

Anticipation of Christmas

Luke 2:25-38

Christmas is often associated with children waiting for *THE* day.
I remember my mom had a cloth banner with candy tied for each day up till Christmas...
It only built anticipation for Christmas Eve at our house.

One of my favorite Christmas movies is "A Christmas Story".
It's about a boy's anticipation of getting a Red-Ryder bb-gun for Christmas.

How many of you are anticipating Christmas?
What are you waiting for this Christmas?
Are you longing for something?
What are you expecting to receive?
Are you looking forward to something special this Christmas?

In the Gospel of Luke, we come across two characters who make their appearance in the final scenes of the Christmas story. One is a man named Simeon; the other is a woman named Anna.

They don't appear in any Nativity scenes or in any Christmas songs, but they are none the less, significant players in the original Christmas story.

Both of these individuals were waiting for something, actually they were waiting for someone.

Luke uses a Greek word of anticipation that identifies them as waiting with expectation for the coming of the Messiah, their long awaited Savior. It literally means that they were "*alert to His appearance, and ready to welcome Him.*"

Luke 2:25-38 (NKJV)

We see in **verse 25** reference to Simeon where we read that "*He was waiting...*" and in **verse 38** to describe a woman named Anna who was of those who, "*...looking for...*"

SIMEON -- WAITING FOR COMFORT.

Things weren't going well for the nation of Israel. They hadn't heard from God for many years and were under Roman rule. They had lost their political independence and were living in fear of the cruel King Herod, and many were starting to wondering if the Messiah would ever come.

Verse 26 shows us that Simeon had good reason for his hope and anticipation: "*It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*"

Simeon's expectation focused on the comfort that Christ the promised Messiah would bring.

Among Jews of Simeon's day one of the popular titles of Messiah was Comforter. Like some of the Christmas songs we sing, they were longing for the Messiah to come and bring His comfort and joy to them. For example, "*God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*"

It strikes me that the desire to be comforted is a universal human need.

We all struggle with loneliness, emptiness, insecurity, even desperation. In fact, the Christmas season is one of the major crisis times of the year for loneliness, depression and sadly, suicide.

The Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to go to the temple at just the right time on just the right day that Joseph and Mary were bringing their infant son to the Temple.

When Simeon looked at the baby Jesus, now about 6 weeks old, he knew that God's promise had been kept. Here was Immanuel, "*God With Us*," to make everything right, to provide significance by His presence, and to eliminate rejection, fear, and loneliness.

Verse 28 says Simeon reached down and took Jesus out of Mary's arms and began to praise God.

It's bad enough people feel like it's okay to touch a pregnant woman's belly, but imagine how would you feel if some old man came up to you, took your infant in his arms and started singing out loud?

I'm sure this was a bit unsettling for Joseph and Mary.

As Simeon broke out into praise, he acknowledged that God had not only fulfilled the individual promise to him, but also the promises of the prophets to send the Anointed One to comfort both Jews and Gentiles.

ANNA -- WAITING FOR FORGIVENESS

The other Christmas character waiting with anticipation was Anna.

After her husband had died only 7 years into their marriage, she had dedicated herself to fasting and praying in the Temple for 84 years. In fact, the Bible says that she almost never left the Temple but worshipped day and night. She was always in church waiting with anticipation!

She was looking forward to the same person as Simeon was, but with a different need.

Instead of looking for comfort, Anna was looking for forgiveness.

Take a look at **verse 38**: "*Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*"

The word redemption is related to the situation of captivity.

The Old Testament Passover and the release of Israel from Egyptian slavery was in Anna's day the ultimate redemption and the symbol of God's power to release captives. Passover also pointed ahead to the day when God would provide deliverance from the slavery of sin.

When Anna saw Jesus, she gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who were waiting for redemption. Here, at last, was the One who would save His people from their sins. Imagine the heart of anticipation that mourns more over sin than a life of slavery.

Jesus Provides Whatever We Need

Friends, when Jesus came, He provided the very things that Simeon and Anna were waiting for -- God's perfect comfort and His complete forgiveness.

Let me ask you a question. What are you waiting for this Christmas?

Whatever it is, Jesus brings it to you.

Can any of you identify with Simeon? Some of you I know are really hurting this season.

You feel lonely, empty, afraid, and stressed out. Do you need some comfort? Some consoling? Do you need a fresh sense of God's presence? If so, you can find what you're looking for in Jesus. He came to console us right where we're at.

Or, do you identify more with Anna?

Are you plagued with guilt because of something you've done or the way you've been living this past year? Do you feel like you're trapped in a pattern of sin that you just can't break out of? If you need forgiveness, only Jesus can give it to you. I can think of no better gift or better time than Christmas to do just that.

THREE STEPS

There are three steps from this passage that will help you experience God's comfort and forgiveness this Christmas.

#1: Become a MARVELER.

When Joseph and Mary tried to process everything that was happening, **verse 33** says that they marveled at what was said about Jesus.

According to the dictionary, to marvel is to be filled with wonder, astonishment, and surprise.

Are you a Marveler of Jesus this Christmas?

Or, are you too caught up in the busyness and stress of the holiday?

Have you been running around shopping because of the Holiday, or are you taking the time to make Christmas a "Holy" season? Has Christmas become too predictable, too familiar? Have you heard the Nativity story so much that it no longer astonishes you?

Actually, this can be a dangerous time of the year for us as Christians.

Our annual celebration of Christmas can immunize us to its supernatural reality. We hear just enough of the story each year to inoculate us against the real thing, so that we never really experience true Christmas wonder.

Here's an idea that may help you recapture the marvel of Christmas.

Pick one of the Christmas characters; (Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, or the Wise Men) and put yourself in their sandals. Imagine what it must have been like to witness the supernatural Christmas story first hand.

#2 is to become a MOVER.

Take a look at **verse 27**: "*Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.*"

Now drop down to **verse 38**: "*Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God...*"

Both Simeon and Anna were movers.

When the Holy Spirit prompted them to move, they didn't sit still, their anticipation moved them. I wonder what would have happened if they had not responded?

Actually, I believe that every one of the Christmas characters responded to the Spirit's leading in a way, with the exception of King Herod.

Mary was moved when she said to the angel;

Luke 1:38 (NKJV)

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Joseph demonstrated that he was a mover;

Matthew 1:24 (NKJV)

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,

The Shepherds were movers;

Luke 2:15 (NKJV)

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

The wise men saw the star and moved from their home land and journeyed a far way to find the promised Savior.

Church, when God prompts you to do something, then you need to do it but you first must have a heart of anticipation for Jesus.

Moving might mean salvation for some of you.

It might mean full surrender for others of you.

Or, maybe the Spirit wants you to be more involved in serving people.

Do you sense Him asking you to do something? Are you willing to move?

Don't procrastinate when God prompts you to do something -- you may miss out on a miracle God's doing this Christmas.

I'm struck by what Simeon told Mary in **verse 34**. It must have taken her breath away. *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against..."*

That's not really a joyful Christmas greeting, is it?

Simeon is not saying, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year." Rather, he pauses, clears his throat and tells her that Christmas will only be merry and the New Year will only be happy when people get moving and surrender their lives to Christ.

Here's the truth that Simeon spoke to Mary. Christmas splits people into 2 camps. Since Jesus has entered the world, He has divided the human race. Jesus will cause the falling and rising of people.

Because of who Jesus is and what He came to do, He forces people to make a decision about Him. The Bible uses powerful imagery Jesus is either a rock that you build your life upon (*that's the sense of rising*) or he's the rock that you crash against (*that's the meaning of falling*).

During this Christmas season, Jesus is calling each of us to a decision based upon our willingness to move and respond to Him, we will either rise or fall.

You can't stay neutral about Jesus. You are either for Him or against Him. You're moving closer to Him, or further away. You either have the Savior or you don't.

Interestingly, as we work at becoming Marvelers, we can't help but become Movers.

That leads us to the final step from this passage...

#3 is to become a MESSENGER.

Notice **verse 38** again: "...she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

Do you see people who've been caught up in endless preparations for Christmas? Houses lit up with thousands of lights, trees decorated, treats baked, presents bought, music playing...

Look at it this way -- maybe their anticipation and longings really represent an inner search for comfort and forgiveness -- those things that only the Messiah can provide.

God wants each one of us to become messengers of the Christmas story.

As you and I become Marvelers, the wonder of Christmas will astonish us once again. Then, as we become Movers toward Jesus, our needs for comfort and forgiveness will be met. And, as we take our role as Messengers seriously, we'll be in position to introduce others to the Christ of Christmas -- so that they in turn can find what they have been waiting for.

Christmas is a marvelous, moving, message! The Christ is here! How can we not find what we've been looking for this Christmas season?

John 1:14 (NKJV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.