

*For Your Consideration:*

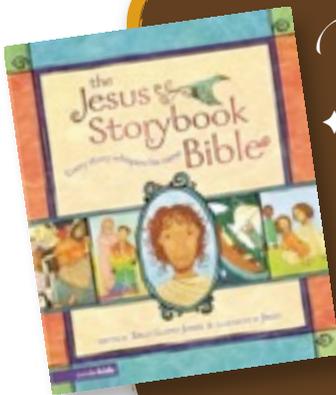
- ◆ Won't you pray today for a desire to be obedient, with patience and perseverance, to every call God makes upon your life, especially the call to pray? Then one day, like Anna, a woman of great faith, "We shall see Jesus just as He is!" May God find us faithful in all things this holy season.

**Merry Christmas!**

*Week Four*

# PRAISE

by  
*Jim Huitt*



*This Week's Reading with Kids :*

- ◆ This week read "The King of All Kings" starting on page 192. You will read about the journey of the Wise Men and their gifts -- just right for a king.
- ◆ To learn what happened to Jesus, you might consider reading "The Sun Stops Shining" and "God's Wonderful Surprise" starting on page 302.

## *Day 1- SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN A GODLY CHARACTER*

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before had seen the Lord's Christ. (Luke 2:25-26)*

Praise is a word that seems to flow easily from the lips of believers today. Like many of the words in our vocabulary, the more we use them the more they lose their impact and meaning. As I write this, I have come to a deeper appreciation of the words we use, their meanings, and what they communicate. Simple words like grandfather and grandmother are words we use every day. Those words reflect not only a role that we have but also a relationship with family members and others. Simeon is one of the individuals we do not hear much about in the Christmas narrative, but his brief appearance speaks volumes. Simeon shows us that praise is not something a person does, but it is reflective of who he is, his character, in a committed relationship with God

In Luke 2:25-26 we learn several aspects of Simeon's character. First, he was a righteous man. In the OT, righteous and just are English words used to translate the Hebrew words yasher ("upright"), tsadiq ("just"), tsidkiah ("righteous"). All of these words have one idea in common: the righteous, or just, man is so called because he is right with God; and he is right with God because he has walked "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord."

The Old Testament righteous man was not sinless (Eccl 7:20), but one who, for all his sins, resorted to the ordinances, and offered in faith the required sacrifice.

Second, Simeon was devout. Simeon steadily regulated all his conduct by the law of his God; he had fully consecrated himself to God, so that he added a pious heart to a righteous conduct. The original word also signifies a person of good report - one well received among the people or one cautious and circumspect in matters of religion; it properly denotes one who deals with whatever he encounters, carefully and well. He so professed and practiced the religion of his forefathers that he gave no cause for a friend to mourn or an enemy to triumph on his account.

Third, Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel - that is, the Messiah, who was known among the pious Jews by his character. He was to be the consolation of Israel because he was to be its redemption. This consolation of Israel was so universally expected that the Jews swore by it. They would often say, "So let me see the Consolation, if such a thing be not so, or so." Note also that he was waiting. This carries with it a sense of expectancy and anticipation, as if waiting for something or someone special, but not knowing the exact time it would arrive. Another word for consolation is comfort. Those who are hurting need comforted. Those who are lonely need comforted. Those who are grieving need comforted. Those who are hurting, lonely, or grieving do not need a cold, lifeless, and detached religion. They need the warmth that comes with being comforted. Those who need comfort wait for, long for, and yearn for someone to come to comfort them in their time of need.

Finally, we are told of another aspect of Simeon's godly character. The Holy Spirit was upon him. What a testimony! Think of it. Here we are in the twenty-first century reading about a man from the early part of the first century--a man the Holy Spirit used in a way that would have a profound impact

on the world. Being filled with Holy Spirit is to have a unique relationship with the Living God.

Character is who you are when nobody is looking. Simeon was in right standing both with God and his fellow-man; he was totally committed to Jehovah God, and he was waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled in the coming of a Messiah who would bring strength to the weary and hope to the hopeless.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Have you taken an honest inventory of your own character recently?
- ◆ To what degree would your character match that of Simeon's?
- ◆ Is the character that people see in you at Christmas reflective of your character the rest of the year?

## *Day 2-SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN A SENSITIVITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT*

*“And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,”  
(Luke 2:27)*

Waiting... waiting... I hate waiting! I hate waiting in line at the grocery store. I hate waiting for my computer to “boot up.” I hate waiting at restaurants. I hate waiting for the microwave to pop my favorite brand of popcorn. Get the idea? I HATE WAITING!! Yet waiting is so much of the experience of every believer. One important element in the story of Simeon is that he was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” His waiting was not, however, an impatient kind of waiting. It was a waiting that revealed strength of character. It was a waiting that had lasted a lifetime. It is important to note that Simeon’s waiting was not a “sitting- in- the- rocking- chair- watching- time- pass- by” type of waiting. Rather, it was a waiting that reveals a quiet expectation of a future hope. Remember God’s promise to Simeon “that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26, NIV). Every day of every month of every year since that promise was given to him, Simeon anticipated the fulfillment of that promise. Each morning when Simeon awakened, he quietly asked Jehovah, “Is this the day, the day your promise to me will be fulfilled?”

A second element shows Simeon’s sensitivity. Not only is his sensitivity to the Holy Spirit seen in waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise, but also it can be seen in Luke’s description “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (Luke 2:25 NIV). These words hold great significance both then and for believers today. The fact that the Holy Spirit “was upon him” indicates Simeon’s lifestyle. He lived a life before men and God consistent with what he believed. Simeon holds no great significance to the world at large. His words are not well remembered by historians or philosophers. Yet, in quiet obedience and Spirit-filled devotion to Jehovah-God, he was given a promise that he would not die before seeing the Messiah.

Another element in Simeon's encounter with the Messiah is that he was "moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts" (Luke 2:27 NIV). Note the words "moved by the Spirit." I am deeply convinced that nothing happens to believers by accident. If we as believers truly believe in the Sovereignty and that He gives guidance to His children, then we are left with such a conclusion. A survey of both the Old and New Testaments will also lead to the same conclusion. Think of it! From the very beginning of the birth narrative, before and since, the Holy Spirit has been "moving" in the lives of those devoted and obedient to Him. Fate? Luck? Karma? No! Not for the believer! Michael Green in I Believe in the Holy Spirit says "The Spirit was active in an upsurge in prophecy, active in the birth of John and Jesus, rests upon Jesus in its power he carries out his mighty works and after the resurrection imparts the same Spirit on the disciples." What was true then is true today; the Holy Spirit moves in the life of the obedient and devoted believer to accomplish His purpose for His Kingdom.

*Praise* is a word that has become all too common in the modern Christian culture. The story of Simeon reminds us that praise is the outward expression of an inward reality rooted in a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Have you been waiting a long time for God to answer a prayer you have been praying? What can you learn from Simeon about waiting for the Lord's promise to be fulfilled?
- ◆ Does the lifestyle you currently live reflect a willingness and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit?
- ◆ When was the last time you verbalized praise to God instead of begging or pleading your cause about something you are going through?

## *Day 3-SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN A CONNECTEDNESS WITH GOD*

*"... he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,  
'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation'" (Luke 2: 28-30)*

**Connectedness** is a word we seldom use in conversations. A handshake, an embrace, or a friendly touch on the shoulder, all communicate connectedness. Connectedness has taken on a new meaning for me in recent days: it means not only being able to talk to family members thousands of miles from home but also to see their faces at the same time. I cannot touch them physically, but I can see the expressions on their faces and feel as though they are in the same room with me. But something else has, in a sense, transformed my understanding of connectedness. In a far away place that I had never heard of, called Donetsk,

Ukraine, two little girls I never knew existed, whom I had never talked to or heard their voices, had never seen or touched, have been living their lives without connection to loving parents to embrace them in an expression of love and acceptance. No parents to hold them in their arms when they have skinned their knee or to put ointment on a wound to help the healing process, no parents to tell them those words that fill an empty heart, “I love you, you are special to me.” But a few weeks ago that all changed.

Over the thousands of miles, I saw pictures of those two little girls, and even though their names are foreign to me and difficult to pronounce, I immediately felt connected. I got a lump in my throat. Tears welled up in my eyes. I’ve never held them in my arms, but I feel connected. I’ve never heard their voices, but their smiles fill the room with beautiful music. I feel warmed when I see their smiles. They now have the same last name I do. Even though they are not my grandchildren by birth, they have become part of my family’s heritage. Is there a reason to praise? The answer is a resounding, YES!

Simeon must have felt the same way. Simeon, moved by the Holy Spirit for an appointment orchestrated by divine decree to meet the promised Messiah, “took him in his arms” (Luke 2:28 NIV). Simeon made a connection with the Eternal God of the Universe who became flesh. It was a connection that brought both a sense of fulfillment and an overwhelming peace. His life was now complete. The promise of God was now fulfilled. Was there a lump in his throat? Probably. Did tears well up in his eyes? Certainly.

When Jesus grew into manhood and began ministering, He not only used words to touch people, but also He physically touched people. He touched people who were deaf, and they began to hear. He touched people who were lame, and they began to walk. He touched people whom other people would not, and they

felt completely accepted. He connected with people who were burdened by the struggles of life and gave them renewed hope.

Everybody loves to hold a baby, to gaze into their eyes and wonder what they really see. To hold a baby is to experience a new life, to make a connection. Simeon and the baby Jesus made a connection. Simeon's life was old and frail, and the other was just beginning. Simeon was at peace with dying, and the other was destined to die to bring peace to all. Simeon was filled with praise because of the connectedness he experienced, and the other, the object of that praise, was destined to be the focus of the praise on the lips of countless believers for an eternity.

My days are filled with immense hope and anticipation of being able to hold two little girls, our son, and our daughter-in-law when they return from a faraway place of unfamiliar names and customs to a place we call home. What a reunion that will be! I wonder if that's what Simeon thought when he held that little baby in his arms.

*For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ Christmas is a time of connectedness. Do you feel connected to your family/friends? If so, great! If not, take this time to connect or reconnect with significant people in your life.
- ◆ Has your relationship with God felt disconnected of late? He came in the person of Jesus Christ to be intimately connected with you. Take the necessary steps to reconnect with Him.

## *Day 4-SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN A SALVATION*

### AVAILABLE TO ALL PEOPLE

*“... that you have prepared in the presences of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:31-32)*

*Salvation.* Is it just another word? Is it an event? Or, is it a relationship? Some say it's a word that could mean whatever you want it to mean. One definition is as good as another, and it depends on the person. Some say it's an event. “I got saved in church today” or “I was saved when I was a child.” Simeon's encounter with the living God in the person of His Son was indeed an event, but it was much more than that. It was the culmination of a lifetime of devotion, hope, and intimate relationship. There are several things to make note of in our verses for today.

First, note that Simeon announces that this salvation has been prepared by God. This tells us several things. It tells us that God has an eternal purpose which is not limited to human understanding of time. It is impossible for human beings to comprehend the idea of the eternal purpose of God. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. However, it is important to realize that the sin that became part of the human experience after the fall in the Garden of Eden and resulted in separation from God has been overcome and has no claim on the believer. The Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1 NIV). Simeon recognized that

the baby he held in his arms was the culmination of a promise God had made in eternity past.

Second, Simeon announced that this salvation is for all people. This is a significant statement because of the perspective of the religious establishment of the day. It was taught that only a select few could really know God. Only those who observed certain rules, regulations and rituals as well as strict dietary laws could hope to be close to God. At the time Simeon first met the baby Jesus, a group of people known as Gentiles were looked upon with much disdain. They were considered “half-breeds.” They were shunned by those who claimed to be godly. Simeon announced that this salvation is for all people--no class distinction, no economic preference, no distinction based on social standing. He came for ALL people.

Third, Simeon announced that this salvation is to be a light in a dark world. Light reveals the truth about what is real and what is not. Do you remember as a child that the “boogeyman” always came out in the dark? Then, when the sun came up, you found out that big, bad monster was just a tree limb rubbing the house. Darkness hates the light; the two cannot function together. The Apostle John quotes Jesus as saying, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness” (John 12:46 NIV). Simeon also announced that this light is for revelation. This baby would grow up to reveal Jehovah-God to men as never before. He would bridge the gap between Holy God and sinful man. He would reveal the nature and character of the Heavenly Father who yearns for an intimate relationship with men. This baby boy Simeon held in his arms would reveal the glory of God that had been mysterious from the beginning and had now come to Earth in human form. What a reason to raise a voice of praise!

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ Have you trusted the God of the Universe who came to Earth in the form of a human named Immanuel (God with Us) to become your Father and His Son your Savior? Do not let this Christmas go by without making that decision.
- ◆ Is your practice of faith more about rules and regulations, or is it one of the intimacy of relationship?
- ◆ Can you recognize truth versus lies? In a day when the world twists and perverts truth, look to the Light of the World and live in His light.

## *Day 5-SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN THE ETERNAL PLAN OF GOD*

*“And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed . . .’” (Luke 2: 33-34)*

**Plans. . . . Everyone makes plans. Plans are made on a daily basis. We make plans for retirement. We make plans for vacations. We make plans for education. We make plans for our families. When we plan to have children, we almost instinctively begin to think of their future. What college will they attend? What career will they choose? Who will they choose for a life mate? Typical questions parents have asked for centuries. When Simeon met the baby**

Jesus and his earthly parents, however, these were not the questions asked. Instead, Simeon gave a very sobering prophecy.

Our plans are of temporal significance while God's plan is of eternal significance. Our plans are limited to the cooperation of time and people while God's plan has no such constraints. You and I make multiple plans on a day-to-day basis, but God has only one plan "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9 NIV). While our plans change from time to time, God's plan has never changed.

Joseph and Mary marveled at the words of Simeon. They had been told similar things by Gabriel, Elizabeth, and the shepherd. So why did they marvel at the words of Simeon? If someone would have told me when our oldest son was a baby that he would grow up, marry, and go to a foreign land to adopt two, beautiful children and that our youngest son would be a music producer living in the Country Music Capitol of the World, I would have reacted much like Joseph and Mary.

Simeon's words of prophecy take on a more serious tone in what he says next. He tells Mary her son will cause some to rise to a new level of intimacy with Jehovah, but he will also cause others to reject Him. Sobering words spoken at an otherwise joyful event. Joseph was there with Mary, but Simeon spoke these words directly to Mary. Why? Because the relationship between a mother and her child has no comparison. The birth of Jesus was like no other human birth. Conceived of the Holy Spirit, He is called Immanuel which means "God with us." Millions of children had been born to both rich families and poor. Millions had been born to royalty as well as to slaves. But this baby was different. While other parents hold their baby and dreamed of a bright future, Joseph and Mary were to raise their child with a future that would lead Him to a place of despicable horror and shame.

“You can mess with me, but don’t mess with my kid.” Many parents have made this statement at one time or another, in one form or another. Simeon’s next statement would bring out “the parent” in all of us. Simeon said the baby Jesus would “be a sign to be spoken against” (Luke 2: 34b NIV). No parents want others to speak ill of their child. No parents want others to ridicule or mock their child. Nothing tears at the heart of a parent more than a child crying because others say he’s different, not like them. But that’s God’s plan. A child being made fun of and mocked by others. But that’s God’s plan. A child who encourages love and acceptance only to have scorn and rejection returned. But that’s God’s plan.

I am reminded of the vivid images of the crucifixion in the movie The Passion of the Christ. The most striking image that has stayed with me is the scene of Jesus being falsely accused by those He came to save. But it was God’s plan. His mother Mary could do nothing to stop the horrific pain of the whipping post. But that was God’s plan. Jesus carried the heavy cross to that mount called Calvary. But that was God’s plan.

We lift our voice in praise to God for His eternal plan!

### *Questions to Consider:*

- ◆ When you plan your day, week, or month, do you consider God’s plan for your life in those plans?
- ◆ When you pray for God to reveal His plan for you, do you consider the possibility that that plan may include suffering?
- ◆ Do you sometimes make plans and then ask God to bless those plans, or do you place a greater emphasis on what His plans are for you?

## *Day 6-SIMEON: PRAISE ROOTED IN A CHILD SENT TO DIE*

*And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.' (Luke 2:34-35)*

A baby is born. . . . What a joy! He is a wonder of God's creative ability. You marvel at those little hands and feet. He is so small, so fragile. You hold him carefully, cuddle him so tenderly. He is a precious gift from God, and you never want to let him go. Others stare at him in amazement and tell you how beautiful. how perfect he is, and you smile because you believe the same thing.

The years go by so quickly, don't they? It was just yesterday that you gave birth. It was just yesterday that he was learning to walk. It was just yesterday that he spoke his first words. Watch him grow. There he is standing along with his father in the shop, learning the family trade. Yet, you remember the words spoken by the angel not so long ago, "He will save His people from their sins." But just how will that happen? When will it happen? What will it be like to be the mother of a king who will reign forever? So many questions, but you don't want to think of that now; you just want to spend as much time with him as you can and enjoy every minute of every day.

Simeon's last prophetic announcement must have been puzzling to Mary. Simeon spoke these words directly to her. But what do they mean? This was to be a joyous occasion, a celebration. After all, Jehovah's promised Messiah has

arrived on the human scene. God's promise to Simeon has been fulfilled. Simeon's words to Mary are sobering to say the least.

No mother wants to see her child in pain. A skinned knee, a broken limb, cuts and scrapes, all require a loving mother's tender touch. "Mommy, make it stop hurting" a child cries. The natural reaction of a loving mother is to make it stop hurting. But this was not to be for Mary. She was to stand in quiet loneliness while her son was falsely accused. She was to stand quietly by as the flesh was torn from His body at the whipping post. She was to stand by with tears filling her eyes perhaps quietly pleading with the Heavenly Father to stop the hurt. "I don't want to let Him go, please, God, not yet!" Then, there is the crucifixion. The helplessness Mary must have felt. "Please, no, not a sword! Hasn't He suffered enough! Haven't you satisfied your perverted pleasure yet?" Then Mary remembered the words of Simeon, "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2 :35b). Nothing pierces the heart of a mother more than watching pain inflicted on her child and knowing she can do nothing, not one thing, to ease or stop the pain. All of Mary's mothering instincts scream within her to do something, anything, to make the pain go away. But it is not to be. Tears flowing like tiny streams of water down Mary's cheeks and pooling on the ground beneath her are the outward sign of the immense heartache she was feeling inside.

Both ends of the Christmas story are presented in the verses we have been studying this week. However, we don't want to dwell on the death of the child Simeon held in his arms; we want to take this time to celebrate His birth. This is a joyful time, a time of wonder and amazement at the gift God has presented to us. Since the time our sons were babies themselves, every Christmas morning all of us sit in our family room with the brightly lit Christmas tree, the decorations, and all the presents that are an expression of our love for family and

friends. But Christmas is much more than that. So every Christmas I have the great joy of reading the Christmas story that tells of another father, our Heavenly Father, who loves us far more than we can begin to comprehend, and because He loves us so much, He gave each and every one of us a gift that lasts for eternity.

This year I will have the indescribable joy of sharing that same story with two precious gifts to our family named Sveta and Olivia. They will be coming from a land and a language foreign to us, to a culture with family and friends who will be just as foreign to them. But, to see them, to hold and hug them, to tell them how special they are, to say the words “I love you” to them--what a glorious time that will be! And one day, one day soon by God’s grace, in His own time, they, too, will come to know the Christmas story as a reality in their lives.

*For Your Consideration:*

- ◆ During this time of joy and celebration with your family and friends, remember the story of Simeon and his prophetic announcement that Jesus was born for the sole purpose of dying in order that you and I may live eternally.
- ◆ Remember that without the cross, the birth of Jesus would be just another among billions.
- ◆ As we would never turn away a gift from a loved one or friend, don’t turn away from the gift God has given to you.
- ◆ If you don’t have a tradition of reading the Christmas story to your children (even if they are adults) or grandchildren, begin this Christmas Day.