

Order of Service for 12-31-23 10 AM

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

C: and also with you.

Opening Carol: “Angels From the Realms of Glory” – Hymn #367

Confession of Sin:

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

C: Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.

P: In His name let us make confession of our sins. For His sake let us seek forgiveness.

P: Father in heaven,

C: We do not deserve to be called Your children, for we have disobeyed. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed. We deserve Your wrath and punishment.

P: "His name shall be called JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

C: It is in the name of Jesus that we come before You, heavenly Father, pleading the merits of His holy life, His innocent suffering and death.

P: Good news of great joy! A Child is born to us, a Son to us is given, a Savior, Christ the Lord!

C: "He shall save His people from their sins."

P: All who receive Him, who believe in His name, are given power to become the children of God. In His name and by His authority, your sins are forgiven.

C: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Entrance Psalm: Psalm 98

P: Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things!

C: His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

P: The LORD has made known his salvation;

C: he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

P: He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

C: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

P: Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;

C: break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

P: Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,

C: with the lyre and the sound of melody!

P: With trumpets and the sound of the horn

C: make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

P: Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

C: the world and those who dwell in it!

P: Let the rivers clap their hands;

C: let the hills sing for joy together

P: before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

C: He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Gloria Hymn: “*Angels We Have Heard on High*” – **Hymn #368**

Prayer of the Day:

P: O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

P: 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. 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.

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. 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. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

P: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Galatians 4:4–7

P: When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

P: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: thanks be to God.

Hymn: “*From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*” – **Hymn #358**, vs. 1, 2

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 2nd chapter.

C: Glory be to You, O Lord.

P: When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] 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 to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 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. 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. 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, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.”

And His father and His mother marveled at what was said about Him. 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 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

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, 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. 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.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, o Christ.

Sermon Hymn: *“In His Temple Now Behold Him”* - **Hymn #519**

Sermon: *“Promises Kept”*- **Luke 2:22-40**

Russian playwright Anton Chekov is considered one of the greatest writers in the world. Because of his fame, he was sought out for advice by younger playwrights. In one letter, he describes a principle now known as Chekov’s gun. “One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn’t going to go off. It’s wrong to make promises you don’t mean to keep.” If a gun is placed in a scene, it must at some point be used. Putting extraneous details in a story that are never mentioned or used again create false promises. Foreshadowing should lead to fulfillment.

Throughout the Christmas story, we see that God follows that principle. We see all sorts of details from Old Testament prophecies and events in the history of the people of Israel that

foreshadow the coming of Jesus at Christmas. More than that, we see the characters, Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and others, who see the promises made to them fulfilled before their eyes. It's amazing how much fulfillment happens.

Promises kept.

What we see in the reading from Luke is that promises were kept even after what we think of as Christmas. God kept his promises to Simeon and Anna. Both of them had been waiting for Jesus for years, waiting for God to return to His temple. They'd been waiting for the birth of Jesus for years, and their waiting is finally over.

Mary and Joseph, despite the chaos of their lives, despite everything that had happened to them, keep their promises. They go to the temple to offer the sacrifices, to thank God for the gift of a son. They can only afford two turtledoves, which places them in the lower classes, far from the wealth expected of parents of a king. Still, they are welcomed by two longtime dwellers of the temple, Simeon and Anna, and they leave with great blessing upon them.

God kept his promises in bringing Jesus into the world.

Simeon would hold Jesus in his arms and proclaim, "My eyes have seen your salvation," and Anna who had been "waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" would also give thanks to God for His provision in Jesus.

Simeon and Anna clearly recognize and speak over Jesus' great destiny. There is much praising and witnessing and blessing. What we do have present in this passage is great satisfaction. An emotion more powerful than happiness or excitement; we see several journeys come to completion, we see tasks finished, and we see destiny fulfilled. We see promises kept.

The satisfaction in this passage comes to Simeon when he is able to see the face of God in the face of a child. Simeon is able to pray with and be a blessing to God in human form, at a time when God is humble and in need of care. His life is made complete by being able to offer that service. The satisfaction comes to Anna when she realizes that the Jerusalem she loves will experience redemption. The community she had just about given up hope on, seeing it descend into chaos, will be restored. Her spirit is at peace. Mary and Joseph are satisfied by completing the actions their faith calls them to do. Their following of the demands of faith is where peace lies. Indeed, all are satisfied, because of the promises kept.

Simeon and Anna displayed patience and hope as they waited for God's promises to be kept. But like many of the characters we encounter every year during the Christmas season, they don't wait long enough. They wait to see the Messiah born, they wait to see God return to the temple and to be among his people again, true. But they miss the rest of the story.

Simeon gets a glimpse of that when he warns Mary that "a sword will pierce through your own soul." With a blessing like that, we'd think that Simeon leaves in a little less than full peace. But he leaves the scene. Like Joseph and the wise men, the shepherds and the angels, Simeon and Anna point to Jesus as the Messiah, the one who they've been waiting for, but then fade

away. After the first couple of chapters of Matthew and Luke, we don't hear from them or even about them again. They waited, they saw what they were promised, but there's so much of the story they miss. They miss Jesus traveling all throughout the countryside, teaching and healing. They miss all of the miracles that Jesus would do. They miss the parables Jesus would use to teach. They miss the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They miss Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. They miss Easter. They see the beginning of the story, but they don't wait around until the end. They miss that God will keep his promises to save his people, to save all people, from their sins.

Christmas is not just the fulfillment of what we were waiting for. It is the promise that our waiting is not in vain. It's the fulfillment that shows us that all of God's other promises are worth holding onto, worth trusting.

As we wait for Jesus to come again, we live in the same promises of Simeon and Anna. We have seen God's Word fulfilled among us, and trust that it will continue to be so. We trust that the same God who watched over Zechariah and Elizabeth in their years of waiting for a child, who watched Mary and Joseph as they watched the fulfillment of the promises made to them, who will continue to watch over us as we wait for the day when promises are fulfilled, when sin and sorrow no longer grow, when thorns no longer infest the ground, when snow and ice and cold and wind no longer harm us.

It's New Year's Eve, the end of 2023. Looking back at this year, how was this year? Was it full of joy or full of sorrow? One interesting exercise is to look back at your resolutions, your plans and dreams for the year. If you made resolutions at the beginning of 2023, how did you keep them? If you kept them, how did they change your life? If you didn't keep them, how long did you keep them going? What made you stop? It's interesting to look back at the promises you made, even just to yourself, and see how they were kept.

When we look at the promises God has made, we see that the same God who has kept his promises in the Bible is the same God who keeps his promises today. The same God promises that in spite of our failings and fallings that he will hear us and bless us and direct us and keep us as his own. Through Jesus, because Jesus died and rose just as he said he would, you have been forgiven. That's a promise that has been kept.

2nd Article of Creed and Explanation:

Prayers

Admonition to Communicants:

P: Jesus was born on Christmas to carry on His mission of going to the cross to die with our sins and to rise on Easter so that we be restored to God. As we approach His altar to receive His true body and blood given in His Holy Supper, let us remember that we deserve nothing from Him but eternal punishment and that instead as we believe in His Word, we receive instead full forgiveness of our sins. With that certainty we come to His supper.

Sanctus Hymn: *“What Child Is This?”* – **Hymn #370**

The Lord’s Prayer:

The Words of the Lord:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution:

Communion Hymn: *“Now Sing We, Now Rejoice”* – **Hymn #386**

Dismissal Hymn: *“Go, Tell It on the Mountain”* – **Hymn #388**

Prayer after Communion: (from Hymn 358)

ALL: Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle-song.

Glory to God in highest heave,
Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad new year to all the earth.
Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen

Closing Hymn: *“Let Us All with Gladsome Voice”* - **Hymn #390**

Postlude