

“Believing is Seeing”
Rev. Susan M. Prichard
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Luke 2:22-40

On this Sunday we are dealing with chronos, the progression of time. This week we will put new calendars on the walls, the year 2009 will begin. The marking of time is our doing. The fullness of time is God's. In all the celebrations that will be held in the coming week let us take time to celebrate God's fullness, God's glory in Jesus Christ and in those who share with Christ the Spirit that makes us all God's children. Listen, now, to Simeon's proclamation and hear God's message to us this day.

Luke 2:22-40

My favorite line in the movie, “The Santa Clause” is in a scene at the North Pole. Tim Allen who plays the man who put on Santa's suit at the request of his son, and thereby becomes Santa Clause has just returned with the now empty sleigh and is overwhelmed by the sights of Santa's world of elves and toys and such. He is talking to an elf named Judy and is telling her that he sees it all, but he doesn't believe it. Judy tells him that he's missing the point. “Seeing isn't believing; believing is seeing.”

I think that is one of the biggest overlooked points of Christmas. If we do not look out with eyes of faith, we will never see what God has in store for us. Believing is seeing. If we're looking for proof we will miss the miracle and be disappointed.

Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah believed what they saw, because they believed in God and in God's messengers--angels.

The shepherds believed the angels and went to Bethlehem. They believed what they saw because they saw what they believed.

The Magi followed the star. Why?? Because they believed what they saw and they saw what they believed.

Now we hear the testimony of both Simeon and Anna. When they saw the baby that was brought to the Temple, they believed what they saw. They saw a child that was so full of the Holy Spirit, they knew... they believed that God's promise had been fulfilled in this child. They saw what they believed they would see one day. They were looking for Him. They were waiting for Him. And so, when they saw Him, they knew who he was. If they didn't believe, they never would have seen.

Fred Craddock is quoted as saying, “It's always easier to believe in a Christ who is coming than a Christ who has come.” It's easier for us to wait for the baby to come than it is to believe Jesus is already here among us. There are no expectations on us while we wait. If Jesus has come, then there are expectations for us. Things change.

Beloved author C.S. Lewis says:” Christianity, if false, is of no significance; and

if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Both Anna and Simeon can attest to that. If they didn't believe God's promises to be true they never would have seen the miracle that was before them. Don't you see, there was nothing different about Mary and Joseph. They were obedient Jews who were coming to the Temple to observe the proper presentation and purification rites. The shepherds had gone, the angelic choir had returned to heaven. There were no neon signs announcing to the world what had happened. They appeared to be ordinary parents doing what ordinary parents do...the time had come for them to do what was expected of them. The list was fairly simple: go to the Temple, observe the rites, pack up their stuff and go back to Nazareth.

Mary and Joseph brought their child to the religious authorities to observe the traditions of their faith. They brought with them family and friends, dressed the child in the best clothes they could find, they brought their hopes and fears for their future, and then, they would go home.

But while Mary and Joseph were at the Temple, there is one more intrusion into their lives. This intrusion comes in the form of Simeon and Anna. These two elderly people declare to Jew and Gentile alike that this baby-- Mary and Joseph's baby-- is indeed the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation. But, they say, that salvation will come with pain and suffering.

More strange messages; more predictions about their child; more talk of God's promises. As confused, first time parents, we can only imagine what all must have been going through their minds. As if having a child in such unusual circumstances wasn't enough-- everywhere they went someone was adding to the strange predictions about their son. I'll bet that Mary was doing a lot more than just pondering these things in her heart. I know I'd be talking to God every few minutes asking for explanations, trying to get clarifications, wondering what we had gotten ourselves into.

“Simeon came to the realization that his life was fulfilled in the gift of the Messiah. Do we realize that glorious blessing?

“Anna began to tell the good news. She recognized that people were looking for redemption, so she told them about her encounter with Jesus. Are we willing to tell others of the Gift we have received? Are we willing to “speak about the child”? People are waiting-- and looking-- for a Savior.”

But this story ends with the promise of fulfillment. Luke tells us that the child grew and was filled with wisdom and favor from God.

On this fourth day of Christmas, a Sunday that is three days away from the day we make new years resolutions-- a Sunday between the celebration of the fulfillment of God's promises and our own resolution to live life differently in the new year-- will we continue to go throughout our lives believing only what we see? Or will we be willing to see God's hand in our lives because we believe in God's promises?

The world lives the rule: seeing is believing. The faithful know that miracles happen only to those who live by faith, and because they believe they can see the miracles of God all around them.

May the miracles and the blessings of Christmas be with us all. Thanks be to God.
Amen.