

"Our New Year's Resolution: Dedication"

Text: Luke 2:25-38

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you in the certain knowledge that Jesus Christ, your Savior, has been born, and that he went on to render the full payment for all of our sins. Amen.

Dear Heirs of the Gift of the Christ-Child:

So did you come away from Christmas with a firm understanding of the "true meaning of the season"? If you were listening, you had many options from which to choose. "It's all about family," or "It's all about giving," or "It's all about receiving," or "It's all about caring," or "It's all about sharing," or "It's all about food," or "It's all about getting presents," or "It's all about 'Peace on Earth'," or, let's see, what have we missed?

As a Christian you know full well that it's all about the birth of Jesus Christ and the promise that that birth holds for all humanity. It's all about God-made-man and the forgiveness of our sins. Although that's a given for Christians, we continue to be amazed and perplexed at just what passes for depth or meaning in our society. My understanding is that "deep" today includes just about anything above the level of Sponge Bob Square Pants, and I'm afraid some may include also him.

It ought not surprise us then that that which actually *does* have true depth and insight is dismissed or ridiculed by those who look to Hollywood for their meaning and insights.

The natural question that this raises from the other side is, "*How do you Christians know that you are right about all of this and that we are wrong? Who's to judge?*" Fair enough. We'll take the question to the only sure and certain source for such answers – God's Word. The text that will help to answer this question and to guide us going forward is found in the Second Chapter of Luke's Gospel:

ESV Luke 2:25-38 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in

his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that 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 his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." ³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

These are God's Words. Acknowledging that they come from God himself, given to all mankind through verbal inspiration, we rightly regard these words as the only infallible source and norm of truth and light. That our God would this morning fill us with both, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Can you remember back to school days and the subtle, relentless temptation to "lump and dump" fellow students into certain categories? The easiest targets were usually the "geeks" or "nerds," the titles that are evidently still today assigned to pretty much anyone who is serious about learning. There were also the "goody two-shoes" or "straight arrows" – those who had the audacity to follow the rules and to be respectful of those in authority.

In looking back (assuming you weren't in one of those groups) how do you feel about that whole categorization thing now? Probably not so good. You would probably, at minimum, assign different names to those groups today. Instead of "geek" or "nerd" you would use "scholarly" or "studious," and those who did a better job at following the rules you now see as "devout" or "pious."

This whole demeaning categorization thing certainly isn't new to our culture. In fact, I wonder how those who lived during the time of our text for this morning would have labeled Simeon and Anna. I have no doubt how they would be thought of today – as "nobodies" at best,

fanatics at worst. Our society would wonder what kind of life they could have had, given the fact that they were "continually in the temple." They would be seen as pointlessly maintaining the dead traditions, and their lives therefore as wasted and pathetic.

The more important question is what do *you*, as a Christian, think of them? You think of them as exemplary believers, right? Ask yourself the question another way: Would you care to trade places with them?

What does the honest answer tell you?

Of course we could object that that's not fair. Someone has to earn the money. Someone has to go to work so that we can pay the bills and carry on our joint kingdom work. The Thessalonians, after all, were condemned for doing nothing but sit around and wait for the Lord's return. Actually "condemned" is too strong. God did not condemn their attitude but their actions. The eager waiting for the Lord's return was not the problem. Their dedication was great. Doing nothing while waiting, on the other hand, was not so great.

All of this misses the point, badly. The question is not "*Should we live like Simeon and Anna, or even like the Thessalonians?*" It is, "*Do we even want to have the single-minded dedication of Simeon and Anna? Do we want to live with the single-minded focus of the Thessalonians?*" That's the point, isn't it? That's the condemnation here, yet another reason why we kneel daily in confession and repentance. There is a part in us that doesn't really *want to* be like them. We want to be Christians and go to heaven, but we are often more concerned with getting what we can out of this life, while maintaining the bare minimums of the Christian faith, than we are with having our Savior fill our world.

Simeon and Anna were dedicated – *in God's eyes*. That's the key. They were where they were and did what they did *not* because there was nothing else out there for them. They were where they clearly wanted to be, and their dedication was commended by God. That, in the end, is all that really matters.

The impression the world has of Christians in general, and dedicated, devout Christians in particular, is that those whose lives revolve around their faith and their church are that way because that's all they have. They believe Christians would gladly trade place *if they could*. They see devout, dedicated Christians as those who have nothing else in life, so they opt for importance or relevance in the most inconsequential of little ponds.

If that were true, then surely the words of Paul would apply here: "***If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.***" (1 Corinthians 15:19) Pitiable because then we truly are pathetic, for we will lose both in this life and in that which is to come – if this Christian faith is nothing but an illusion or myth.

The problem is that although Simeon and Anna were commended by God himself, who among us would relish the thought of trading places with them? The words of Simeon in our text certainly have application here: "***Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.***" Our thoughts, our attitudes, our aspirations and focus are here revealed.

Our society speaks of a "post-Christian era." They believe that mankind has moved on. This is really nothing new. The society of Simeon and Anna's day believed exactly the same thing. The vast majority had moved on past the "Messianic Promise" and were searching, no doubt, for something else to which they could dedicate themselves. The problem is that without Jesus Christ, there is no viable alternative. Nothing else carries the same weight or import. Everything else is just some degree of shallow, because nothing else deals with the true solutions to our most important problems. Nothing but the Christian faith has any relevance beyond this life.

Visionaries are those who see what is coming. They see past the here and now to the future, and then seek to guide their actions in the present according to what they see coming. When the world hears "visionary," they think of men like Leonardo da Vinci, Henry Ford, Bill Gates, Winston Churchill. Our society holds such men in awe because they seemed to see what was coming before anyone else, and then prepared accordingly.

Christians then ought to be the ultimate visionaries. You and I most certainly know what is coming. The question is whether or not we are acting in accord with that knowledge.

Simeon was a true visionary, in the very best sense. Not only did he know what was coming (since our text tells us that "***it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ***) his entire life was lived in accord with, dedicated to, that vision. The vision dictated his actions. He knew what was coming and he acted in accord with that vision.

You and I have the first part, don't we? We know what's coming. The question, again, is will we act in accord with that vision? Will we opt for true and meaningful lives of dedication, as God defines it, or for the shallow illusions offered by devil, world, and sinful flesh?

As we continue to both be comforted by the birth of our Savior and to look forward to yet another calendar year of God's grace, know that it was only the former that can prepare us for the latter. Only the birth of Jesus Christ can prepare any of us for whatever lies in the future. To put it another way, if Christ had not come, nothing that lies in the future could possibly matter; nothing could hold any promise. This we know, but what we often lack is the desire to live our lives focused on and dedicated to our Savior God. This then is what we ask of our God as we enter a new year. We ask him to create the sort of hearts within us that **"seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness."** We pray for dedication to that one necessary thing.

Remember that God gives such gifts in and through his Word. It is well and good to ask him for such gifts, but then remember that the delivery point, the meeting place at which God gives such gifts, is his Word. There he promised to visit us, inform us, bless us. Even beggars know that they must go to the soup lines or food pantries to receive their free meals. Christians know that the Bread of Life is freely distributed only in his Word. Visit there every day with your Lord, asking him to create in you that clean heart, and to renew that right, unfaltering, resolute spirit within you. And then be amazed at how he will transform you through the power that is his Word. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3** I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul 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 like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. **62:1** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ² The nations shall see your righteousness, 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.

^{ESV} **Galatians 4:4-9** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. ⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

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Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The Sunday after Christmas –December 31, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 83 (Red Hymnal)
"Hark What Mean Those Holy Voices"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 61:10- 62:3) The first part of our Old Testament reading (the verses from Chapter 61) are spoken by the believers in Israel, and echoed by Christians today. In bringing us to faith, the Lord has covered us with the priceless robe of righteousness, having taken away our sin. The second part of this reading (the verses from Chapter 62) are the words of our Savior, who resolved to follow through in his work of redemption until he had accomplished what he had set out to do – which was to secure that robe of righteousness for us as our Substitute and Savior.

The Second Lesson: (Galatians 4:4-9) Christ Jesus having won our righteousness by his perfect obedience, Paul here not only reminds us of the new creations we are, but of just how foolish it would be to return to our former ways. His question is simple: *"Having been rescued from the curse of the law, which we were unable to keep or fulfill, why would we ever want to place ourselves back under the demands of that law by trying to again earn our own righteousness before God?"* This is exactly what we would be doing if we were to imagine that we are now saved, even in part, by our own actions, rather than by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 108 (Stanzas 1-3, 7-8) (Red Hymnal)
"We Sing, Immanuel, Thy Praise"

The Sermon - Text: Luke 2:25-38 (Printed on the back page)
"Our New Year's Resolution: Dedication"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 125 (Red Hymnal)
"The Old Year Now hath Passed Away"

The Installation of the 2018 Church Council

The Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 123 (Stanzas 1-2, 8) (Red Hymnal)
"Our God, Our Help in Ages Past"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (42) Christmas Eve (62) Christmas Day (28)

Today	-9:00 a.m.	- Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	- Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	- Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	- Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	- Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	- Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	- Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	- Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Church Council Installation – The members of the 2018 Church Council are scheduled to be installed during the service this morning. The new officers are: Mark Johnson – President, Samuel Meyer – Vice President, Michael McEnroe – Treasurer, Phil Pfennig – Secretary, Gary Miller – Financial Secretary, and Brian Fettig – Trustee Coordinator. Pray for these men as they seek to carry out the Lord's kingdom work on your behalf.

Computer Desk Available – The computer desk near the north coat rack in the fellowship hall is available for anyone who wants it. Please see Mark Johnson if you are interested. If more than one family wants the desk, the matter will be settled by combat.

Charitable Giving Receipts – A reminder that anyone in need of special tax receipts, which are required for any *single* donation of \$250 or more, should contact Financial Secretary Gary Miller this morning.