

“An Epiphany”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
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Luke 2:21-40

When it came time to select a name for my first born child, it was a little bit of a challenge. You see my husband was and is a school teacher. Every name that I suggested to him was turned down because there had been a student with that name, who did not live up to his standards. Most of the time the student had gotten on his last nerve! So I finally purchased a baby name book and had him circle all the names that he liked. Then I went from there. We finally arrived with a boy and a girl's name, which we both agreed on. After our first born daughter was born, we had her baptized in the church. I will never forget the pastor asking, “What do you name this child?” We proudly responded, “Bethany Lauren Crismore”. Rev. Bill Huber placed the water on her head, baptizing her in the presence of God, and then presenting her to the congregation as the new member of the Body of Christ. It was a proud day for us as parents.

In the Gospel of Luke, we pick up today from where we left off on Christmas day. Mary and Joseph have had their baby in a stable in Bethlehem. We really don't know how long they stay for the census. All we know is that 8 days later the parents of God's Son follow the Jewish Law of Moses and have their baby circumcised. They also publicly name their baby Jesus. Now they did not have to resort to buying the baby name book, like myself, because an angel of the Lord told them what to name their baby. They faithfully followed God's direction.

Now this couple had to have been very busy because in the very next verse we find that they have traveled to the temple in Jerusalem. They have had to do a lot of traveling. First it was Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census and then back to Nazareth, which one would think probable as they would not have the money to stay away from home for a long time. Now onto to Jerusalem 40 days after the baby is born for the purification of the couple and the presentation of their first born son to the Lord. They must be exhausted! I simply cannot imagine how hard it was to travel with a newborn... Mary on the donkey... and Joseph on foot!

You have to give them a lot of credit because these parents want to do it right. They love this baby. They love God. They want to be faithful as they have been chosen to raise the Son of God.

So their proud day of presenting their son in the temple has arrived and in the midst of all the liturgy and ceremony, a devout, faithful man appears. I picture Simeon being one of those people, who is always hanging around fixing things, chatting with the rabbi and praying to God. Everyone knows his name in their little temple circle. He approaches the new parents, wanting to hold their infant son. Once Jesus is placed in the old man's arms and looks up into his bearded face, Simeon knows through the power of the Spirit, who this child is! This is the promised Messiah that will bring salvation to all. Not only Israel – God's people but the Gentiles as well. I wonder if Simeon is first excited about this discovery and then did he have second

thoughts. You see God had promised him that he would not die before seeing the Messiah come. So now is death around the corner or is it time for him to simply live in total peace?

We read that the parents are amazed as they continue to hear confirmation of who their son is. The prophet Anna enters the scene. A woman clearly dedicated to the church by constant acts of praying and fasting. She also proclaims that this child will be the consolation of Israel. Jesus is here to save the world! Praise be to God!

At this point, everyone is celebrating the arrival of Jesus, this precious baby. It is a grand time, where the parent's buttons are about to pop because they are so proud of their newborn son. I remember when my daughters were babies. My husband or I would get them all dressed up for church on Sunday or if we were going to a get together with friends or family. Everyone would be oooo-ing and aweing over them. They would want to hold them and they would get passed around from person to person. I always tell my girls that this was when they were easy to love! They always say, "Oh Mom!"

All is well or at least it seems to be. But Simeon pulls Mary aside and shares with her that things will not always be so wonderful. He alerts her that this child will grow up. He will make people decide if they believe or not. There will be opposition. There will be falling and rising. There will be death and life. Mary's heart will be pierced like a sword. Life will not be easy. There will be good times and hard times. Don't you wonder what Mary and Joseph's conversation was like on the way back to Nazareth? Things will not be easy for these two parents. The Gospel of Luke continues on to share the story of when Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple when he is twelve years old and they accidentally leave him there. When they return to find him, he responds to their worrying by saying, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Luke doesn't share what the Gospel of Matthew shares and that is this family will have to flee to Egypt to escape the order from Herod that all newborns should be killed. Then, I wonder if Simeon's word came flooding back to Mary as she stood at the cross?

I don't know about you but I want to start this New Year's Day off with the sparkle and twinkle that Simeon and Anna have in their eyes when they discover the identity of the Christ child – the Epiphany! We want the hope and light that goes along with this baby. It is hard to think about Jesus as he grows into adulthood. The ridicule, the doubting and questioning from his disciples and the religious officials, the trial, the beating and death of Good Friday, Jesus has quite a journey ahead of him. We don't get a lot of stories in the Bible talking about Jesus as a baby, a child.

I want to hold onto the newborn baby for just a little while longer. I just got use to the smell of the hay from the stable. I want to ask Simeon, why can't we hold onto this wonderful story of the parents faithfully presenting their Son in the temple? Please don't pull Mary aside and give her the inside scoop! It reminds me of the silly movie, "Talladega Nights". Will Ferrell is at the dining room table with his family and someone is about to pray. He makes it clear that he wants to pray to the baby Jesus not the big Jesus.

So, sweet Baby Jesus please don't let me lose my job, please don't let me hear the word "cancer" when the test results are returned, please don't let me not have enough money to pay for my bills, please don't let anything bad happen to me this year. But that is simply not the way it happens.

Several months ago, Frank had shared in one of his sermons about our secretary Kim Grant and her husband Bill caring for two teenage Congolese refugees. One of them has been in their foster care and he will be returning home to his biological family soon, which is a good thing. The other boy was an orphan and Kim and Bill have taken him in as their son. Kim shared recently with me that in the beginning, when they were going through the discernment with God. They were asking, "Should this young man be a part of their family?" The Holy Spirit very loudly and plainly told her "Let me bless you by giving you this child!" Kim and Bill never questioned God after this.

Kim has seen this young man struggle with the cultural differences. She has seen him struggle with his studies in school because of the language barrier. She has seen him struggle with the grief that he has had to suppress from losing his mother at such an early age. Bill and Kim have seen him read his Bible, fast for days, write beautiful prayers and live out his faith. As he is a senior at Ben Davis High School, Kim and Bill have begun college searches with this new son of theirs. Kim would like to see him stay close to home because she is not ready to let go so soon after he has become a part of their family. She says that she feels the love for him as she did when her other children were babies.

You know many times blessings are not the easiest to receive. The blessings worth having are the ones that usually take the most work. This family's amazing faith continues to astound me. Kim and Bill are the faithful followers of the light that comes into the world as a child but goes on to have victory on Easter morning.

The Christ child comes into the world and he must grow up to seal the deal. Jesus has to go through his ministry, suffer death on Good Friday and have his glorious Easter Morning! The light that comes into being in the dark stable in Bethlehem will always prevail. May we enter into this New Year clinging to this hope and promise from Simeon that this Savior is for all the world! Thanks be to God for the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph. Amen!