

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 2018 is quickly fading. Yet, it lives on in our memories, it lives as we see anew what this Christ child means for all of us.

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

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

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

The food has been all baked, all the presents are unwrapped, yes, the Christmas holiday is over.

Yet there's bad news isn't there? That's right, the clean up job begins. The Christmas decorations need to be put away, the trees hauled outside to be picked up.

There are piles of wrapping paper to be throw away, and there are all those added pounds to be lost, because you ate such good food during the Christmas holidays.

Then there's those gifts that have to be returned, because they didn't fit right, or weren't the right color.

And worst of all, you find that even though you were trying to be careful, you somehow over-spent and now you wonder how am I going to pay it off.

But wait there's good news, Christmas doesn't end December 25th. No, there's more much more.

Look, there's a part of Christmas that isn't told much today. It's a part of Christmas that you might say, seals the deal.

That is the deal about confirming that the child born of Mary is indeed Jesus, yes, the one who was to come, the promised Messiah.

It's also the story of two elderly people, Simeon and Anna. A story I just love, its not a short story, but a huge story about the birth of baby Jesus.

But before we get to that, the reality of today is that our attention has turned to the New Years celebrations. and what the New Year will 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.

Like most spiritual experiences, the warm glow of that magnificent night when Jesus was born was now cooling, or was it?

There were religious rituals that still needed to be observed, and that long trip back to Nazareth.

Now according to our text this morning we catch Mary and Joseph as they begin their journey home and a new life as a family of three.

Now in this story, we see how they lived in the reality that the Word had been made flesh, and yes, dwelt among them.

The Word made flesh told them how to live so that the truth of Christmas becomes more than a dim memory in the days and months ahead of them.

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

Luke notes that they offered the least of the permitted sacrifices allowed. Not because they were cheap people, but because they were very poor.

Luke wanted to emphasize the humble beginnings of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the promised Messiah.

Now while in the temple, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, encounter two prophets: Simeon and Anna. Both quite old.

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

They had been waiting for the Messiah and the redemption of Israel all of their lives.

By way of Luks gospel we learn that the Holy Spirit wants to highlight several truths to the readers of his gospel.

First of all, Jesus was indeed God's promised Messiah, and the fact that Jesus had been prophesized hundreds of years before.

And that the sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ was now moving to carry out His Father's will.

Second, Luke want's to remind all people that God is faithful and keeps all of His promises made to us, past, present and in the future.

And third, the fact that many times God's promises are a long time in coming and it is necessary for all God's people to have patients.

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 they were trying to understand why.

They couldn't understand why Jesus didn't return shortly after his death, as some of his words seem to indicate He would.

Look, it's indeed true that these are powerful words for us to hear this morning. Yet there are still more lessons here contained in this story.

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

That 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 were growing up and as they began life as a couple.

And as people of faith, they wanted to bring up Jesus in the faith. In fact some believe Mary dedicated Jesus in a similar way as Hannah did Samuel.

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

Now the scriptures do not say that Jesus was raised in the Jerusalem temple, but probably did receive special training. He was taught theology.

He had to memorize Scripture. He probably was made 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 certainly 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 to come.

Joseph and Mary show us how important it is for children to be raised in the church and to be around other children who were living in the faith as well.

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

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

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

Just how important was Simeon and Anna, well they served as encouragers to Joseph and Mary, as well as scripture fulfilled.

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 faithful 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 do, and we do this as we wait patiently for the return of our 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.