

For: Sunday, December 31, 2017 – Christmas 1

**THEME OF THE DAY**

Christmas: Dreams realized! The texts focus us on an awareness of how the Christ who has come to us fulfills all our best hopes for our lives and for the world.

**PRIMARY TEXT**

**READ Luke 2:22-40**

**Commentary:** We are again reminded that this gospel is the first installment of a two-part history of the Church (the second part is the Book of Acts) traditionally attributed to Luke, a physician and Gentile associate of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). In his two-part history, the author's intention was to stress the universal mission of the church (Acts 1:8). Addressed to Theophilus (1:1), it is not clear if this means that the Gospel was written for a recent convert or for a Roman official from whom the church sought tolerance. But since Theophilus means "lover of God," it is possible that the author addressed all the faithful.

This lesson is the story of Jesus' Presentation in the Temple in Jerusalem and encounter with Simeon and Anna. This is another account unique to Luke. It seems that first-time mothers in Israel were to submit to rites of purification (Leviticus 12:2-8) and the firstborn were to be set apart for service to God (Exodus 13:2, 12), which accounts for Jesus' Presentation and the offering of a sacrifice (vv. 22-24).

The devout Simeon looking for the messiah and the aged prophet Anna are introduced (vv. 25-26, 36-37). Simeon seeking the "consolation" [*paraklesis*, literally a "going alongside"] of Israel refers to the salvation or Israel's independence that the Messiah would bring (Isaiah 40:7). Both recognize that Jesus will bring salvation [*soterion*] to Israel (vv. 27-32, 38). Simeon proceeds to praise God for letting him see the Messiah by offering a song, the *Nunc Dimittis* (vv. 29-32), used to this day in communion liturgies. Simeon sings that he is ready to die, ready to leave, since he has seen the Messiah and the hope of salvation.

The "peace" [*eirene*] referred to should be interpreted in terms of the Jewish idea of *shalom*, completeness and well-being. The hymn continues, noting

that the child will be a revelation for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. Simeon also prophesies that the child Jesus will cause division among Israel, some falling and others rising as they respond to him (vv. 34-35).

It is reported that when Anna saw Jesus she began to praise God and speak of the child to all seeking Jerusalem's redemption [*lutrowsin*] (v. 38).

Luke simply reports Mary's and Joseph's amazement over this praise for their child (v. 33), their return to Nazareth (but only after scrupulously following the law) (v. 39), and the subsequent maturation of Jesus, his strength and wisdom [*sophia*] (v. 40).

**Application:** This text focuses on the eschatological promise fulfilled by the babe in the manger: how he redeems us and makes the dream of the good life before God more real than what presently appears to be the case.

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## ADDITIONAL TEXTS

### **Psalm 148**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! <sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! <sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. <sup>6</sup> He established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. <sup>7</sup> Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, <sup>8</sup> fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! <sup>9</sup> Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! <sup>10</sup> Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! <sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! <sup>12</sup> Young men and women alike, old and young together! <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. <sup>14</sup> He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!

### **Isaiah 61:10–62:3**

<sup>61:10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being 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 with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a

garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. <sup>62:1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

#### **Galatians 4:4-7**

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What theme(s) hold these texts together?
2. Is it significant that the old people, Simeon and Anna, are quick to see and state the special identity of this child brought to the Temple? What do you think you would have noticed about the baby Jesus that day?
3. After meeting the baby, Simeon says he is ready to die. Is there anything so important to you, that having seen it, all other claims on your earthly life would feel unimportant?
4. The text from Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph were amazed at what was being said about the specialness of their baby in fulfilling God's plans. Do you think their views about Jesus changed over time? When and why?

## SUMMING IT UP:

- **What** is important to know and remember?
- **Where** is God found or seen in these words?
- **So what** does this mean for our lives?
- **Now what** is God's word calling us to do?