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“Looking Forward” **Sermon on Luke 2:22-40**

Donovan A. Drake

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First Sunday of Christmas

I'd like for you to take out your Bibles and turn to Luke 2:22-40 and follow along as I read it. I want you to see in your mind's eye the scene, listen for the law, watch for the Spirit, and see the characters.

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The Gospel writer Luke is ever mindful of the times in which we live. Writing, "In the days of King Herod of Judea..." Writing, "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus..." Writing, "When the time came... ...according to the law of Moses."

Time orders us around.

The Christmas tree drops its needles, the time is coming to drag that thing to the curb. It's 30 minutes to kick off... you better get to the game. It's 12 hours before you can celebrate the new year, or, if you go by the liturgical calendar, there are only 12 hours left to get your annual donations into the church office, or they'll be refused...

The point is - time orders us around.

"In those days Mary set out and went with haste..." And in THESE days, we're scrambling to get this, that, and the other thing. In those days, Joseph traveled from Nazareth in Galilee to the City of David called Bethlehem. In THESE days, "Have you got your travel plans for spring break? In those days, "The shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place..." In THESE days, it's "Let us go, go, go..."

Time orders us around. What is time telling you these days?

Is time telling you to buy or sell? Is time telling you that your best days are in front of you or behind you? Is it time to worry? Is it time to fear? Is it time for the winter blahs?

Or do you take your orders from some other source?

Do you remember reading about Simeon? Did you like him? I like him. He doesn't seem to be flustered by time. Maybe it's because he's a righteous man, a devout man, which means he, himself, is not the center of his life.

Mind-blowing to think outside of one's self. I don't know about you, but I tend to think about myself a lot. I'm hungry, I'm tired, I've got things to do.

But on occasion, I'm able to reason that I'm not the center of the universe. I remember dangling my legs off the edge of the Grand Canyon. I was sitting on a rock that was 520 million years old. Looking down into the bottom of the canyon, I saw a rock that said to me, "I'm 1.8 billion years old." I was 53 at the time, which is nothing in comparison. My life was not even the depth of a little piece of a sand in the great scheme of things. It kind of hurts the ego to have to think outside yourself.

This past summer, I was off the grid in the mountains of British Columbia. And there, the sun sets. And there, the night is dark. But there, they make these little things called stars. What a star is is a little point of light. How should I describe them? Twinkle, twinkle, little stars... They're like little diamonds! And there are a thousand of them in the night sky! Maybe more than that! And those stars are a THOUSAND light years away. It's humbling. I'm 60 years old, nothing compared to a thousand light years – just so tiny!

I couldn't wait to get back to civilization where all the light is focused on me. And you.

Simeon was a righteous man, a devout man, always dangling his legs into the depths and vastness of the Almighty. Simeon was always looking up. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars...who are we that you should care about any of us? Simeon can look at the big and be humbled that he's so small, but so loved.

Simeon didn't take his direction from the babbling emperors of the day. Simeon didn't take his direction from what his creaking old bones were saying. Simeon didn't take his direction from the tick, tick, tick of time.

He settled into heavenly peace. Holy Night. All is calm. All is bright. And I so love the translation.

Luke writes, "The Holy Spirit rested on him." I love the thought of that. That the always going, always pushing, always persuading Holy Spirit needed to catch its breath, and there was no better place to rest than on Simeon.

There on his shoulder, the Spirit whispered in Simeon's ear that he would not die before... before what? Before he made his first million? Before he walked his daughter down the aisle? Before he retired? No. Something bigger. There would be something bigger before he saw the One who was and is and is to come. The reconciler of all things, the one who redeems.

Simeon is not in control over his life. He is guided by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit guides him into the temple one day. Guides him to see... ..Jesus. He knows! He knows that out of a boatload of babies in the world, he sees this baby as the anointed one.

It's kind of like when we baptize babies. I don't know how many babies I've baptized in my life, a bunch! But what a gift it is to hold a little human being in your arms! Such

mysteries. When I baptize a baby, I don't know what that baby is going to be when they grow up. Do you?

Unless we know what they're going to be. Unless the Spirit tells us something. Like a dove descending and resting on us, "This is my child, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Unless at every baptism the Spirit says, "Here is the one who is hope. Here is the one who is love. Here is the peacemaker. The humble one. Here is the eternal. Here is light.

They say that even when a star dies, the light keeps going, forever bouncing around the heavens.

It's true. It's true about light.

There is on the frozen tundra of Iowa a granite slab that has my parents' birth dates and death dates carved on it. But what I see is the light and the love that keeps bouncing around in the heavens.

There is a brass plaque outside on the church wall filled with names and dates... birth dates and death dates. But I look at those names and I see the light. Still bouncing around. They are the ones who said, "it doesn't cost a penny to be nice." There on the plaque is an April day, hanging the door in a Habitat house, hanging on all the goodness. It's there in a name is a cup of living water. I can still see her face. There in a name is a smile afforded. An embrace. Grace upon grace. Many of you know them not by dates - you see the names. They're more than names, they're light. And light never dies. They are light. You are light. We are light! My eyes have seen your salvation!

"And Mary, the light will be opposed. A sword will pierce your heart because, Mary, light exposes truth, and truth will make some run for the shadows. Light doesn't stop at the borders. You have to love the whole world. And a lot of people don't like that."

"Mary, light makes you see that mercy can bathe the mistake, and people don't like that. They like to hold on to bitterness and make people pay. People will knit together lies to cover up the truth. And people will believe the lies because they are easier to believe than the truth. They'll stab it - the truth. They'll kill it - the truth. They'll bury it - the truth."

"Mary, I'm telling you, it will pierce your soul. It is so sad. But Mary, you don't have to hide the light. And you don't have to protect the light. And Mary, you don't have to save the light. For the light saves you. So, it's time to catch your breath. Peace. For the Son always rises. God is up to something that lasts. God is up to something good in this world... it's the time... and it's in you.