

The Advent W.A.I.T.: Watch

Luke 2:22-38

Nov. 29nd, 2020

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"Happy New Year St. Mark's!"

Did that sound kinda strange - what I just said to all of you? (I'm sure it did!) Because you're probably not used to hearing those words until Jan 1st, but according to the church calendar, the brand new "liturgical" year begins on the 1st Sun of Advent which is today! So Happy Liturgical New Year!

The Season of Advent kicks off the new liturgical year, at least in the western church, and in case you're wondering what the Season of Advent is about, this is the season to retell and remember when Jesus 1st came into the world, and it is also the time to renew our hopes that He will surely come again!

Here at St. Mark's, we have some wonderful traditions that go along with this season. The lighting of the Advent Candles is one of them. The decorations in the church, as well as the sanctuary is another. We've decorated the chancel area with quite a lot of poinsettias as well as a Christmas Wreath, and had we worshipped in person, you would have seen the progressive nativity scene as well as a Christmas tree on display in the Narthex.

Another tradition which is one of my favorites would have been the Christmas Cantata, which unfortunately won't be taking place this year, but to make up for that, Debbie and I will try our best to bring more music to our worship.

The Christmas Eve service is also one of my favorite traditions, which will still be taking place this year, except that instead of worshiping in-person, we'll ask you to join us online that evening. (We're still trying to figure out how to do the candle lighting - but we've come up with an idea!)

This year's Advent Sermon Theme.

Now, in year's past, I've preached on traditional themes during the Season of Advent, like the theme of "Peace, Hope, Love and Joy," but for this year's Advent series, I'd like to try something slightly different. For this year's theme, I'm focusing on a single word and that is the word: WAIT.

Waiting is such a big part of this season and for each of the 4 Sundays, I'm going to take a letter from the word WAIT (sort of like an acronym) and share an Advent message starting with that letter.

So the first sermon today starts with the letter "W" and our theme for today is the theme of WATCHING.

The 2nd sermon next Sunday will start with the letter "A" and the theme that Sunday will be the theme ANTICIPATE.

The letter on the 3rd Sunday will start with the letter "I" and will be the word INVITE,

and the letter on the 4th Sunday will start with the letter "T" and will be the word TELL!

"Watch, Anticipate, Invite and Tell" with the overall theme of Waiting.

Christmas Eve will have it's own theme and that will be the word CELEBRATE.

So we begin our Advent series this morning on the theme of WAITING and WATCHING, and our Scripture passage today comes from Luke 2:22-38.

In this passage, Jesus has already been born (we'll get to the birth story, in one of the future Sundays,) but our passage this morning matches up with our theme and talks about two very devout people Simeon and Anna who were WAITING and also WATCHING for the arrival of Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:22-38

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every first born male is to be consecrated to the Lord.", and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Now, there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

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.

If there ever was a poster for Advent and if there ever was "poster children" for what this season is about, Simeon and Anna were the perfect couple.

Simeon and Anna waited their entire lives for the coming of Jesus Christ, and as they waited, they kept watch for the baby, they kept a look out for the Messiah there in the temple.

This our theme on the 1st Sunday of Advent - the theme of Waiting and Watching.

I think it's safe to say that the year 2020 has been filled with a lot of waiting - hasn't it?

We've been waiting for this pandemic to end.
We've been waiting for the opportunity to worship inside our sanctuary again.
We've been waiting for a vaccine waiting to visit with friends,
We've been waiting to take off our masks and not have to keep social distances.

The year 2020 has been filled with a lot of waiting, and perhaps we might have to wait a little longer until we can do those things again, but even before this year began, we were no strangers to waiting.

Here's a few pictures of people who are waiting for something.
Maybe you can identify with 1 or 2 of them

This is a picture of Charlie Brown waiting next to a mailbox.



What is Charlie Brown waiting for? Maybe he's waiting for a college admissions letter and to play football for a university team like he always dreamed of! Or, maybe he's waiting for a letter from a love interest (the little red-haired girl.)

How about this next picture?

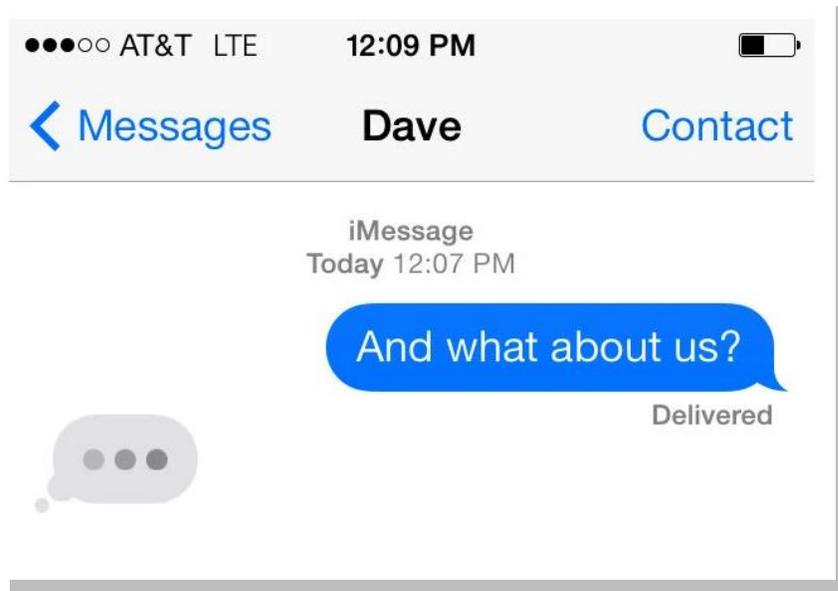


It's a picture of ppl waiting around at what looks like an airport lounge. Maybe they're waiting to board the flight or waiting to go on vacation or waiting to go see their family.

I imagine some of you may know about this next picture,
It's a group of people waiting in a doctor's office.



Here's one more picture for those of you with iPhones,



If you've ever sent a text message and waited for a response: there's those three little dots telling you they're writing something.

"Dave" (according to the text message) just sent someone a text that reads "And what about us?"

And now he has to wait for the person to write something back, which sometimes may seem like an eternity!

Many of us are used to waiting. It's kind of a ritual in our lives. We're used to waiting in line, we're used to waiting for news and here in So. California, we have the un-enviable joy of have to wait in rush-hour traffic!

Simeon and Anna

Well, the two main characters of our passage this morning took the meaning of "waiting" to a whole new level! Their names were Simeon and Anna as told in Luke chapter 2.

Simeon and Anna were "veterans" when it came to waiting. That's what makes them the best representatives of what the season of Advent is about.

They were waiting for Jesus. They were watching for His arrival, and our passage for today tells us what happened when they finally met Him.

I'd like to show you a famous painting this one was done by Rembrandt, called "**Simeon's Song of Praise**" and there in the background is supposed to be Anna the prophetess in our story.



Simeon was Waiting and Watching

Now, in Luke 2:25, the passage said this about Simeon:

There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

The passage first tells us that Simeon was "righteous and devout." Then a few verses later, it tells us that he was "moved by the spirit."

When the passage says that he was "moved by the spirit" it wasn't just an expression, He was literally moved or inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Most people think that the Holy Spirit doesn't show up until the book of Acts, but here in Luke 2, the Holy Spirit was already helping people recognize Jesus Christ!

So, our first character in the story was a man named Simeon who was "filled" with the Holy Spirit and was waiting for Jesus to show up.

What was Simeon waiting for?

Verse 25 tells us Simeon was waiting for more than just a cute little baby, to show up to the temple, vs 25 tells us specifically "He was waiting for the CONSOLATION of Israel."

What does that mean? The "consolation" of Israel? Well, it's not a riddle and it's not a mystery - Simeon was waiting for his people to receive consolation.

The word "consolation" by definition means:

"The comfort received by a person after a loss or disappointment."

For example, you can console someone when they have lost a loved one or you can console someone when they have experienced something tragic or difficult.

Basically what you are doing, is you are providing comfort or emotional or physical support.

Earlier this past week, I started listening to Handel's Messiah, sort of to get in the mood for Christmas. I wasn't able to listen the entire concert, since it's a few hours long, but at least the opening few songs.

For those of you who are familiar with Handel's Messiah, it begins with The Overture, which is kind of like a musical introduction, then the second song, which is when the lyrics actually begin, is a song called: *Comfort Ye My People*.

That song happens to be sung in a tenor voice, which is my favorite, and listen to how the opening lyrics go:

COMFORT YE
COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE.

The opening words to the entire Handel's Messiah, begins with words of COMFORT, (which were taken from Isaiah 40:1)

This is what Simeon was waiting for, He was waiting for God to bring comfort and consolation in the person of Jesus Christ, to all of God's people who were suffering in the first century.

Comfort Ye My People

It think it's safe to say that the world we are living in today is also in need of comfort.

Our world needs comfort.

Our nation needs comfort.

Our globe & our planet needs comfort.

All the patients who are in hospitals right now, all their family members waiting to hear good news, all the doctors and nurses who are tending to the 1000's of patients trying to recover are in need of Comfort & Consolation.

Then there's our young children who are struggling with online classes as well as all our teachers trying to keep their attention, not to mention the parents whose living rooms have all turned into classrooms, They all need comfort right now.

We need comfort from the ravages of this pandemic.

We need comfort from all the social issues that is hurting our society.

That's what Simeon was waiting for - he was waiting for the CONSOLATION of Israel, and when he saw the baby Jesus - his waiting had come to an end.

Advent is a time of waiting ~ waiting for God to comfort His people,
and those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings as eagles
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not be faint!

The Temple Court of the Gentiles

Our passage also said something interesting when it came to Simeon. It said in vs 27 - Simeon was "moved by the Spirit to go into the temple courts" and that's where he was waiting for Jesus to arrive.

Now, Luke didn't explain in detail, where the Temple Courts were located, all he said was:

"Moved by the Spirit, [Simeon] went into the temple courts. When the parents brought the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms."

Well, the temple in Jerusalem that Luke was describing actually had several courts. There was the Inner Court (also known as the Court for Priests). This was where the Holy of Holies was located and restricted to only Priests.

I doubt this was where Simeon was waiting because 1) he wasn't a priest, 2) a young family wouldn't be allowed and 3) Anna also wouldn't be allowed in.

There was also the Court of the Women which was just outside the Court for priests. I also doubt that this was the place where Simeon was waiting for Jesus.

The most likely place where Simeon was waiting for Jesus would have been the Outer Court, also known as the Court of Gentiles, which was the largest public area where there were no restrictions and everyone could walk thru.

This was the same temple courts where later on in the Gospel Jesus "cleared the temple." It was sort of like a marketplace. There were merchants selling things, like animals for sacrifice as well as moneychangers too.

By far, the Court of the Gentiles was the most crowded. There were 100's if not 1000's of people walking and mingling in this courtyard.

Plus - the fact that in vs. 30-32, Simeon said the following:

"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel,"

gives us the impression that Simeon was standing in the middle of the court of the Gentiles and looking into the faces of all the young couples who were coming to the temple to fulfill the ritual.

He was scanning each person. He was checking out each baby. It didn't matter where they came from or if they were rich or poor, and as Jews and Gentiles alike - from all walks of life - passed thru the temple courts, Simeon was scanning their faces looking for The Christ Child.

If I can say it simply, this is how I would say it:

Simeon was looking for Jesus in the faces of all the people.

Look watch for Jesus!

My first challenge and charge to you as we begin this season of Advent, is to do exactly what Simeon did at the temple, and that is to look for Jesus, to watch for Jesus - in the faces of all the people you see.

To look for Jesus in the faces of every new born baby.

To look for Jesus in the faces of weary and sleep deprived parents.

To look for Jesus in the faces of people (even if they are covered w/masks) and to look for Jesus in unexpected places.

I'd like to show you a picture of a young couple - their names are Zac & Alicia.



When Alicia became pregnant with their first child, during the pregnancy, they went to the hospital for routine check-ups.

Well, at one of the doctor's visits, they did an ultrasound, which looks at the baby in the womb and everything looked ok.

The doctor printed out a pix of the ultrasound and gave it to Zac and Alicia, to take home with them and when they got home they looked at the picture again and couldn't believe what they saw!



Here's a picture of that ultrasound and that's their daughter right there in the middle.

But guess who they saw also in the picture?

They saw Jesus!

Here's a better picture showing Jesus in a circle!



Now this was just for fun, but I'd like to think that Zac and Alicia saw Jesus in the picture because that's Who they were looking for.

This Advent Season, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, I hope you see Jesus in all the things you do. In all the decorations you put up, In all the gifts you buy and wrap. In all the cards you write and send and in the faces of all the people you encounter.

And, this Advent Season as you WAIT for Jesus again, pay close attention to those around you who may need a little extra comfort and consolation.

I found a poem that I would like to close with today. It's called **If You Look for Me at Christmastime.**

*If you look for me at Christmastime,
you won't need a special star,
I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,
I'm right there where you are.*

*You might not be aware of me,
amid the celebration,
You'll have to look beyond the stores,
and all the decoration.*

*But if you take a moment
from your list of things to do,
and listen to your heart,
you'll find me,
I'm waiting there for you.*

*You're the one I want to be with,
You're the reason that I came,
and you'll find me in the stillness,
as I'm whispering your name.*

An Advent Prayer

Now is the time of watching and waiting
A time pregnant with hope
A time to watch and pray.

Christ our Advent hope,
Remind us to prepare for your coming;
Remind us to prepare for this time
When the soles of your feet touch the ground,
When you will become one of us
To be a one with us.

May we watch for the signs,
Listen for the messengers,
Wait for the good news to slip
Into our world, our lives.
Christ our Advent hope,
Help us to clear the way for you;
To clear the clutter from our minds,
To sift the silt from our hearts,
To move the boulders that prevents us meeting you.

May sorrow take flight,
And your people sing a song of peace
And hope be born again.
Amen.

written by Kate McIlhagga