

Sermon: Seeing God in the Ordinary (Revised)
Text: Luke 2:22-40
Date: December 28, 2008
Place: Jesup First UMC

Sermon: Seeing God in the Ordinary
Text: Luke 2:22-40
Date: December 29, 2002
Place: Wrightsville First UMC

Two astronomers were gazing into the heavens through their telescope looking for a distant star, but it seemed to be missing. So the two men got out their charts and began to check their information. Just then, the sun came up over the horizon and the men looked up to see an amazing sunrise. One nudges the other and says, "God sure does know how to paint a beautiful picture." The man said, "God? Now wait a minute, you know that that is nothing more than the sun's light being refracted by the earth's atmosphere." The guys said, "Yea. I know that. In fact, I could even tell you what atmospheric gases cause the light to bend and produce certain colors. But when I see a sunrise like that, I can't help but see the hand of God." So, the man said, "Well, just tell me this, how can I see the same sunrise and not see the hand of God?" And his friend said, "Maybe you're just not looking the right way."

How is it that people can see and experience the same exact things but see it in two different ways? Here we are two days away from the New Year and some are looking forward to the New Year and others are dreading the New Year. Somebody told me this week: "The holidays aren't even over yet and I'm already 90 days ahead on my calories and about 90 days behind on my bills."

As we begin this New Year, we are reminded of the story of Simeon and Anna. When Jesus was 8 days old, Joseph and Mary took Him to the Temple in Jerusalem. The 8th day was the day of dedication, the day when male children were circumcised and dedicated to God. And as they entered the Temple that day, an old man named Simeon was there. Every day Simeon came to the Temple, looking for something special, anticipating the day when He would see the Messiah. And Simeon saw Mary and Joseph walking up with their baby boy and Simeon looked at the baby Jesus and saw the Messiah. He took the baby in his arms and said: "**Lord, now I can die in peace, because you have kept your promise and I have seen the Messiah.**"

And Luke tells us that at that very moment, an 84-year-old prophet named Anna, who lived within the Temple, saw what was going on and began to praise God and tell everybody she knew that she had seen the Christ.

How is it that people can see and experience the same exact things but see it in two different ways? Other people saw Mary and Joseph walking through the Temple with their baby boy that day. Other people must have come up to Mary and said, "Oh what a precious little boy." Somebody else must have said, "You know, he's such a sweet boy. I don't know who he reminds me of." Other people say a baby, but Simeon and Anna saw the Messiah. How is it that people can see and experience the same things but see it in

two different ways? And what can we learn from Anna and Simeon that will help us see the Lord.

1ST SIMEON HELD ON TO THE PROMISE OF GOD.

Simeon knew the truths of God's Word. Luke tells us that was "*a righteous man ... very devout ... and filled with the Holy Spirit.*" He knew that God had promised to send a Messiah who would rescue His people. And not only that, Luke tells us: "*And the Holy Spirit has revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*"

Can you imagine what it was like to be Simeon? He knew what the promises of God were and yet, day after day and year after year, no Messiah. Did Simeon ever feel like giving up? Maybe, but He held on to the promises of God.

God's Word is filled with promises for you and me. God tells us: "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" He says: "*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse and I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you a blessing that you will not be able to take in.*" He says: "*Be ye faithful even unto death and I will give to you a crown of life.*" He says: "*Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of a man what the Father has prepared for those who trust in Him.*" These are God's promises and brothers and sisters, if God makes a promise, you can stake your life on it because sooner or later it will happen. Hold on to the promises of God and you like Anna and Simeon will see the Christ.

2ND SIMEON AND ANNA SAW WITH EYES OF FAITH.

Many people saw Mary and Joseph and their baby boy, but only Simeon and Anna saw the Christ. Why? Because they saw through eyes of faith.

You see, most people of Simeon and Anna's day expected to see the Messiah in the extraordinary. They expected to see the Messiah in the earthquake or in the miracles. They expected the Messiah to ride into town on a white horse and announce the overthrow of the Roman government. But Simeon and Anna saw the Messiah in the ordinary face of an ordinary baby.

There's a lesson here for you and me. You know, many times you and I expect to encounter Christ in the extraordinary events of our lives – in a Christmas Eve Service or an Easter Celebration, in a New Year's Eve Watch Night Service or in the baptism of a baby – and believe me, He is present at those special times, but many times – in fact, most times – Jesus comes to us in the ordinary events of our lives and we can only see Him through eyes of faith. So keep looking for Jesus and chances are that you

will find Him – like Simeon and Anna – in the ordinary events of your life. He's there if only you and I are looking the right way – through eyes of faith.

3RD SIMEON AND ANNA LIVED CONSECRATED LIVES.

Luke tells us that Anna was a prophet who lived at the Temple, “worshiping God with fasting and prayer.” And Simeon was “a righteous man, very devout and filled with the Holy Spirit.” You see, God wasn't a passing thought in the lives of Simeon and Anna; He was the very core of their existence. Their lives centered around worshiping and serving God. Is it any wonder that God would choose people like Simeon and Anna to reveal His Son to?

Years ago, author J.C. Ryle wrote: “A zealous man in religion is pre-eminently a man of one thing ... He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, or whether he dies – whether he has health or whether he has sickness – whether he is rich or whether he is poor ... for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all.”

Simeon and Anna fit that description perfectly. They were zealous for God. They cared for one thing, lived for one thing – to please God.

We could learn from their example. You see, there are many things that demand our attention. We have careers to build; families to raise; school assignments to do, but in the midst of it all, we are called upon to live consecrated lives – lives set apart by God as holy and righteous children of God.

Brothers and sisters, you and I will see God working in our lives if we – like Simeon and Anna – will live consecrated lives.

You know, there's something special about a New Year. Every year about this time, people go out and buy new calendars and they take the old 2002 calendar down and throw it in the garbage and put up a new calendar for 2003. And we stay up into the wee hours of the night on New Year's Eve to ring in the New Year, because there's a part of us that believes and hopes that things will be better in 2003 than they were in 2002. And some of us even make New Year's Resolutions – our goals for how we want our lives to be better next year than they were this year.

One pastor has made a list of resolutions for 2003 and he calls them: **“THE 7-UPS FOR THE NEW YEAR.”** Let me share them with you:

1. **Wake Up** – begin every day by thanking God for another day of life.
2. **Dress Up** – put on a smile. It helps your looks and your attitude.
3. **Shut-Up** – watch your tongue. Don't gossip. If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

4. **Stand-Up** – take a stand for what you believe. If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.
5. **Look-Up** – open your eyes to the Lord and what He is doing around you.
6. **Reach-Up** – spend quality time in prayer and Bible Study.
7. **Lift-Up** – be available so that God can use you to help those around you – serving, supporting, and sharing.

The New Year forces us to re-evaluate our priorities – to make sure our houses are in order. And so we gaze into 2003, but what do we see? Brothers and sisters, I contend that what we see depends on how we look at things.

Some look into 2003 with fear and anxiety, fearing failing health, shrinking finances, and continued isolation. Some look into 2003 with disappointment over broken promises and unfulfilled goals and dreams. But if we will look into 2003, holding onto the promises of God, looking through eyes of faith, living consecrated lives, then we will encounter Christ – like Simeon and Anna – even in the most ordinary events of our lives.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.