

MERRY CHRISTMAS... ALL YEAR LONG

The First Sunday of Christmas (Year B)

December 31, 2017



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Lessons

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 148 (13)

Galatians 4:4-7

St. Luke 2:22-40

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

*Anna, Simeon
faithful saints in the Temple
attentive to God*

Sermon

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Amen.

Merry Christmas to you all! I am assuming that most of you who have made the effort to show up today realize that we are still in the Christmas season. (That's why I said "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy New Year.") Shopkeepers at the mall may have left Christmas far behind, but that's not the case for those of us who are in the liturgical tradition. For us, today is "The Seventh Day of Christmas" — and that means more than remembering the true love's gift of seven swans a swimming. The Twelve Days of Christmas are the church's way of making sure that the celebration of the Savior's birth is given more than just one day each year. We may not be hearing this greeting in our neighborhoods much anymore, but we continue to share it here at church. Do me a favor,

¹ Romans 1:7, 1st Corinthians 1:3, 2nd Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1st Thessalonians 1:1, 2nd Thessalonians 1:2, Philemon 3; New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

will you? Take a minute, turn to your neighbor, and say, "Merry Christmas." Merry Christmas to you all.

So I don't know what your last few days have been like. We close down the church office during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, and I always have this fantasy about what a restful, thoughtful time it is going to be for me. I imagine myself reading a lot, digging into books that I never seem to get around to during the course of a regular work-week. I figured I'd catch up on some of my guitar lessons. Take some long, leisurely walks around the neighborhood. Maybe even tie a few flies, and fill in some of the spaces in my fly boxes.

That never pans out, of course. We've pushed through one of the last in a long string of home improvement projects. I've made a few hospital visits. Caught up on the e-mail backlog that stacked up in the days before Christmas. Completed some year-end accounting tasks. It's actually been pretty busy at the Risendal house this week.

Isn't that the way it always happens? We have so many distraction these days. Computers, smart phones, tablets, magazines, newspapers, books and journals, favorite shows on television and radio... the list just seems to go on and on. And the longer the list gets, the more likely it is that plans for reflection, thoughtfulness and devotion go by the wayside. Our morning agenda gets put off until afternoon; often until the evening, or the next day. We can be a profoundly distracted people.

I sometimes have this romantic notion that things must have been different years ago, in simpler times. It certainly must have been different in the first century. They weren't wired in the ways that we are today. But they had their own share of distractions and preoccupations: hauling water from the well to the house; plucking chickens in order to prepare dinner; sweeping out the house with a straw broom; washing clothes in the stream; working needle and thread to make and repair clothing; preparing fields with an ox-drawn plow and a pick axe. There was so much that needed to be done in those days just to stay alive. And despite our valiant efforts to stay busy constantly, studies show that we have more free time at our disposal than any previous generation has had.

Which is what makes the prophetess Anna even more remarkable. We read about her in this morning's Gospel lesson. As a young woman, she was married for seven years before her husband died. From that time on, she spends her time in the temple: worshipping, praying and fasting. For the rest of her life she is consumed by her faith, attentive to what God is doing in her world. Day and night, (until her eighty-fourth year!) she never leaves the temple. Hers is an intense and focused attempt to deepen her faith and pay attention to her God.

The story of Simeon's life is similar. He is described as righteous and devout. He is focused on spending time with God and deepening his faith. He is looking forward to the day when God will send the Messiah. As a matter of fact, he believes that God has spoken to him, and informed him that he will not die before seeing the Messiah with his own eyes. Day-after-day he too, like Anna, is in the temple worshipping, praying, fasting, and most importantly: watching and waiting, for the fulfillment of God's promise.

Simeon and Anna. Two faithful believers living in the first century, who don't end up spending all of their days preoccupied with the chores of making a living in a primitive time, but who end up, instead, making the commitment to spend time in worship, prayer and fasting. They are waiting in an active way for a sign that God's promises are about to be fulfilled.

For them, it makes a difference. On that day, when a devout young couple with their newborn baby visit the Temple to do what the law requires, Simeon and Anna are the only

ones able to see who this newborn baby truly is. After years of paying attention, they recognize what God is doing. A child is born. A son is given. He is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... While all the others are keeping themselves busy making offerings, obeying rules, preparing dinners, tending livestock, and working fields, the time Anna and Simeon have invested in their faith allows these two to see what God is doing in their world.

Last weekend we celebrated the message of the Savior's birth in a lowly manger in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. Very few people realize that he is the king. Most never suspect that this poor child laying in a manger could be anything special. But a few, like Simeon and Anna, do come to know. They know because they have searched the Scriptures diligently. They have become deeply involved in the life of faith. They have fine tuned their senses to be aware of how God is present the world. And they are rewarded for their diligence with the opportunity to meet the Savior.

The story of Simeon and Anna recognizing Jesus in the Temple is an important story. But perhaps even more important is the story of how Jesus is seeking to enter into the lives of those are living yet today. It is true: the story of our Lord is not just one that takes place long ago in history. It is a story that takes place in the present as well. The baby who was born in Bethlehem grows up and becomes the man who dies on Golgotha, is raised from death by God, and is now seeking to gain a place in our lives.



How do we see him today? What does he look like? Where will we recognize him? We only discover the answers to these questions as we look at the world through the eyes of faith. And this happens when we, like Simeon and Anna, are diligent in practicing our faith; continually sharpening our spiritual senses; seeking to be more clearly aware of God's movement in our world today.

Here at Saint Peter, one of the ways we seek to join Simeon and Anna is by practicing habits of discipleship in our lives. We haven't talked about this as much during the past year, but it is still an important part of who we are, and can become a way that we learn the ways of God in our time and place.

I am going to invite our hosts to hand out for you a commitment form for this coming year. I'm not asking you to turn this form in: this is a commitment between you and God. But I would like each of you to take a moment, right now, and fill one out. What will you do in 2018 to follow Simeon and Anna in equipping yourselves to be more aware of what God is doing in your world?

[Provide a few minutes for worshippers to complete the commitment form.]

Thank you for completing these forms. As I said, we're not going to collect them, although if you want to share with me what you've decided to do, I'd love to hear about your plans. Fold up your copy and store it in the Bible you use for daily devotions. Return to it now and then during the year, to remind yourself of the commitment you've made.

Taking on a commitment like this is one way to extend the celebration of Christmas. It is one way to make sure that Christmas, in our lives, is more than one or two days of opening gifts and sitting down to feasts. It is how we take time every day to look for the ways Christ is born among us. Prayer; Bible study; worship; service; generosity; Christian fellowship... this is how we invite Christ to be born anew in our lives every day. I hope you'll join us this year.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

Gospel Lesson; English Text ²

^{2.22} 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 ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” ³³ And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ 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 ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed —and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ 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 seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. ³

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

^{2.22} Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαιρισμοῦ αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραστήσαι τῷ κυρίῳ, ²³ καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν νόμῳ κυρίου ὅτι πᾶν ἄρσεν διανοίγον μήτραν ἅγιον τῷ κυρίῳ κληθήσεται, ²⁴ καὶ τοῦ δοῦναι θυσίαν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου, ζεύγος τρυγόνων ἢ δύο νοσσοὺς περιστερῶν. ²⁵ Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος ἦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ ὃ ὄνομα Συμεὼν καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβῆς προσδεχόμενος πάράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ πνεῦμα ἦν ἅγιον ἐπ’ αὐτόν ²⁶ καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ κεχρηματισμένον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον πρὶν [ἢ] ἂν ἴδῃ τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου. ²⁷ καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ ²⁸ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας καὶ εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν ²⁹ νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δούλον σου, δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμα σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ ³⁰ ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριον σου, ³¹ ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν, ³² φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραὴλ. ³³ καὶ ἦν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ θαυμάζοντες ἐπὶ τοῖς λαλουμένοις περὶ αὐτοῦ. ³⁴ καὶ εὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς Συμεὼν καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς Μαριάμ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ ἰδοὺ οὗτος κείται εἰς πτώσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον - ³⁵ καὶ σοῦ [δὲ] αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία- ὅπως

² A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/Lectionary.

³ St. Luke 2:22-40, New Revised Standard Version Bible, op. cit.

ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί. 36 Καὶ ἦν Ἄννα προφῆτις, θυγάτηρ Φανουήλ, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀσήρ αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς, ζήσασα μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἕτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς 37 καὶ αὕτη χήρα ἕως ἐτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων, ἣ οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ νηστειαῖς καὶ δεήσεσιν λατρεύουσα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν. 38 καὶ αὕτη τῆ ὥρα ἐπιστάσα ἀνθωμολογεῖτο τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλάλει περὶ αὐτοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς προσδεχομένοις λύτρωσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ. 39 Καὶ ὡς ἔτέλεσαν πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον κυρίου, ἐπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς πόλιν ἑαυτῶν Ναζαρέθ. 40 Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐκραταιοῦτο πληρούμενον σοφίᾳ, καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦν ἐπ' αὐτό. ⁴

First Lesson; English Text:

- ^{61.10} I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- ¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations
- ^{61.10} For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
- ² The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
- ³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁵

Second Lesson; English Text:

^{4.4} But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. ⁶

Second Lesson; Greek Text:

^{4:4} ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, ⁵ ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν. ⁶ Ὅτι δὲ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ

⁴ St. Luke 2:22-40, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

⁵ Isaiah 61:10-62:3, New Revised Standard Version Bible, op. cit.

⁶ Galatians 4:4-7, New Revised Standard Version Bible, op. cit.

αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν κράζον· ἄββα ὁ πατήρ. ἵνα ὡς οὐκέτι εἶ δοῦλος ἀλλὰ υἱός·
εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος διὰ θεοῦ. ⁷

⁷ Galatians 4:4-7, The Greek New Testament, op. cit.

Merry Christmas, 2017

Simeon and Anna, two faithful saints in the first century, each spent a lifetime preparing for the moment when God's son would be revealed. When Mary and Joseph arrive at the Temple with the baby Jesus, Simeon and Anna immediately recognize him as the Christ. Their example inspires us to a daily, weekly and monthly commitment to grow in our faith, and become more aware of what God is doing in our day.



My "Simeon & Anna Plan" to Grow in Faith during 2018 (check as many as apply)

Daily Commitment to Prayer and Bible Study

- I will pray before meals and at bedtime every day.
- I will pray at set times throughout the day, and when the need arises.
- I will read my Bible at least once a week.
- I will read my Bible every day.
- I will adopt a plan to read all the way through the Bible during this coming year.
- Other (please describe):

Weekly Commitment to Worship

- I will worship on Sundays when it is convenient for me and my family.
- I will worship every Sunday when I am in town.
- I will find a place to worship on Sunday, even when I am traveling.
- I will worship at mid-week services when they are available (Advent, Lent, special occasions...).
- Other (please describe):

Monthly Commitment to Community Service

- I will find a way to serve the needs of others in my community at least once every month.
- I will establish a personal, on-going, supportive relationship with a service organization.
- I will work to create a new way for people to be involved in serving the community.
- Other (please describe):

Ongoing Commitment to Financial Generosity

- I will grow in financial generosity every year.
- I will adopt a 5-year or 10-year plan toward tithing (giving away 10% of my income).
- I will tithe this year.
- I will tithe to my church this year, and give beyond a tithe to other charitable organizations.
- Other (please describe):

Commitment to Gather with a Faith Partner or Small Group

- I will find a faith partner, and gather regularly to study, pray and support one another.
- I will join a Christian small group, and have a plan to grow together in faith.
- I will start a new Christian small group with others who aren't already in a group.
- Other (please describe):
