

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA December 28, 2014

Luke 2:25-32

After the Anticipation

Hymns: 54 – 707 – 58 – Closing: 42

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

What comes after the anticipation? Millions woke up this past Friday morning and for them, things were very different. Christmas, more than any other holiday has been built on anticipation. For the secular celebrator, that anticipation most likely begins around Thanksgiving, with Black Friday kicking things off. The radio is soon tuned to 106.9 and the 24/7 Christmas carols add daily to the anticipation. It continues to build as the house is decorated, the tree is searched for, and the mailbox brings a daily intake of Christmas cards and letters. Each tradition only serves to add to the excitement. Then, finally, after so much build-up and anticipation, the day arrives....Christmas! And there is family, and food, and fun. And of course, there are gifts! Then, the day after Christmas arrives, and it is done. The lights come down, the gifts go back to the store, the carols are muted, it's all quickly put away! Life returns to normal, and people trudge forward into the damp gray of the remaining winter months. So much time spent waiting and preparing, and then what? After all of the anticipation, there always seems to be a bit of a letdown and disappointment that follows.

Today, in Luke 2, we see a man whose entire life was built on the anticipation of Christmas. And then what he was waiting for finally came, well, a logical question is raised: What would come after the anticipation?

Our story begins in Luke 2:25-26. There, we are given two verses of introduction about a man named Simeon, and they tell us that Simeon lived a life that was overflowing with anticipation. First off, Luke tells us that Simeon was an Israelite who was **“righteous and devout.”** This meant that he was diligent in studying the Old Testament Scriptures and he was faithful in carrying out the practices of worship law that God had given to his people. Anyone who followed those worship laws and read the prophets knew all about anticipation, because God gave those laws and sent his prophets to build

anticipation. The worship laws foreshadowed the salvation and forgiveness that God would give his people, and the prophets provided clues about the Messiah and his work. Through the Law and the Prophets, God wanted his people to long for the consolation of Israel that would come through the Messiah. This anticipation was one that still burned in the hearts of many people, of whom Simeon was one.

In addition, Luke tells us that Simeon also felt a special kind of anticipation. As a special gift of God, Simeon had been told by the **“Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the LORD’s Christ.”** Simeon had been told that he would win the lottery; he just didn’t know when the winning ticket would be scratched. Can you imagine the feeling that Simeon must’ve been filled with each morning when he woke up? Each day might be the day when the culmination of all the Laws and Prophets, when the Deliverer of Israel, when the Chosen One from God would be shown to him. I personally don’t know how Simeon ever slept a wink after he was given that revelation by the Holy Spirit.

And then one day, Luke tells us in verse 27, Simeon was **“moved by the Spirit (to go) into the temple courts.”** For Simeon, the anticipation must’ve spiked through the roof; he was like the child about to open the big gift that had been sitting under that tree for so long.

And finally, there he was! A new-born child, eight days old, being dutifully and faithfully brought by his parents according to the Law, and Simeon knew. This was it! What he had anticipated; what he had waited for; what he had devoted his life to. How could he not take the child in his arms and praise God for keeping his Word; for allowing him to see this child!

But now what? Consider how Simeon’s life would change. That anticipation that he had awoken with every morning would be completely changed. Waiting had consumed his entire life, and now the waiting was over. However, for Simeon, there was no empty feeling; there was no letdown because the event didn’t live up to the anticipation; there was no wondering, “Now what?” And that is because something very different from anticipation now filled Simeon’s life.

His anticipation had been replaced by reality. In his arms, he had held what he had spent his life waiting for. In most cases, the reality never measures up to the hype. However, in this case, it had far surpassed it.

The reality did not disappoint, and Simeon’s famous song tells us why. Simeon felt peace. There was no more wondering. There was no more waiting. There was no more room for uncertainties or doubts.

Simeon had peace because he now had certainty in God's promises. He was privileged to see with his very eyes the salvation that God had promised to his people beginning with Adam and Eve. Simeon was content in the promises of God and he knew what this child meant for his eternity; he knew what this child meant for the entire world. Simeon had peace after the anticipation, and it allowed him to sing a song of joy that is still heard today. I'm sure a day didn't pass until the day he was dismissed from this world where he wasn't filled with the same joy and exhilaration that he felt the moment he held his Savior in his arms. That kind of joy can't go away; and Simeon experienced it by God's grace. For Simeon, it was unending joy and peace that came after the anticipation.

Now what about you? What comes after the anticipation for you? Christmas and all the buildup and excitement have come and gone; so how are you now feeling? Is there a bit of an empty feeling; a tinge of sadness as the carols stop, the tree comes down, and the decorations are put away. Or are you still singing "Joy to the World?" Are you rejoicing because the reality of what came on Christmas far surpasses the anticipation?

How you are feeling in the wake of Christmas, I can tell you, is largely dependent on what you were awaiting and anticipating for the past month. Was your anticipation secular; or was it spiritual? Here are a few questions to test:

- Was your anticipation built on decorations and popular jingles, or was it built upon a manger and prophetic songs?
- Was your excitement built on traditions and gifts, or was it built on promises and the Gift?
- Was your joy built upon the visits of family and friends, or was it built on the Father and the arrival of his Son.

If yours was an anticipation built on the world's version of Christmas, I'm sure there is an empty feeling that has come after the anticipation. And that is because that secular version of Christmas - that Christmas that becomes all about the gifts; that gets consumed by the commercial; that says the most important part of Christmas is something other than Christ: that Christmas that we all too often get caught up in - it has been packaged up and put away until next December. How could you not feel empty and disappointed if that is your Christmas that has come and gone?

However, if yours was a Christmas anticipation built on hope and the fulfillment of the promises of God, then you can join in singing the song of Simeon with unending joy. And that is because what you were waiting for has come and it doesn't disappoint

or go away. God has again allowed you to see the Christ, his gift of salvation to all people, the light that illuminates the world.

For Christian people, the reality of what is given to us on Christmas far surpasses the anticipation that leads up to Christmas. And that is because we know with certainty that we have a Savior who forgives our sins, who restores our relationship with God, who gives us eternal peace. We know with certainty what is ours because Christmas has allowed us to see again God's gift to the world. Nothing can take away that peace, so there is nothing that needs to ever dampen our rejoicing. The joy of Christmas never needs to leave us the whole year through!

But, you might ask, "What about those times when the joy is drowned by the worries of life?" "What about those times when the peace is disrupted by an upheaval of problems?" At those times, remember that God's gift of his Son doesn't just come to you in a Christmas manger. Through the Lord's Supper, God gives you his Son on a regular basis; to assure you of your forgiveness; to fill your life with peace; to restore your joy. That is why we sing Simeon's song of Christmas peace after we receive the Sacrament in our services. Every time we take the body and blood, we can be filled with the same peace and joy that Simeon felt shortly after that first Christmas. God's gift continues to be given long after Christmas has come and gone.

So, continue to be filled with joy and peace. When Christmas gets boxed up so quickly, it is easy for us to be persuaded that Christmas is over and done with and it's time for us to put it away. When you go back to work tomorrow, when you return to school, don't put Christmas away. Show those around you what comes after the anticipation for Christian people. Show them that the joy and excitement of Christmas is just beginning. Sing with Simeon, because you have peace, you have seen your salvation, you know what God has done for all people. Amen.