

Filled with Wisdom

First Congregational Church Branford
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After the baby Jesus was born,

²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴and 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. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷Guided 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, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” ³³And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then 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 opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶There 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, ³⁷then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸At 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. ³⁹When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The word of God for the people of God. Let us pray...

Happy New Year!

Ah, new beginnings – fresh start of the year, the past over and gone! We're *filled with hope* for good health for ourselves and those we love, hope for fulfilling relationships, hope for financial abundance, hope for all the good that is in store for the church through the calling of a settled Senior Minister, *and* hope for better national and world relations.

Mary and Joseph, like any new parents, are *filled with hope* for their child. Mary and Joseph have come to temple to present their child to the Lord. And, to make a sacrifice of turtledoves or pigeons.

And, who was there, but righteous, old Simeon, who the Holy Spirit had rested upon. The Holy Spirit had told Simeon he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Some believe Simeon was 200 years old! Ok, I'm just sayin'! When the holy family walked in, Simeon must've asked Mary if he could hold her son. It's doubtful she knew him, but sometimes we have an instinctual trust with people, don't we? It's a little like when I walk through the congregation with a baby we've baptized, and I settle on a couple of people to hold the child. I would trust any of you with one of our babies!, but it's true that something does cause me to zero in on one or two people. Simeon must've looked kind, with a smile on his face, and maybe even a tear in his eye - for he knew *this was the one*. He was here. After all of that waiting! This was the child to save all of Israel.

Simeon praised God, for his eyes had seen the Lord's salvation. Mary and Joseph stood in awe – that this man would know of what the angels had told them about the identity of their son. Simeon's warning that her child would be opposed, and that a sword would pierce *her* soul may have made poor Mary shudder. No mother wants to be told that her child will have enemies, and that she will also have pain... But, ya know, something tells me that Mary realized that worrying wouldn't do any good. She wouldn't worry about the future. She trusted God instead – he's the one who got her into this, and he would see her through. Oh, to have Mary's wisdom in the new year! *Trust the Lord*. Repeat that with me if you would... *Trust the Lord, Trust the Lord, Trust the Lord* - to *really* get that in your head, and soul for the new year.

Anna, the prophet was there. She was 84, and so in love with the Lord that she never left the temple! She, too, knew Jesus was the Messiah. She began praising God and telling everyone about the child God had sent to help the people.

Simeon and Anna show so much vitality in their older years. I think it's because they've stayed so close to God. That's what I see in so many of you after 80. It's the way you share about God. You just light up and I see it in your eyes and see the joy in your body. I've also seen people after 70 be turned on by new things in life, new hobbies. One great thing that seems to happen in our older years is we have more calm, and a patient appreciation of what has come about *in God's*

good time. Like Simeon - it came about in God's good time. It's too bad that calm and patience takes 70-80 years to cultivate! (I want it now, lol!)

We were very lucky to have Jim Boak to make coffee this morning, and I was oohing and ahing over him and he laughed and said, "that's one good thing about getting older, you don't need those strokes anymore." lol, I don't know about that! (Thank you, Jim.)

I remember my mother, at 82, had spoken sometime after she turned 70 of seeing life all come together, of having renewed energy, knowing what to overlook, understanding what matters, seeing why things were the way they were, and having such a deep appreciation for all of it – she saw it as God's gift of life granted to her.

I was really struck by the quote I found for today's bulletin - take a look at it.... *The older you get, the more quiet you become. Life humbles you so deeply as you age. You realize how much nonsense you've wasted time on.*

I wish politics worked like that!, that we could witness maturity and humility! And, quiet. It interests me that Democrats and Republicans both find the other side so immoral. I read commentary yesterday that "Democrats have become a party of a racially diverse, urban, coastal population, not as given to traditional religious practices and are accepting of immigration and changes in gender roles and sexual mores." "Republicans are increasingly the party of older, white, rural conservatives, suspicious of 'liberal elites' and feel threatened by immigrants and what they see as a decline of traditional morality and social order." Those are two widely different world-views, aren't they?! How can they ever hope to meet in the middle?

What would it take for our country to be *filled with wisdom* and experience bipartisanship? I think its in that bulletin quote - *get quiet*. What would it be like to for politicians to listen to God more than they listen to their constituents? To have the humility to be willing to lose? Because they put God first. What would it be like to be willing to listen to the other side more, to really listen to an opposing view? In our own lives, might there be a way to hold onto our standards, but have them be a little more... porous... less rigid... Sometimes when I come down hard on an issue I like to have an internal debate and debate it from the opposing view. What if everyone did that, walked in the other side's shoes? While you may never agree with them, maybe it would humanize the other. *Maybe we'd stop putting others down*. Politicians need to grow up, get quiet, listen more, and be more respectful of the other side, to not just shoot off that they're immoral. "You're immoral, no, you're immoral and on and on." It just sets up a fight! Maybe both parties could go to temple for a purification ceremony! Wouldn't that be something? Wouldn't that be great?

After Jesus' purification, he grew and became strong, *filled with wisdom*; and the favor of God was upon him. The next passage shows him in the Temple at 12 years old, sitting with teachers and *asking them questions*. That's how he grew in understanding, *by asking questions - by speaking with those who had wisdom that he didn't yet have*. *Jesus listened*, and by doing so, he developed a deeper understanding of scripture. And, that *quiet place* inside of him gave him the ability to look right into the human heart, to know what drives it, what wounds it, what makes it sing. Of course, we love him for that, knowing our heart, but we can each do that, too. We can see into each other's heart. (If we get quiet. If we listen.)

In the passage Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph. I thought it might be a wise way to end the old year and begin the new to bless one another. I'm going to quickly move through the congregation and bless the first person in each pew, and then pass it down. *May you always remember that you are special to God...*

I wonder what God may hope and dream for you in 2020.... ***May it be a year of deep blessing for you.*** The favor of the Lord is upon you. It really is. Amen.