

A Journey from Waiting to Wonder

A sermon preached at
San Leandro Community Church
by Tammy Nelson
Sunday January 1, 2012

Luke 2:22-40

The wait is over! Jesus was born. The craziness of Christmas is now over and we can take down the tree and put the manger scene away for another year. Whew! Those annoying people, who had to come over because, well, they are family, have gone home. Perhaps we were dreading the approaching holidays because we knew there would be fewer loved ones at the table. But, Christmas is now behind us and we have entered into a new year!

Oh sure, there are still evidences of Christmas day if we look around; trees left by the curb to be taken away, garbage bags piled up with the detritus of Christmas just past. Colored lights still twinkle and tantalize as we drive through the streets at night. But the stress, the hoopla, the crazy malls and grocery stores are finally calming down.

Now, I know that we just spent all of Advent preparing for the birth of Jesus. We've been trying to find a quiet center in the midst of all the chaos. We've talked about the peace, joy, hope and love that supposedly came into the world when Jesus arrived. We were even waiting until we could sing all those old Christmas carols that warm our hearts and make us feel just that little less anxious.

Then he smiled at me, pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. Me and my drum...

He rules the world with truth and grace...

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift was given...

Be near me lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me I pray...

But I think all of the craziness that we experience each Christmas is much truer to life than the sanitized vision of shepherds kneeling next to a little manger scene with a glowing infant god. It was a crazy time in the life of Mary and Joseph. Well, it was a crazy time for everyone under Roman rule. The cities were bursting at the seams because people were traveling for the census. Relatives were popping out of the woodwork and needing a place to stay just until this whole census season was finished. Can you imagine the marketplaces? The synagogues? Everywhere just teeming with life! And in the middle of all this a woman travels to the birthplace of her husband's ancestors while VERY pregnant. (I mean, even today, women are discouraged from major travelling during their final weeks of pregnancy.) Well, they reach the end of their arduous journey just to find there is no room in the inn.

So Mary gives birth to her first born son in a stable and lays him in the animals' feeding trough. They're visited by shepherds; hear stories about angels and stars guiding people to seek out their baby. Then after all that craziness of Jesus' first few days on earth, the family settles in to wait. They have to wait 8 days before Jesus can be circumcised as per Jewish Law. Then they got to wait some more. After giving birth to a male child, a woman was considered unclean until 40 days afterwards. And only after that time would she and her husband be able to travel to present their child at the temple, offer sacrifices to God and redeem their child as was the custom instituted after the Israelites flight from Egypt.

This morning we meet up with the young family again at the end of their wait. They enter the temple and are greeted by two people, Anna and Simeon. Ah, Anna and Simeon; these two know something about waiting. They were both regulars at the Temple, well respected and devoted to God. Simeon had been given a promise by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah of Israel. And Anna...she had married young and became a widow

after only 7 years. No family to care for her or to care for, she had dedicated herself to God and became known as something of a prophet after 87 years. At least 60 years of fasting and prayer and awaiting God's Messiah.

And in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of the outer courts of the temple (for of course women weren't allowed into the inner temple), in the middle of livestock being sold, money being changed and lots of crying, laughing, wide eyed kids and of course women and even Gentiles, Anna discovers that which she had been waiting for all of her life. She didn't find it in a royal procession with servants in tow. And she didn't find the Messiah flanked by a band of warriors ready to take back what was theirs. Instead, she found the salvation of Israel and all peoples in the innocent face of a slumbering infant.

All her years of waiting came down to this single, life changing moment. And she discovered it only because she was willing to cast aside expectations of what a Messiah should be. She had plenty of time during her 87 years to see "Messiahs" come and go. While waiting, she allowed herself to become attuned to the heart of God and so she was ready when God began to reveal the plans for her people's salvation.

Simeon likewise had spent a lifetime learning to wait. He had a promise that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. He too had spent his life in growing communion with God. And he now recognized the unfurling of God's long awaited plans.

Prophecies are spoken, joyous news is once again broadcast to all who would listen. The holy family completes all that the law requires and then it is back home to Nazareth...to wait some more. 30 years people wait before Jesus performs amazing feats of Messiahship. 30 years of waiting and wondering for Mary as she sees her little child grow up and gain wisdom and build the deep relationship with his heavenly father that allowed him to become the Messiah that

God envisioned. But Mary had been granted the knowledge of who her child would be. Just imagine as Jesus grew up – in the dark of the night Mary and Joseph whispering to one another, retelling the story of their son’s birth lest they forget in the day to day busy-ness of life the great treasure they had been entrusted with.

You see, Christmas isn’t about perfection or beauty, at least not as we understand them. It is about a willingness to wrap oneself securely in the imperfection of humanity. It’s about the beauty of the ordinary. Hidden blessings if you will. And most importantly, it was about a birth. And as most of you know, when a child is born that is only the beginning of the journey. Birth is followed by a lifetime of hope, expectancy and lots and lots of waiting. 87 years is a long time to wait for the promise of ages. But we know the good news story. We simply need to seek God’s hidden blessings in plain sight.

So perhaps the Christmas season has left you feeling a little flat. You might feel like something was missing. But that’s okay. Because the Spirit of Christmas isn’t found in tinsel and trees and fancy packaging. It is found as we attune ourselves to the one who created us, when we look beyond what the world is seeking. And when we are willing to settle in and wait. It’s found in the hustle and bustle of life that is roaring all around us. Can you see it? If not, just wait.