

Look The Right Way!

Luke 2:22-40

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Are your eyes open? Can you see God right now? Some people do and some people don't. Why is that? Why can some of you shake your head that you do see God today, while others are saying no? It all depends on which way your looking, are you looking through eyes of faith or through eyes of skepticism. Many see the ordinary things of life and never see God in their day because they are not looking in the right way. Other's see God in everything, in the face of friends, or loved ones, in the voices they hear, in the bread and wine, in the waters of baptism, in the beauty of creation, in the Word we read, in so many ways. To many those are just ordinary things and they don't see the presence of God in any of it, because they are not looking in the right way.

In today's Gospel reading we get the story of two people, a man of Jerusalem and an old prophetess woman, both we are told are very devout and faithful people, and both were led by the spirit of God to proclaim the baby Jesus as the Messiah, they were looking the right way. To us there is nothing shocking or surprising about this story, it is very ordinary. It doesn't seem odd that people should recognize the infant Jesus and acclaim him as Messiah. It seems right and normal to us because that is the story we have all heard from way back when we were children, in Sunday School. This reading is told and retold every year after Christmas and we hear it so often it becomes the routine and we just take it for granted. We just know for a fact that the Son of God came as a baby. So we are not surprised when we read that a righteous man named Simeon picked up Jesus and blessed him as the Christ, or that an old woman ran about telling people that the Son of God, the salvation and redeemer had come. It's nothing new to us.

But that was not the way the Jews in Jesus' day were expecting the Messiah to come. They had been waiting for centuries for the coming redeemer who would rise up and do battle against their enemies. When they were looking for the Messiah, they were not looking for a baby. They expected the Messiah to come in clouds of glory. They expected to see the heavens torn open and the Son of Man to descend with armies of angels. And all the peoples of the earth would see it and fall back in fear before him and his people. He would wage a war against all who opposed them bringing down the powerful and raising them up to glory. Then they expected the Messiah to sit on a throne and rule the world with a mighty fist. They were looking for power, glory, magnificence in a Messiah; not an infant of a poor peasant family from the backwoods.

It didn't fit their expectations that the Messiah should come quietly in the night to be born of common people. It wasn't what they had been told would happen. Their hypothesis, tested by the scriptures and what the elders had always taught them, was that the Messiah would be seen by all the world in glory and authority at his coming. Instead, only a handful of shepherds heard of the birth and they lived out alone in solitary lives and no one paid them any mind even if they were to say anything. Many people in and around Bethlehem that would have seen the baby Jesus in the days that followed his birth didn't know he was the Messiah, there was no sign for them. No name tag identifying him, not even a halo and glow that you see in all those artist renditions. He was just a new born baby with young inexperienced poor parents and they didn't have time for them. They had it all figured out. The Messiah would come in clouds of glory, and sit on David's throne, that's what they knew and believed. They didn't see God's hand in Jesus' birth because they weren't looking the right way.

These expectations even made it harder for faithful people to see clearly what was happening. Even Mary didn't fully understand what was going on. If there was anyone who would be likely to see these events clearly it would have been Mary. After all, the angel Gabriel had appeared to her and explained it all, the spirit had come upon her and given her wisdom. But after Jesus was born and the shepherds had come and told how the angels had appeared to them, it says that Mary "Treasured these words and pondered them in her heart." Even she didn't fully understand what was going on. She valued them as kind words but she had to think about them, she pondered them.

I am sure that Simeon and Anna were no different. They were faithful people the text tells us. Simeon probably was a faithful member of the temple, coming to worship and prayer religiously. Anna we are told never left, she was there day in and day out fasting and in prayer before God. Both of them had heard the Scriptures and the explanations of the priests. I am sure they expected the Messiah to come in clouds of glory like everyone else. Simeon especially must have thought a lot about the coming of the Messiah. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before the Anointed one of God, the Christ, came. So year after year, month after month, day after day he came to the temple expecting that that day could be the one when the Messiah would come. He probably stood outside of the inner court and imagined the Messiah coming out of the heavens and descending into the Holy of Hollies, itself, and the armies of the heavenly hosts filling the temple mount and surrounding the holy City in all directions.

But when the Messiah did come it was not like he or anyone else expected. Instead of coming out of the sky the Messiah came through one of the gates just like anyone else. Instead of

ending up at the Holy of Hollies Jesus ended up at the place where infants were purified. Now Simeon and Anna had seen hundreds probably thousands of children come through the temple to be purified. It was a common everyday event. There were probably other people having their children put through the rite of purification that day. Joseph stood with Mary while she held the young baby in her arms. They could have been awaiting their turn standing in line behind other parents, when Simeon or Anna first spotted them. The Spirit had revealed, given knowledge, sent them the wisdom to know that that baby was different, not like all the rest, that he was the Messiah.

Now many people saw Jesus being brought into the temple. Why didn't they see that he was the Messiah? Because they weren't looking the right way. Anna and Simeon were looking with the eyes of faith, the heart of the Spirit, and the Mind of God. Other people looked at Jesus and said, "Oh what a cute Baby." They did not see anything special about him. But Anna and Simeon were able to see the hand of God at work in that common everyday event.

People expect to see God in extraordinary events. They expect to see God in life changing miracles or in devastating hurricanes. They don't look for God in the ordinary. I guess people figure that God is so great that God can only appear at certain times and in extraordinary ways. I think that is why people often expect to encounter Christ at special times of the year. Maybe they think that since Christmas time is such a special time that they are more likely to meet Jesus at Christmas. They expect to encounter Christ in the special only and not in the ordinary. Then Christmas is over and many people are disappointed. All the specialness of the season is past. And there are over 300 days before it comes again. The decorations come down and it just seems empty. The special time to remember the Messiah is over and they think their chance to see God at work in their lives is past for another year.

But I have some good news! The Messiah is here, he is not in the manger anymore, he is not a baby laying in straw, or even a young baby being taken to temple for his rite of purification. Christ is alive and in our lives. And yes you may be thinking, if that is true then why can't I see him? And my answer is because you are not looking the right way. Jesus is with us in the midst of common every day events in the good times and in the bad, in the big moments and even in those moments we don't even realize. Christ is with us that is the Gospel truth. We have to be like Anna and Simeon. We have to expect to see the anointed one, the Christ, the Son of God each and every day in all that we do. And if we live our lives in this way with that expectation then the presence of God will be revealed to us just as it was to Anna and Simeon. And we will be able to see the hand of God where other people just see ordinary everyday things. May you look the right way and celebrate the glory that is the Christ, Emmanuel, God with Us, now and always. Amen.

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May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.