

12/27/2020



## Music To Prepare Us For Worship Welcome

Sarah Sharp, Musician

It's inevitable, the incredible after Christmas let down. It's been just two days and most of us are still digesting, yes digesting our very filling Christmas dinner but couldn't we also be digesting God's Good NEWS. What does the birth of the One True Light really mean for all our darkness? The other phenomenon that occurs now is that families start to leave for home and go back to work. But, even that's different as we endure the pandemic's restrictions. But today we're shifting our focus. The Good News we've proclaimed this Advent/Christmas season culminates in Luke giving us these words: "When the time came." Seems Luke's saying the time has come for us to change our focus from the purposes of Jesus' birth in our lives to Jesus' purpose on earth...the purposes of reconciliation and redemption. Today, we'll hear Jesus' infant ritual cleansing story. It's that story but it's also the stories of 2 people who'd been waiting all their lives for this moment. As we head into the New Year, 2021, what are you waiting for? A vaccine? A more just society? The end of hate and division? A more peaceful existence? Maybe you're just waiting to be able to go out to eat with friends again. Whatever you're waiting for: believe this: the time has come for us to search for the light the Candles of Advent so beautifully represent. So, will you join me in our responsive lighting the Candles of Advent litany.

Pastor: I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining.

**Congregation: I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining.**

Pastor: The clouds begin to clear.

**Congregation: The clouds begin to clear.**

Pastor: The horizon starts to glow.

**Congregation: The horizon starts to glow.**

Pastor: The time has come.

**Congregation: The time has come.**

Pastor: Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we have caught throughout this season of Advent and Christmas, glimpses of your gifts of hope, love, joy and peace. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle-even when we have not been sure of tomorrow you have ignited the Light within us.

**Congregation: and we have glowed with its brilliance from the inside out.**

Pastor: Help us continue to proclaim far and wide that the time has come for light to be among all people. AMEN

**Lighting All the Candles of Advent and Christmas**

**Music Video** "I Believe" by Mark Miller & ULV Chamber Singers Virtual Choir

**Opening Song** "Angels from the Realms of Glory" #220

**Prayer Intro**

Billy Graham once said, "before prayer changes others it first changes us. Let's approach this prayer time with hearts and minds open to the transforming power and presence of God's Holy Loving Spirit. Let's pray...."

**Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer**

Great and Loving God; On this last Sunday in December of the very hard and unusual year, 2020; we celebrate your call on our lives. Now give us eyes to see you and a heart that desires only you. We who have seen the sunset of so many days now see the dawn of a new day and new

12/27/2020

year. God, in faith we come to you asking to see Jesus Christ face to face in this New Year. Time violates the heart, the advance of years breeds the anxieties of aging. Oh, to be children again. To be cradled in the arms of our fathers and mothers. To be strangers once again in our parents' world! But, for some of us our childhood has vanished. We've grown up becoming strangers to one another and to ourselves. We've grown in the ways of our world feigning ignorance of your will and way, O God. But, Lord, if leaving the very hard year 2020 and heading into the new year 2021 still holds your promises, then we know we can anticipate a new day with new presidential leadership, new opportunities and less disease and loss. In financially uncertain, pandemic times, we pray for a new world. And, in some remote corner of our foolish hearts we hope for the reconciliation of all the hurt and pain of our past. You send no army of angels to fight our fights, no yellow-brick road to show us the way, no earthquakes to topple our great walls of fear. NO, to save us, and reconcile us to you and to each other you sent what we lost, you sent an infant, a child into our hearts, and today we lift that Holy child in our arms and bless His Holy name, the name of Jesus Christ. Today we worship the Christ child, hoping to see with our hearts, the joy he brings to our world even when we've made a mess of this earthly existence. O God, return Mary & Joseph & Jesus safely to their own place and time and slow Time's course. Guide us in ways that allow us to see and know Jesus before our hour is too late, to bless not curse; to declare not to deny; to trust not to betray, to be reborn and not die. Help us, O Lord, keep the Christ child safe within us, so we don't destroy the child you sent to save us. And, keep us forever praying the prayer you teach all your disciples praying; Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

**The Old Testament Scripture Reading** Isaiah 61:10 – 62: 3 (Common English Bible) Barbara Meyers, Liturgist

12/27/2020

I surely rejoice in the LORD; my heart is joyful because of my God, because he has clothed me with clothes of victory, wrapped me in a robe of righteousness like a bridegroom in a priestly crown, and like a bride adorned in jewelry. As the earth puts out its growth, and as a garden grows its seeds, so the LORD God will grow righteousness and praise before all the nations. For Zion's sake I won't keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I won't sit still until her righteousness shines out like a light, and her salvation blazes like a torch. Nations will see your righteousness, all kings your glory. You will be called by a new name, which the LORD's own mouth will determine. You will be a splendid garland in the LORD's hand, a royal turban in the palm of God's hand.

**The New Testament Scripture Reading** Luke 2: 22-40 (Common English Bible) When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, *A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons*. A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too." There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She

12/27/2020

was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

**The Message** "Believe This: The Time Has Come" Pastor Cheri

Not going to waste time or words. Straight up, asking. What would you like to do before you die? Something I'd like to do before I die? I wanna go to Hawaii and I'd love to learn to play the piano. I know it's a rather startling and sort of morosely dark question to begin an after Christmas sermon with and you're probably wondering why! Well, we're fast approaching a new year. What you want to do before you die is an appropriate New Year's question. Haven't we already started thinking about our new year's resolutions? So, in the grand scheme of pandemic life as we move from 2020 to 2021; it makes sense to make a new year plan and resolve to work that plan in 2021, important plans considering the 326,000 people who can't make New Years plans because they contracted Covid and died. I also can't help but think of Coleen Spurling. When it was obvious the cancer was taking over, ALL Coleen ever wanted was more time. Coleen not only lived life to the max, she lived and died grateful for every minute. Makes what we'd like to accomplish before we leave this earthly existence a real spiritual issue, an issue of our faith! Coleen's perspective was a gift of her unending faith. Maybe we'd answer the question light-heartedly, and say I'd like to win the lottery, or sky-dive, or visit some far-off place before I die. Or, maybe you're the more thoughtful, reflective type. You'd like to write a book. Or, maybe you're more playful so you'd like to shoot your best- ever golf score! What would you like to do or see or experience while you are still able? That's today's question.

12/27/2020

I once asked a parishioner named Stuart that question. When I asked, I didn't know it'd be 6 months before he would die 98 years young. No longer able to get around independently, Stuart received care in a nursing home. I'd visit as often as I could, at least once of month. If he wasn't feeling poorly, Stuart was very chatty. One visit I asked him if there was some thing he wished he could do before he died. He thought awhile and this was his response: He told me my question made him think about the time he spent serving in the Navy during World War II. He especially remembered all the planes that crashed into the ocean. Stuart was bothered by the fact that the men who died at sea and were buried at sea were never sent home to their families. My guess is: it takes a lifetime to put to rest and be at peace with war's memories. That day we talked alot about life and death. I asked him if he had any regrets about his life. Stuart choked back tears to tell me his one and ONLY regret was that he tried to save a fellow sailor who'd accidentally fallen overboard. He did his best to rescue him from the ocean's depths. He pulled the man from the water and got the man to the medic but the man suffered a severe head injury in the fall. He died and was buried at sea. Stuart was not at peace with that memory! I left that day having prayed with Stuart, asking God to assure him God loved him and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross meant he was forgiven. Even though he had a strong faith, I still wonder if Stuart EVER found peace by accepting God's forgiveness.

There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. Scripture tells us he was a very righteous, righteous meaning the very old Jewish man, Simeon was virtuous, honorable and morally right. God sent Simeon God's Holy Spirit. Simeon believed he would NOT die before he'd seen the Messiah face-to-face. Can't we just see pre-occupied Simeon, a very old man beside himself searching all of Jerusalem, not resting until he'd meet his Lord and Savior face to face. Led by love, led by something beyond himself, led by God's Spirit, Simeon went into the temple where 40 day-old Jesus happened to be there with his faithful Jewish parents. Mary and Joseph brought him to the Temple for his ritual dedication. Jewish custom meant a newborn would be dedicated to

12/27/2020

the Lord, similar to our rite of baptism. There, at the Temple, the promise God made to Simeon many years before was fulfilled. What we need to know about this historic event is: if Jesus had been born in Nazareth, if Mary and Joseph's hadn't made the journey to Bethlehem, Simeon would've died never having seen his Savior face to face. But as God's plan would have it, Jerusalem was only six miles away from the manger, so the Jerusalem Temple was not only accessible to Simeon; it was an appropriate place for Jesus to be circumcised, a requirement for all newborn Jewish males. Because his parent's were faithful participants in God's plan; God kept his promise to Simeon and Jesus appeared to him wrapped in his mother's arms. Simeon told God he could die because he'd met his Savior face to face. Simeon then makes this powerfully prophetic and predictive statement about the purpose of Jesus' life. Imagine Simeon, so overwhelmed he speaks God's praises and says, my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared for all people to see—a light that will reveal salvation to unbelievers and bring glory to your people Israel." Simeon would die having seen his Savior face to face, knowing salvation.

There was a woman whose name was Anna; eighty-four years old, she too was looking for and speaking of this Savior who was to come. The bible says she never left the temple. Anna stayed at the temple day and night, fasting, serving and praying! Eventually she too sees the One God sent to save and redeem Israel. And again, God brings them together at just the right time, allowing Anna to prophesy how this child would save us. All her years of watching and waiting; fasting, serving and praying suddenly come to fruition. It's Anna who identifies for the Temple people that Jesus is the one, the infant child born to save the world. No wonder these two people are featured this first Sunday after Christmas. Ironic neither Simeon nor Anna could die until they met our Savior, and we can't really live until we meet our Savior. Oh, we can journey though life, happy enough. We can be successful, comfortable, happy people, but we won't know true peace, hope, and joy until we experience Jesus face-to-face, until we accept our salvation.

12/27/2020

The lives of Simeon and Anna teach us a valuable life lesson for this Eve of the New Year 2021. The elderly Simeon and Anna teach us that living our faith is not a brief sprint. The faithful life is more like a long-distance marathon that seems more like an impossible long, hard uphill climb. Faith's all about endurance! Simeon and Anna spent a lifetime, many faith-filled years seeking God's blessings of salvation. Our faith journey is a journey that lasts a lifetime and is really a lot more like a long-distance marathon. 2020's sure given our lives perspective. Faith is about searching and seeking our Savior all our lives. Faith is about resilience, determination and endurance to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The four long weeks of Advent, the 9 long months of isolation, it all might have seemed like forever to us; but for Simeon and Anna, they'd faithfully watched and waited for their savior for decades. But, what's most significant about Simeon and Anna is the legacies they leave behind. We, the Church forever remember them as a hero and heroine; righteous Saints who sought to love, worship and serve Jesus Christ. For two millennia and 20 years, their names have been synonymous with patience, faithfulness, peace-filled serenity and dedicated searching and serving. So, it occurred to me that the question with which I began this sermon was probably the wrong question for today. Rather than asking "what would you like to do before you die?" Maybe I should ask "**how would you like to be remembered?**"

Know, I pray I won't be doing ANY of your funerals for a very long time! I'm just wondering what you want your legacy to be? What will your tombstones say? Simeon, Anna and Jesus, they all teach us that life is best lived with the end in mind. "There was a woman named Cheri who...." What will people say about me? There was a man named Larry or Bob, Gary or John, Ken, Jim or George who.... What will people say about him. There was a woman named Lorrie...or Jodi...or Debbie, Ann...or Esther, Katie, Carol or Traci. What will our legacies be? If God brought something to your mind just now; there's still time to write that legacy into our living. Jesus' was born, lived, died and resurrected to write over our past, to pen a different future. We don't have to be defined by our past. There's still time to live God's blessed way and all

12/27/2020

people will see in us faithfulness, generosity, wisdom, patience, peacefulness, and unconditional love. I have some ideas of what I want my legacy to be, and it doesn't include being super particular, or loving coconut, or loving to wear dresses. How about you? What do you want to be said about you when you're gone? And, how will you live your life so that the legacy you leave will be forever remembered, like Simeon and Anna? A legacy that gives God glory?

On this last Sunday of December 2020; this true story bears repeating. Did you know Alfred Nobel was a Swedish scientist who was best known for developing dynamite. He developed dynamite as an explosive to be used in mining tool, as well as in war. He wrote, "My dynamite will sooner lead to peace than a thousand world conventions. As soon as men find that in one instant, whole armies can be utterly destroyed, they will abide by golden peace." But then a very interesting thing happened; a Paris newspaper made a huge error; the paper erroneously printed Nobel's obituary seven years before he died. In it, Nobel was described as "the inventor of dynamite, a substance which led to the deaths of thousands, including his own brother." Nobel read it and was horrified. That moment was a turning point for Nobel. Alfred Nobel made a life-changing decision. Nobel would re-write his legacy. He revised his will so that when he died, the bulk of his massive estate was placed in trust to award prizes each year to leaders in the areas of science, chemistry, medicine, literature. **His most notable award would be the Nobel Prize for Peace.** I don't know about you but I've never been much for New Year's resolutions; they never seem to last much beyond January for me. But maybe the beginning of a New Year is a good time to think about something larger than a resolution. Maybe it's time to consider what kind of name, what kind of memories, and what contributions we'll leave behind when our time on this earth is done. What do you want people to write about you, to think about you, to say about you after you're gone? There's still time. Like Simeon and Anna allow God's Holy Spirit to inspire your life, search for Jesus and don't be satisfied until you meet him face to face. Open your heart to God's love. Make a New Year's resolution to **pray more.** Talk to Jesus,

12/27/2020

he will hear you, and answer you! Ask Jesus to save you and forgive you of every past mistake. Decide to put Jesus first. Jesus will give you peace and the depression and darkness you feel will begin to disappear. **Listen and let Jesus show you the truth.** Spend time with Jesus. Tell him your every fear. Believe, the time has come. Leave your way for His! If you haven't already been, be baptized. Commit to serve Jesus through the missions and ministries of the church. If you're not a member and would like to join the church contact me. You'll be changed. Jesus will grab your heart and never let go. Jesus will re-create the way you're remembered. This New Year, 2021 I pray God grants us all the days and the ways to live our lives that will touch people with God's love for generations to come. Let's end this year 2020 and prepare to begin a New Year 2021 by joining our hearts and voices in the Litany of Confession you see printed on the screen.

### **Litany of Confession**

Pastor: I believe that we have failed to see Christ and...

**Congregation: I believe that we can wake up and serve Him by serving others.**

Pastor: I believe that we have waited for someone else to rescue us and...

**Congregation: I believe that we can be the change we want to see.**

Pastor: I believe that we have hidden the light for far too long and...

**Congregation: I believe that the light can shine whenever we open ourselves to be Christ's presence in the world.**

*Pastor and Congregation: We believe, even when we are discouraged. We believe, that when we are discouraged, raising our voices for justice will offer more hope, more love, more joy, more peace and more light. AMEN*

May 2021 be the year we see Jesus Christ face to face. Amen

### **The Invitation to Give Our Gifts & Tithes**

Today, like every Sunday is an opportunity to advance the cause of Christ. Every Sunday we advance God's kingdom beyond the walls of

12/27/2020

our homes, our church, and our community in the giving our gifts and tithes. In the spirit of growing God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven; we offer our gifts out of gratitude to God for all God's blessings in 2020. We give with the hope that our Savior will transform and redeem US to be hope for our community and our world! You're invited to send your difference-making gifts to the church or go online on the church's website and use our secure PayPal giving option. Now, let's pray to thank God for this giving opportunity as we dedicate our gifts to the work of Ottawa First United Methodist Church in prayer.

### **The Prayer of Dedication**

God of hope and joy, the gifts we offer to you pale when our minds try to grasp all we have been given in this past year: wholeness in our woundedness, hope in our despair, peace in our turmoil, forgiveness in our rebellion. Like Simeon, our eyes have seen your salvation, and you give us light in our darkness. Help us embrace your extravagant generosity as we give ourselves to others. In our Savior's holy name, we pray. Amen

**Closing Song**      "He Is Born"

#228

### **Benediction & Sending Forth**

Believe this! The time has come!

The New Year 2021 approaches.

Resolve to search for your Lord and Savior face to face.

Be forever changed!

His light shines in US. Now go and be God's love and light to the Ottawa Community.

**Music After Worship**

Sarah Sharp, Musician