

## Tidings of Comfort and Joy

### [Read Luke 2:21-40 NRSV]

<sup>21</sup>After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. <sup>22</sup>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 <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>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, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup>"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." <sup>33</sup>And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>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 <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup>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, <sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>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. <sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## **Opening Image**

Have you ever been in a situation where you tried to console or comfort a baby? I know many of you have had someone hand a baby to you to hold for just a minute. Suddenly for some reason that baby starts crying. You immediately go into action to try and figure out a way to console this crying baby.

Babies cry for many reasons. They cry when they are hungry. They cry when they are thirsty. They cry when they need changing. They cry when they need to take a nap. Sometimes they just cry for no apparent reason.

We try to console them by giving them something to eat and drink. We play with them. We change their diapers. We rock them to sleep. I can remember many times trying to figure out what to do to bring comfort to my little girls when they were babies.

## **Adults**

Bringing comfort to an adult is completely different than bringing comfort to a baby. We all face challenges, difficult times, and disappointments in our lives. How many of us have had major health concerns? How many of us have lost their jobs? How many of us have lost loved ones? We could all use a little comfort. Do I hear an "Amen?"

Providing comfort for the ones we love can be challenging. Kind words and a hug can go a long way but spending time with someone seems to work best.

Maybe someone you know and love has been through some tough times lately. We as a society have short attention spans. We like to go to work on solutions before we hear the whole problem. I know I have that propensity to fix rather than listen.

Most of the time comfort comes not from trying to fix the situation but just simply listening to someone who is hurting. When you listen you show that you value what the person is saying. Most people simply want to be heard. I have found that listening to someone and praying with them can be far more effective than simply trying to fix the problem.

Sometimes the problems we face are of our own doing. Sometimes we face problems that are larger than us. What can we do about problems that we cannot fix on our own? Where can we turn when we are inconsolable? What does the Bible say about God and God providing comfort for God's people?

### **Narrative Intro**

Our passage today is about God and God's promises to bring comfort to God's people. The nation of Israel during the time of Jesus has had a long history of being occupied by foreign invaders. The high

point of Israel as a nation was under kings such as Saul, David, and Solomon. That was over 1000 years before the birth of Jesus.

Many invaders like the Assyrians (722-605 BC), Babylonians (605-539 BC), Persians (539-334 BC), and Greeks (334-166 BC) came and went. When Jesus was born the Jewish people were suffering from Roman occupation and oppression.

### **Roman Occupation**

We as a people have been fortunate in that we have never been subject to foreign kings except for the time of the American Revolution. The Jews revolted against their occupiers many times and were defeated. The Jewish people were free for about 100 years only during the leadership of the Maccabees (166-63 BC).

The Romans (63 BC-135 AD) were the next invaders. The Romans treated the Jewish people harshly. The Jews were subjected to great humiliations and harsh taxes. Many people probably wondered, "Where is God?" Why is God allowing this to happen to us? Does God hear us?

I am sure they cried aloud to God for comfort. The prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah assured the nation that God would comfort Jerusalem. "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand

double for all her sins" (IS 40:1-2). God promised a deliverer or Messiah. Everyone knew those predictions about a coming Messiah, they just did not know when and where God would act.

### **Simeon**

Simeon was one of those people who read the scriptures and patiently waited for God to act. We do not know much about Simeon. He is only mentioned here in Luke's gospel.

We know that he is an elderly, devout, and righteous man. We also know that he is a man of faith and prayer. Simeon has been praying in God's Temple to God for a Messiah to bring comfort to God's people. Not only that, Simeon wants to see the Messiah with his own eyes before he dies. Simeon's prayers are heard and answered as part of God's plans.

### **Jesus already born**

Unknown to Simeon and apparently everyone else in Jerusalem, the Messiah has already been born in a stable and laid in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem. His parents are Mary and Joseph. Mary became the mother of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. God has acted to comfort God's people but with little fanfare through Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

## **Parents of Jesus**

Mary and Joseph are called by God to bring good news to the world. We know very little about Mary and Joseph except what is written in the Gospel accounts.

Mary is a young Jewish woman. She is very devout and faithful to God. When God calls her to act she submits humbly to God. Joseph is an older Jewish man who is a carpenter by trade. He is obedient to God's plans even though he knows that the child Mary will have is not his.

Jesus' parents were very devout because they travelled from Nazareth to Jerusalem to do what the Law required. They name and circumcise their baby boy on the eighth day in accordance with the Law of Moses. They name him Jesus just as Gabriel instructed them. Jesus means "God saves."

They offered purification sacrifices in accordance with the Law of Moses. We know from the sacrifices offered that the parents of Jesus are poor. The wealthy typically offered a lamb instead of two birds. God uses the poor and lowly to bring about God's plans to comfort God's people.

## **Simeon's encounter with Jesus**

When Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple, the Holy Spirit moves Simeon to take the child in his arms and praise God. "Simeon

took him [Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'" (Luke 2:28-32).

Simeon's prayers have been answered. The long awaited Messiah has finally arrived in the form of a baby. Simeon's faith has been rewarded and he has received the gift of seeing God's salvation. God's plans continue to unfold and be revealed to God's people. Israel will be comforted and the world will be filled with joy because of the coming of the Lord.

### **Anna**

A prophet named Anna also comes on the scene. She is very old and devout never leaving the Temple. "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" (2:38).

### **Parent's Reaction**

Joseph and Mary are surprised by this reception. Imagine a strange old man and old woman approaching you in church and taking your baby and saying this is God's answer to our prayers. "And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him" (Luke 2:33).

Mary and Joseph took all this in. It was probably more than they ever imagined. But they did not fail to be faithful to God. They did what was required by the Law. Then they returned home and raised Jesus as their son. "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (2:40). This is the good news.

### **Good News**

The Good News of this passage is that God keeps God's promises by giving us his son Jesus. God has acted out of compassion to deliver God's people on numerous occasions. Now God acts to deliver all of us from sin and death. Jesus gives up everything to dwell with us. Through this self-sacrificial act we are forgiven. How do we respond to this wonderful gift?

### **Our Response**

Our response today and every day is to give thanks for the gift of Jesus. All of us have suffered in one way or another. We all need to be comforted. God knows our struggles. God knows our pain. God knows our suffering. We know through faith that true comfort comes from God.

### **Waiting**

Simeon and Anna have waited a long time to be comforted by the good news of God. They are devout and faithful. They pray and

go to the Temple on a regular basis. God does not disappoint them. Their prayers are answered and they see Jesus.

### **Comfort and Joy**

Jesus came into the world to bring us comfort and joy. We as Christians experience God's comfort and joy on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. Our prayers for an eternal life with God have been answered.

Where have you encountered God's love and compassion in your life? We are created in the image of God to reflect God's love and compassion on earth. ***Take time today to show someone God's love and you will experience God's comfort and joy.***

Where have you heard God's comforting words in your life? God speaks through prayer, sermons and the Holy Scriptures. ***Pray and meditate on God's holy words day and night and you will experience God's comfort and joy.***

Finally, where have you seen God's saving grace in your life? God reveals God's self in many ways through Jesus. At the Day of Judgment Jesus says to the righteous and the wicked that they have seen him. Jesus says to the righteous, when you served the least of these you did it to me. ***Comfort others through serving and you will experience God's comfort and joy.***

**In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **Selected Bibliography**

- Culpepper, R. Alan. "The Gospel of Luke." *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume IX*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Green, Joel. "The Gospel of Luke." *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.

## **Image of Jesus**

### **Trip to Israel**

Recently I had the wonderful privilege of travelling to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a large, ancient, walled city that sits on a hilltop. It was once occupied by pagans and later captured by David and his army around 1000BC. King David made Jerusalem the capitol of his united kingdom of Jewish tribes. The name Jerusalem means the "city of peace."

Jerusalem has not experienced very much peace because it is filled with many holy sites claimed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. One of the most controversial holy sites is located on top of Mount Moriah.

Today, a Muslim mosque with a large gold dome occupies the center of Mount Moriah. Muslims claim that Mohammed ascended to heaven from what they call the Dome of the Rock.

The Jews claim this same site is the rock where Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac. It is also the site of the ancient Jewish Temple. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD and has never been rebuilt.

The Western Wall is all that is left of the ancient Temple. Many devout Jews come to the Western Wall to pray. But they also come to celebrate. Late one evening a young man was escorted by a large

group of other older men down to the Western Wall to celebrate the young man's bar mitzvah. We were asked to join in the celebration. Everyone joined hands and dance to the music. It was a joyful celebration.