

"At Last.....A Dream Comes True!"

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Luke 2:21-40

Here we gather on the first day of 2012 and I have a hunch some of you have made New Year's resolutions. It is certainly the time of the year to do so....we've said good-bye to the old year 2011 and are saying hello to the New Year 2012. *Why not give thought to some of the changes we would like to make during the coming year?*

The US Government has compiled a list of New Year's ***resolutions*** that make the resolutions hit parade every year:

- Drink less alcohol
- Eat healthy foods
- Get a better education
- Get a better job
- Lose weight
- Manage debt
- Manage stress
- Quit smoking
- Save money
- Volunteer to help others
- Reduce, reuse or recycle
- Take a trip

For those of you who make New Year's resolutions, how does this list compare to your list?

Each year I enjoy taking time to write out ***goals***.....I don't call them resolutions....in the following categories: *Maintaining and Improving House and Vehicles, Caring for My Health, Financial Planning, Enjoying Life Outside of the Church, and my Professional goals* for my ministry here at Fairmont. Throughout the year, I enjoy checking off my goals as they are accomplished.

But the New Year's is also a wonderful time to lift our vision higher than mere resolutions and goals....those things that we can accomplish through our own wisdom and talent. The New Year is a perfect time to dream the *dreams* that are God inspired and can be realized only by the hand and grace of God.

A New Year's blessing for us: *May God give us dreams and grant the fulfillment of those dreams in God's good and perfect timing and may we have the good sense to recognize God's dreams as God gives them!*

Our New Year's Day Gospel reading centers in a man and woman who had prayed and dreamed God's dreams for years and who had the good sense to recognize God's dreams as God gave them. Listen to the beautiful story of *Simeon* and *Anna*. (Luke 2:21-40)

"After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the

temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

Mary's baby was circumcised on the 8th day and the baby was named Jesus according to Gabriel's message. After Mary's forty days of purification following Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple for the rite of consecrating Jesus as *"holy unto the Lord."*

It was during this visit to the temple that, at last, Simeon's dream came true. At some point in his life, God confirmed to Simeon that he would not die until he laid eyes on the "Lord's Messiah." Simeon is described as *"righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him."* I take this to mean that Simeon was not only morally upright in God's eyes but he practiced the faith through regular prayer, worship and service. In addition he kept his eyes open for the unseen reality of God's presence and lived expectantly that he would witness and experience the power and work of God's Holy Spirit in his everyday life. Simeon was *"righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him."* Quite a nice description!

You've heard people say, *"There is a reason for everything?"* Well, Simeon was a man who practiced the presence of God and followed the quiet nudging of his heart. There were a few people in Simeon's day and in our day, as well, known as *"the Quiet in the Land"* as Barclay describes them. These are the faithful who practice a life of prayer and quiet watchfulness. They will never be identified as super-stars and they won't stand out in a crowd because they are quiet content with a quiet, contemplative life that seeks, above all, to be in tune with the heart of God. Simeon was such a person and one day he sensed that God was saying he needed to make his way to the temple....so he went. Just as he arrived, Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus into the temple to be consecrated for God's work!

Can't you picture this faithful, devout man taking baby Jesus into his arms and bursting into a song of praise? In fact, the Church now calls Simeon's Song of Praise the *Nunc dimittis* which is formed from the opening words of the Latin Vulgate Bible (nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine..."Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord"), "***Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.***"

Awe, at last Simeon's dream comes true and he acknowledges that he can now die in peace knowing that he has seen God's salvation. Simeon had never ceased to believe or give up hope that he would see God's salvation. Simeon's Canticle of Praise is a wonderful reminder to us that devotion to God opens our eyes to God's salvation. I don't know if Simeon was expecting to see God's salvation in the form of a baby but Simeon immediately recognized Jesus as God's salvation, I believe because Simeon was faithfully tuned in to God.

That same day Jesus was seen by Anna who is described as a prophet, a widow and at least 84 years old. Anna is also one of "*the Quiet in the Land*" who, without fanfare, "***never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.***" When she saw Jesus, at last, her dreams also came true and she knew she was in the presence of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Like Simeon, she too, broke into praise and prophecy about Jesus who will bring redemption to all who seek God!

*So what do Simeon and Anna have to say to us on this first day of the New Year? I think Simeon and Anna would say to us, "you might have your plans, resolutions, and goals but if they aren't aligned with God's hopes and dreams for you individually and corporately you will be barking up the wrong tree!" I think Anna and Simeon would tell us, "Be faithful in the little things like prayer, worship, Bible reading, quiet time before the Lord, serving others and the big things will take care of themselves." I think Simeon and Anna would remind us to, "keep your eyes open to the serendipitous surprises of God which are present every day because you never know when the salvation of God is right in front of you just waiting to be received." I think Anna and Simeon would tell us to hearken back to Isaiah and believe the good prophet's wisdom, "***...those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.***" Wait for the Lord and live God's dreams and you will have a blessed 2012!*