

Looking Forward to the Consolation of Israel

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[0:00] Let us pray. Oh God, Heavenly Father, Ruler of the universe,!

We come before you even in the beginning of this year, let this be a marker of the whole year for us as your people, that we will feed at the feet of Christ as his word is preached and proclaimed to us, that we will hear it faithfully, that we will obey and act upon it with courage, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Let us be our portion, Lord, this year and even in the coming years, and that we will continue to trust you and depend on you and rest in what you have accomplished through your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, King of the universe. Amen. Our Gospel readings through this season of Advent, if you've noticed, and even during the season of Christmas, have had to do with the announcement of Jesus' birth and his early days as an infant.

Luke's Gospel in particular has introduced us to certain key characters in this unfolding story. We have Mary, of course, who takes center stage as God's highly favored servant, through whom the long-expected Savior would come.

[1:48] We also have Elizabeth and Zechariah. We have the angels, Archangel Gabriel especially, and the shepherds who were keeping their flocks by night.

This pageantry of Christ's birth is familiar to many of us, but it is worth still a closed examination every time we come to it.

One of the overarching themes so far is that we see that God is in control of events as they happen. In his sovereignty, he is bringing about, exactly according to his word, through the prophets of old, the birth of his Messiah.

In the manner, and in the places, and in the time, even to exact details, as he has prophesied hundreds of years before. Irrespective of who is sitting on the throne, or who is ruling, his purposes are being accomplished.

We see that through these stories. We've already mentioned the manner in which our Lord comes on the scene. If you remember, a king, born as a pauper, the good news of his birth, announced to lowly shepherds, instead of in the courts of kings and queens.

[3:09] And as John reminds us in his gospel, he is not just a mere king, a mere human king. He is in fact the preexistent one from before the beginning of the world.

The one through whom all was made. He is the ancient one who himself was not only ruler, but judge. Now he comes into the world to be our advocate, and our mediator.

He comes to deliver us from our sins. By being the Lamb of God, we will be slain for the sins of the whole world. That is, my sin and your sin.

Now, although the news of his coming is not known in the halls of power, right? Caesar doesn't know about it. Herod knew about it to his own futility.

He couldn't do anything about it. The governor, Kyrenius, or Pilate wasn't on the scene yet, doesn't know about it. But Luke tells us of the amazing things that attended his birth, nevertheless, even though it wasn't pronounced in the halls of power.

[4:22] we see, even in the early pages of Luke's gospel, that something truly unique in human history is happening. And it was apparent to those who saw it.

Our passage this morning gives us two more characters, character witnesses of this story of Christ's birth and early years. These two witnesses come, they come under the scene briefly to bear witness to God's faithfulness in sending a deliverer.

And then they exited as quickly as they came. But Luke wants us to pay attention. He wants us to take it, he takes care to show to us the kind of people these two elderly men and women are and what their pronouncements were about the child.

And I think we should take care to look closely at what he says about them. First, let's look at what he says about Jesus' earthly parents in the opening verses.

In verse 21 to 24, we see that Joseph and Mary, in obedience to the law, circumcised Jesus in the eighth day and gave him the name Jesus, as instructed by God through the angel Gabriel.

[5:43] And then verse 22, when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him, that is the child Jesus, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord.

Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord. And they come, they bring him to offer sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord.

They offer a pair of turtledoves and two pigeons. Presenting Jesus at the temple was an act of obedience in keeping with the law of Moses.

The circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day was also an act of obedience in keeping with God's instruction to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 17. They presented Jesus in the temple 33 days after his circumcision.

Right? That's what Luke means by after the time of purification according to the law of Moses. Now, Mary brings after a time of purification she brings Jesus to the temple.

[7:02] This can be found in Leviticus 12. It's according to the law that if you after the circumcision 33 days if it's a male child the woman is still considered unclean.

Right? And so the purification after that ritually unclean. Not morally unclean but ritually unclean. And after that then she may come with the child to the temple.

So these Mary and Joseph are obeying and fulfilling the law of God. According to Genesis 17 circumcision the purification according to Leviticus 12 and then they brought Luke tells us they brought a pair of turtle doves and two pigeons as sacrifice for Mary's purification.

I think the choice of offerings tells us that Jesus' parents were poor. In Leviticus 12 the sacrifice that was commanded for that purification was a sheep but an allowance was made for people who do not have sufficient means to provide a sheep to bring two turtle doves and pigeons for the sacrifice. And that's what Mary and Joseph can afford. Lastly we see even in these opening verses that they brought Jesus to be dedicated unto the Lord in obedience to God's law in Exodus 13 where Luke actually quotes it that the firstborn male of every womb whether human or cattle in Israel must be dedicated unto the Lord.

[8:46] And Mary and Joseph law abiding covenant keeping Jews do all of these things in fulfillment of God's law.

Now we know remember that we know that Jesus we confess it Jesus was without sin he kept the law of God perfectly. He is the only human to keep the law of Moses perfectly.

But Jesus is an infant child although still God was like any other infant. He was reliant on his parents as any baby would be in every possible way.

So it was important that his parents in God's providence should be pious covenant keeping Israelites. Jesus throughout his life from his infancy to his death on the cross starting with his family and then by him himself after the age of innocence perfectly fulfilled the prescription of the law.

And this is one of the things I think Luke wants us to see even in these opening verses. Jesus was the covenant keeping law abiding son of God the true Israel.

[10:06] And then he goes on to tell us about these two witnesses to his birth and to the redemptive plan of God that is unfolding.

So Mary and Joseph come in obedience to the temple and again we see the wisdom of God on display as he orchestrates things in time and space to accomplish his purposes.

We are told that as a man this man Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to come to this young couple and their baby. Again note the description of this man.

He was a righteous and devout Israelite. Now that doesn't mean he was without sin but it means that he was a man who was looking forward expectantly faithfully to God's salvation and redemption.

That is what makes him righteous and devout. He was looking to God waiting for the salvation and redemption waiting on God's promises trusting and having faith in it.

[11:13] Both Simeon and Anna later in this passage they both have one thing in common they were described as waiting or looking forward to God's deliverance.

their law keeping didn't make them self righteous in their own eyes or self important in their own eyes. They stand Simeon and Anna they stand in contrast with some of the Pharisees who oppose Jesus.

These two people were looking expectantly for the Messiah and they were led by the Holy Spirit to behold him whom they had hoped for throughout their lives.

there's two points of similarities between both characters both witnesses. They were both advanced in years. We see that in Luke's account.

We know for example that Anna is at least 84 years old. Some tradition says she's probably even 105 or 107 years old because they added 84 years to what they but at least she's 84 years old.

[12:19] She's a prophetess from the tribe of Asher one of the scattered northern tribes of Israel.

Again even her coming in this regard is a fulfillment of God's prophecy through the prophet Jeremiah that we read this morning.

This great shepherd was bringing and gathering his lost sheep that had been scattered in. She's an embodiment of that truth of Jeremiah. She's a faithful Israelite gathering the Holy Spirit God is bringing her to behold the salvation.

Simeon likely is also around the same age advanced in years since he says after seeing after beholding the baby that he's ready to depart in peace upon seeing Jesus.

We know that he's a man advanced in years. And they were described these two witnesses as waiting on God's promise of salvation. This is important. Waiting or looking forward is the posture of what we were living faithfully in obedience to God.

It's the posture of every Christian. Christians are awaiting people. Even now we wait expectantly for the consummation of the salvation of God at a second coming.

[13:37] Now what does that look like? It's not hear me now the waiting is not impatiently raising a voice of accusation of God for not moving fast enough.

It's not trying by our own actions trying to take over the reins from God. Trying to help him to finish the task. If you have kids sometimes they do things right?

They tie their shoes or they do things even things you ask them to do and they just really slow at it right? And you end up taking it over and just do it myself right?

It takes patience to wait to do it in their own way right? Now the example doesn't fully transfer actually to God. To imagine now that your kids looking at you as you do things and being impatient we're impatient with them they're also impatient with us right?

Because they don't understand they want something and they want it now and they don't understand the steps that's necessary to take or they don't understand that's not really good for them at this right moment even if it's a good thing and they will and they have a two year old right?

[15:01] They beat the ground right? They will they yell they say it's not fair! all of this because they don't understand they want it now and they want it that's us sometimes with God we want God to do things that are at our timing that is we don't know the end from the beginning he does and in his wisdom he's bringing us along guiding us as loving as a loving father does but we are called to wait right?

The waiting that we're called to wait is not of those things not railing against God's timetable but it does require patience the waiting that we're called to wait it requires trust these two things patience and trust patiently trusting the God who promised that he will do it that he will do in due time accomplish what he said it is an active waiting right it requires being at the ready it's not remember the the story of Jesus the parable used by the five wise virgins who had their lamps burning with oil in reserve!

anticipating the bride grooms return that is the kind of waiting that we're supposed to do we actively wait we are prepared we are ready we are lean and mean like you know to use martial terms right that is the waiting that is required for the people of God it's active it's patient it's trusting this looking forward requires being devout as well being righteous this is what Simeon and Anna these are the kind of people they are knowing that because we are waiting as brides for our bridegroom we cannot be unfaithful we cannot look to the right or to the left nor can we turn aside to false suitors who seek to win our hearts and affection away from the lover of our soul we are faithfully waiting for our Lord it requires a steadfastness that can only be enabled by the

Holy Spirit now Simeon and Anna stand for us as an example of this waiting in their waiting they were faithful to their God in the case of Anna she looked at her she doesn't depart she not departing from the temple that doesn't mean she lives at the temple but she is a fixture there being a

busybody no she was a fixture there worshipping our God by fasting and praying and prophesying to other faithful waiters like her who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem for the redemption of Israel for the consolation of Israel these two witnesses as presented by Luke are two pious Israelites who are waiting expectantly for the redemption of the Lord they represent to us the best of expectant Israel faithfully waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption and they also testify as faithful witnesses to who

Jesus truly is and they testify to the central place that Jesus occupies in God's redemptive plan let's look at Simeon's son right or his prophetic utterance as is revealed to Mary and Joseph imagine being Simeon having looked so long and so expectantly for the sign promised to him by God imagine now holding in his arms the savior of the world guided by the Holy Spirit we're told he was led into the temple isn't that God's kindness and faithfulness this man faithfully waiting ready to die at the point of death old old and aged the Lord said this is the time come let me show you what you've been waiting for the Holy Spirit led him into the temple and led him directly to

[19:34] Mary and Joseph this isn't just mere coincidence this is God again in his wisdom orchestrating things the Holy Spirit led Simeon to Mary and Joseph Mary and Joseph were likely not the only parents in the temple on this day dedicating presenting their firstborn to the Lord and there was nothing about them by the way to distinguish them as parents of the Savior of the world they were normal people they were regular people they were ordinary people we know this from their socioeconomic status there's nothing about them that would make you do a double take yet it was to them that this old faithful man comes and note that many note this there were many in Jerusalem there were many even at the temple at that very moment who were waiting for the sign of the

Messiah yet only these two devout people Simeon and Anna were privileged to see the sign to many it would be lackable that the Messiah of God the one to deliver Israel will be born to people of low means like Mary and Joseph that the son of David the king of Israel should be born in a stable and placed in a feeding trough meant for animals would have been an insult to many of them yet God in his wisdom in such a manner presented his son God in his wisdom came in such a manner the light of the world came in such lowly terms the light of the world still comes even today in such lowly terms and he comes still today to such lowly people and he comes to those who are humble who are lowly to raise them up now

Jesus himself described what it means to be lowly it has nothing to do with him right it has nothing to do with your how much you have in your checking!

lowly by lowliness here right remember Mary sung he's come to raise the lowly and to scatter the proud lowliness doesn't have to do with how much you have in your saving of checking accounts! It has to do with what kind of house you live in, what kind of car you drive how many people know you?

how many followers you have on Instagram? there's nothing to do with that lowliness to God is one who is poor in spirit it is to such people that Jesus promises the kingdom of God it is to such people that God in his kindness reveals himself or that we would be such a people holy trinity in this new year poor in spirit dependent on Jesus looking to him and him alone for redemption!

[22:41] living under his reign and rule even as rulers and potentates in the world and even the ruler of the hour Satan himself try to demand our allegiance oh that we would wait poor in spirit waiting upon our Redeemer looking to him what might God do in us and among us?

how might we be able to utter praises like Simeon and Anna when we have eyes to see God's work of redemption among us in the world like they do now let's look at Simeon's song look with me in verse 29 to 32 Simeon this man upon olden the baby in his arms having been faithfully waiting expecting the consolation of Israel we're told God not consoles him the word translated consolation there is the same word that is translated elsewhere as comfort in the New Testament it is the words that's also used to describe the Holy Spirit himself as a comforter and we see even in that word consolation echoes of Isaiah 40 comfort comfort my people says your God speak tenderly to Jerusalem and announce to her that our time of our service is over our iniquity has been pardoned she is received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins

Simeon knows this promise he's a faithful Israelite it's in all of this that he sees the import of the child he's holding in his arms you can imagine a Simeon has these verses in mind as he beholds Jesus in his arms he is experiencing in real time the comfort that is promised by God in Isaiah that's why he says I am ready to depart in peace my eyes that behold the salvation of God and he means by that that he's ready to die he's ready to die but the meaning goes even more deeper than that

the peace that Simeon talks about here carries a deeper meaning that even maybe Simeon himself realizes because of this baby that he holds in his hand and the babies not Simeon's but the babies impending death on the cross to atone for Simeon's sin

Simeon truly has peace with God it's the kind of peace that is devout life and law keeping cannot secure for him I think Simeon knows this that's why he says in verse 30 my eyes have seen your salvation this salvation is prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for Israel's glory note the coupling there of salvation and light I hope it reminds you of last week's sermon as John describes Jesus as the light that shines in the darkness this salvation this light is not for Israel alone we're told it is for all nations this child is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise he's the offspring through whom Israel and all the nations will be blessed again we see in Simeon's song as we've seen in Zechariah's song and in Mary's song and even in the angels announcement to the shepherds that this baby is not just for the Jews but for the whole world even to the scattered tribes for the whole world for all nations this is this is the fulfillment of God's promise in Isaiah 49 about his servant

God says it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up tribes of Jacob alone to bring back the preserved of Israel I will make you a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth it is these very words that the apostles proclaim after Pentecost that this light indeed has come in the person of Jesus Christ and he is for all the nations we are told that Mary and Joseph marveled at Simeon's words can you imagine the feeling of whiplash that Mary and Joseph must be feeling by this point look at what they have seen so far even from the conception of Jesus of the announcement of his conception to Mary even just till now they have seen the angel Gabriel come to both of them right Mary and Joseph they have seen they have seen we are not sure if the Magi have appeared to them at this point but they have seen shepherds coming out of the blue right imagine someone just walking into your delivery room you and your wife and saying well we have come to work you know they have seen marvelous things they have never seen these strangers that they don't know come and worship this baby of theirs they are marveling at all of these things this child is appointed though

[28:16] Simeon says Simeon says this under the direction of the Holy Spirit he blesses Mary and Joseph as his parents but then he says this word to Mary that this child this infant child that you owed is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel is to be a sign that is opposed a sword actually that will pierce through your own soul Mary so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed that's not I mean it's one thing to be amazed but I don't these are not comforting words here they're not this child is the instrument of God's salvation according to prophecy in Isaiah he is a sanctuary Isaiah 8 talks about this servant of the Lord this the Christ the Messiah of God is a sanctuary that means a place of safety for those who in John's word receive him and believe in his name that's what he is he's a sanctuary for those who believe and receive him but he will also be for those who do not receive him a stone of offense a rock of stumbling and a trap and a snare many shall stumble on this firstborn son of Mary they shall fall and be broken they shall be snared and taken

I don't know about you but as I said those are not comforting words to a mother how could this child be the consolation of Israel and at the same time be a snare and a stone upon whom many will be broken it's because this is what John says also in his gospel that we talked about last week it's because an encounter with Jesus an encounter with his gospel brings all of mankind to a point of crisis he is as John says the light of the world he exposes the darkness in every heart and for those who come to that light it becomes a light that saves but for those who reject this light because they love the darkness rather than the light it becomes a condemning light Jesus is the sign that divides into two camps he is the sign that will be opposed he is the precious cornerstone that the builders rejected and here's the tragic statement here

God's own people would have been waiting expectantly for the hope of Israel will reject that hope this infant child is in fact not just a mere baby he's a conquering king he comes as a conquering king to rescue those who surrender hear this he comes as a conquering king to rescue those who surrender to his rule and reign but he also comes as a conquering king does to judge those who remain proud in their own heart and will not bend the knee to him there is no neutral ground before this king every heart must decide whether to surrender and be saved or to resist and fall into ruin and destruction Mary herself had prophesied that a child would lift the lowly and scatter the proud but one wonders one wonders how much she understands what would distinguish the lowly and the

proud into these two camps maybe she thought like most of the Jews in our day were looking forward to a savior that the savior will come to destroy their enemy for the Jew in that day for Mary for Joseph for every other

Jew the enemy would have been the Roman oppressors I wonder who you would put in that category who I would put in that category but the words of Simeon here and the words of scripture doesn't divide enemies and those will be saved by those same standards that we would make even the mouth of Jesus himself shows that lowly and proud redeemed and condemned the line that separates them goes through Jesus himself our one response to him is the measure of where we will land and here's the main point we are all enemies of God all of us we are all under judgment and condemnation but here's also the truth salvation is also freely offered to all we all have a way out of eternal death that is due us the man

Jesus Christ he alone is the instrument of God's salvation can you imagine the words of Simeon to Mary though a sword will pass through your own soul now Mary in fact was an eyewitness throughout from beginning to end of her son's ministry on earth she was there at the cross as her son was brutalized tortured and murdered at the hands of evil men Mary was there she would have been given the words of promise she would have been given the words of promise that this child would be the savior of Israel and the savior of the world sees the culmination of his life ending at the cross i know we often think of the apostles grief during easter the disappointment the dashed hopes and expectations that Jesus said but no grief ranks higher than Mary's throughout her son's life she had to adjust her hopes of the way God's salvation will come she had to adjust the whole time trusting in God's promises the whole time waiting looking forward through the most unimaginable pain she was there at his crucifixion she was also there though at his resurrection she as one of the first witnesses to his resurrection life she waited she looked forward she beheld her son and Lord as he ascended into heaven she continued to look forward she continued to wait looking in obedience to her Lord as she waited for the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost she was there at Pentecost she was one of the disciples filled she suffered along Mary did along with the early church as a faithful follower of Christ even as it seems like this church in its infancy will be vanquished by the enemies of God she suffered along with them waiting looking forward she waited she remained steadfast until her death and now she beholds her son a savior a Lord and redeemer along with the rest of the church triumphant she's resting she is rested from all her labors the promise of God did not fail her beloved let us look to her as an example of a faithful disciple let's look as well to Simeon and Anna as examples of faithful disciples who wait expectantly looking forward we are forward looking people no matter what comes our way this new year let us be forward looking expectant for our Lord's second advent our faith and our trust in him it's not the matter we were talking about this at the Christian hour it's not the matter of the level of our faith it's not you know it's who we put our faith in and he is trustworthy God is trustworthy and even so we cry come Lord Jesus let us pray Lord God heavenly Father consolation of Israel redeemer of the world we thank you Lord for even in your gospel giving us these two examples we thank you Lord for the

[37 : 31] life of Mary as an example of faithful waiting and looking forward we thank you for Simeon! and Anna we thank you for other sins who have gone before us who are examples of your waiting and looking forward to the promised Messiah to also now looking forward to his return we thank you Lord that the hope that we have in you is a sure hope that does not disappoint and Lord we pray Lord that you will give us by the power of your Holy Spirit strength steadfastness to continue to look forward to you Lord there will be many things that come our way this year many disappointments many sorrows let us look to you for comfort Lord let us look to you steadfastly waiting anticipating ready lean mean ready to see your advent help us Lord to withstand the deception of the enemy as he comes with his many offerings help us to remain steadfast as your church Lord we pray in Jesus name amen