

The title for today's message is: **Finding Jesus after the Manger**

Luke said: **And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him (meaning Jesus) up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.**

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

There are certain things that we like to be predictable. We want water to come out of the faucet when we turn on the tap.

We want the lights to come on when we flip the switch. We want the car engine to start when we turn the ignition switch.

Even in this crazy age and time we want certain things to be boringly conventional. We want our paychecks to be there on time.

We want no unexpected expenses. No, no there are just certain things that are just fine the way they are, no surprises please.

Maybe that is what makes Christmas such a lovely event for so many people.

Maybe part of what makes our celebration of Christmas so meaningful is that it is easy to find Jesus on that holy day.

We expect for Him to be in the stable, lying in a manger. And Christmas never disappoints because we always find our Savior "away in a manger," "in a lowly cradle," "on Mary's lap sleeping," with the oxen nearby.

It's comforting to know that Jesus is just right there for us. We want the Baby Jesus right there in the manger where He can, 'look cute, remain helpless, not challenging us to much.

In short with Jesus in the manger, we can have our cake and eat it too. We can have a predictable, little, cute, helpless Savior.

One Who won't push us too very hard. Let's consider God's movement for just a bit.

You see, God didn't permit the Gospel writers to dwell on the manger scene for very long at all.

Among all four Gospel writers, relatively little time is devoted to the stable and manger.

As important as it was, announced by angels as it was and accompanied by wondrous signs as it was.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John invested just a small amount of ink on the topic. In fact Matthew devotes only one verse that speaks of Jesus' birth.

The rest of the verses in Matthew relate to the annunciation and the visit of the Magi. Luke devotes 20 verses.

Mark and John don't even speak of Jesus' birth directly. So you see, even the scriptures don't permit the Savior to remain in the stable very long.

Our Gospel lesson today starts out with Jesus at the ripe old age of 8 days. Just a short time after this, his mom and dad are already taking Him to the temple for worship.

There, they have an encounter with two aged servants of the living God. One is a temple priest named Simeon.

Now, Simeon was a pretty ordinary servant of God, someone we probably would have never heard of except for this encounter with the baby Jesus.

The Baby in the Manger that we heard of so much during the Christmas season was seen by Simeon as an altogether different person.

He wasn't just cute and adorable. This Baby that Simeon had so longed to see and hold in his arms is described by Simeon as: "the reason that many people in Israel will be condemned and many others will be saved.

He will be a sign that will expose the thoughts of those who reject Him" and to Mary, Simeon said that on account of Jesus, "A sword will pierce your heart."

These are words that speak of tumultuous change. Jesus came to change the world and to challenge you and me.

He came to save and change lives engrossed in sin. He came to permeate with God's aroma those whose souls were permeated with the world's stench.

Again this doesn't sound like the Baby Whom we met at the manger. Simeon knew what this little Child that he held in his arms had been called to do.

We read and many of us are familiar with Simeon's Song. Listen again to the words of Simeon: ***"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."***

Simeon's quest to see and hold the Baby Jesus had now been fulfilled. He had gotten to see and had been privileged to hold in his arms the Salvation of God for humanity.

It brought joy, peace, and hope to the old man. His eyes were able to see into heaven because they had seen Jesus.

His quest had ended. Yet not so for you and me, our quest to find Jesus continues to this very day. Sadly even today there are those who don't look for Jesus at all.

There are those who have no room or time for the Savior. But this is absolutely crazy. Not seeking God can only be destructive.

It's like a person refusing to breath, which results in death. Not seeking God is contrary to the very image that you and me were created to bear!

To think that we do not need God is the height of arrogance. The Psalmist said in chapter 10: ***"In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."***

Look we spend lots of time searching for something of which we're not quite sure of. We know that something seems to be lacking and a bit off.

We feel a longing inside us. There's an emptiness that just doesn't go away and nothing seems to make it go away.

You see, that longing can only be satisfied by God. The Bible tells us that we are created in God's image.

Another thing we can be sure of when on the quest for Jesus is the need to commune with God and to find rest in Him.

The Psalmist writes in chapter 63: ***O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you;***

Now does that sound like we need an encounter with God. Until that encounter happens nothing will satisfy us: not riches, prestige, power, nor possessions.

St. Augustine, one of the great thinkers of the Church, said that we cannot find rest until we find our rest in God.

If you don't know what's missing in your life; if you've been looking for something, let me tell you what it is: Your need, to fill a God-shaped hole in your very soul.

Do you think that God knows about this need that we have? Do you suppose that Christmas is how God gives our quest a face and a name, Jesus Christ?

Do you think that God gave us Christmas in order to give us a place to be found? The answer is yes! So where do we find Jesus after Christmas?

Where do we look for Jesus after the angels have stopped singing and gone back to heaven?

Where do we find him when the shepherds have returned to their fields? Where do we look for him when the holy Child of Bethlehem has vacated the stable and manger, Where do we look for him?

Let me point where to look. Let me point you to the cross. That's right, remember Jesus was murdered and brutalized for our transgressions.

And He was pierced for our inequities. Simeon told Mary that she would bear the pain of watching Jesus die, that a sword would pierce her.

And she did as she stood at the foot of the cross and watched Jesus finish the work that His Father in heaven sent Him to do.

That is why Jesus came: To die in our place, to purchase our forgiveness and to bear our punishment. But the story didn't end at the cross and grave.

He rose on the third day. You see He was more than a helpless infant. In the resurrection we see the rest of Jesus' persona:

Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Quite a change from the Baby in the Manger and the 8-day-old that Simeon saw in the temple.

My friends, Christ can still be found right here in his Temple among us. You can meet the very Christ that once lay in the manger the One Simeon held in his arms right here.

We find Jesus in his Word, in his holy Sacraments; Baptism the Lord's Table and in his forgiveness that we received.

Through these means of grace we certainly do find Jesus, yes the One born in a manger.

We too say as Simeon did: ***“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”***

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.