

The title for today's message is: **Destiny**

Luke said: ***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.***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas 2017 is fading as quickly as it came. Yet, it lives in our memories, it lives as we see anew what this Christ child means for us.

Yes, in the hearts and minds of Christians around the world, the Christmas spirit, the birth of Jesus lives on and into eternity.

True, the radio stations, which have been playing Christmas music since early November, have switched to their normal fare.

That's right, the commercial Christmas celebrations are over, you can now relax, and take it easy.

Not so, there's all those Christmas decorations, you know the Christmas tree, the outside lights and decorations we have on tables, counters and in the windows. Yes, the Christmas holiday is over. But the extra work begins.

Now don't fear, there is good news, the good news is that Christmas doesn't end December 25th. No, there's more.

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But the story doesn't end there, no there's the story of two elderly people, Simeon and Anna. A huge story in the birth of the baby Jesus.

Now before we go there, today our attention has turned to New Years celebrations and thoughts about what the New Year might bring.

Mary and Joseph were faced with a similar situation. The shepherds had to get back to their flocks. And the angels had other angelic duties to do.

And like most spiritual experiences, the warm glow of that magnificent night when Jesus was born is now cooling down.

The truth is there were religious rituals to be observed, not to mention the long trip back to Nazareth.

Now according to Luke, Mary and Joseph go to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the laws requirements of offering a sacrifice for their first born.

Luke notes that they offered the least expensive offering possible, not because they were cheap, but because they were very poor.

Luke wanted to emphasize the humble begins of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

While in the temple, Mary, Joseph and Jesus, encounter two prophets: Simeon and Anna. Both are old.

Simeon was at the age when death could be expected at any time, and Anna was eighty-four years old.

They had been waiting for the Messiah and the redemption of Israel all of their lives, truly a long time.

The Holy Spirit, through Luke, wants to highlight several truths to the readers of this gospel.

First, that Jesus was indeed in God's plan, pointing out that Jesus' birth had been prophesized hundreds of years before the actual event.

And that the sovereign Lord was now moving to carry out his will. Second, to remind all people that God is faithful and keeps all of his promises, therefore God is to be loved and trusted.

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And third, the fact that many times God's promises are a long time in coming making it necessary for all God's people to wait for Him to fulfill His promises.

This was especially important for the people to whom Luke was writing his gospel.

His readers were experiencing persecution at the hands of the Romans, and trying to understand why Jesus didn't return shortly after his death, as some of his words seem to indicate he would.

Look, these are powerful messages for us to hear this morning, yet there are still more lessons contained in this story.

Many people assume that Jesus had all of his wisdom, understanding and knowledge from the day He was born.

Jesus was an “old soul” in a sense, spiritually and mentally mature, waiting for his body to catch up so that he could carry out his mission.

Though this may be a common belief, it is not supported by Scripture. Joseph and Mary had been brought up to observe the Jewish faith and to live by its commandments and carry out its rituals.

They were intent on following what they had been taught as they began life as a couple.

As people of faith Joseph and Mary wanted to bring up Jesus in the faith, in fact.

There are some who believe that Mary dedicated Jesus to the Lord in a similar way to Hannah, Samuel’s mother.

Hannah brought Samuel to the temple and then released Samuel to the priests to be raised by them so that he could serve the Lord.

Now, Jesus wasn’t raised in the Jerusalem temple, but he probably did receive special training. Jesus was taught theology.

He had to memorize Scripture. He probably was “forced” to go to religious feasts and observe religious rituals.

The Holy Spirit didn’t just pour the knowledge of the universe into his head. Jesus had to study and learn just like everyone else.

The work of his human teachers, combined with the movement of the Holy Spirit equipped Jesus for his demanding ministry.

Here, Joseph and Mary show us how important it is for children to be raised in the church.

It is important that they learn, attend worship, and serve in age appropriate ways.

When we say that the primary calling of all adults is to share their faith with the children and nurture the faith of the children we mean it.

Even though the angels' message was short lived, the events of that first Christmas Day would be cherished by Mary her whole life.

Just how important was Simeon and Anna, well Simeon and Anna served as encouragers if you will, to Joseph and Mary.

Look, Joseph and Mary's path was not easy. They had already suffered and endured a lot in order to follow God's calling.

And the road ahead of them wouldn't be any easier either. Mary and Joseph needed the support and encouragement of others in order to carry out their mission.

Certainly Mary and Joseph's need is reflective of our own need. It has been said that it is impossible to be a Christian.

Certainly we need the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but we also need the fellowship, support and encouragement of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's why our Lord encouraged fellowship with fellow believers. Now, in order to keep the light of Christmas burning bright in our lives and in the lives of our children.

It's vital that we live out our faith in the fellowship of other Christians, who will love us, support us, and encourage us.

In order to carry out mission and ministry that we have been called to, and we do this as we wait patiently for the return of the Lord.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.