

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 2:25–40

Sermon: “Manger to Temple”

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. Part of what makes Christmas so meaningful is that it is so easy to locate Jesus (and with him, God’s grace and salvation) on that holy day. We know exactly where to look. Our Savior is “away in a manger,” “in a lowly cradle,” “on Mary’s lap . . . sleeping,” “with the oxen standing by.”

But what about after Christmas, when the angels have “left . . . and gone into heaven” when the shepherds have “returned” to their fields when the holy Child of Bethlehem has vacated the stable and manger? The days and weeks following Christmas can leave us disoriented, confused, even depressed. To find Jesus, we travel with Mary and Joseph “from stable to temple.”

Jesus is indeed the place where God and man meet. The true, permanent Temple of God is brought to the temporary temple to be consecrated to his Father.

Even now, as a 40-day old infant, Jesus must “**be in [his] Father’s house**” (Luke 2:49), about his Father’s business. In the next week’s Gospel Luke will bring us back to the temple to “find” Jesus who at the age of twelve was right where he was supposed to be. Mary and Joseph could not find him because they were not looking in the right place.

Our Gospel for this morning is about Jesus being brought to the temple and Simeon and Anna’s response.

Led by the Spirit, Simeon knew where to find the Christ. He had waited for this day. We sing about it each Sunday with the words of the Nunc Dimittis; “O Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, for I have seen the glory of You redeeming grace. A light to lead the Gentiles unto Your holy hill.” Simeon, representing the old era ushers in the new day as he holds the Christ child in his arms. The temple, the sanctuary of the Lord, is the center of worship in the Old as well as the New Covenant.

Anna, too, knew where to look. She is also there in the temple this day.

“These two aged saints are Israel in miniature, and Israel at its best: devout, obedient, constant in prayer, led by the Holy Spirit, at home in the temple, longing and hoping for the fulfillment of God’s promises” (Craddock, p. 40). From stable to temple!

Now in these days after Christmas we, like Simeon and Anna, will find Jesus (and with him, God’s perfect grace and salvation) “in his temple” in our holy places of worship, our temporary temples where Christ, the permanent Temple, has deigned graciously to meet us through his holy Word and Sacraments. ***To your temple, Lord, I come, For it is my worship home. This earth has no better place, Here I see my Savior’s face.***

We still find Christ in his Temple through his means of grace. We find Christ in his Word, which we read here; which you read in your homes; which you carry with you in your memory, thoughts, and prayers. “The temple is the habitation of God; hence it signifies all places where God is present.

Thus, it also signifies Holy Scripture wherein one finds God as in his proper place, the statements of the prophets take their places warmly next to him, take him up in their arms, and say with great joy this is the man of whom we have spoken. Now our words have come to their end with peace and joy. And right there they begin to give the most beautiful testimonies: how this Christ is the Savior, the light, the consolation and glory of Israel and everything else that Simeon is saying and preaching. (Luther)

We find Christ in absolution and the Gospel throughout worship. In the Gospel we speak to each other in our homes and workplaces, all the promises contained in Simeon's song are perfectly and wonderfully fulfilled for us. We find Christ in his holy Sacraments. Through confession and absolution, we are strengthened in our baptismal unity with Christ, and are assured once again that "***he that believes and is baptized shall be saved.***"

In the Lord's Supper we find our Savior in a most concrete, specific, intimate way. We find him "incarnate" in bread and wine, and we partake of his very body and blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of all our sin. It is no coincidence that immediately after this sacred 'meeting' we sing Simeon's song.

In Christ we find; the consolation of Israel; God's salvation full and free; a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to God's people Israel. We worship Christ in his Temple by the power of his Spirit. And by the power of his Spirit, we embrace him (v 26). The essence of true worship is gladly to take what God so graciously gives. We gladly take the Christ Child into our arms today, embracing and holding fast his precious promises of life and forgiveness. In the hymn "To Your Temple, Lord, I Com" we sing: "***I through him am reconciled, I through him become your child. Abba, Father, give me grace In your courts your love to trace***" (LW 207:2).

By the power of his Spirit, we praise God. How God loves to hear our songs of praise and thanksgiving in response to his gift of salvation in Christ! ***“While your glorious praise is sung, Touch my lips, unloose my tongue, That my joyful soul may bless Christ the Lord, my Righteousness”*** (LW 207:3).

By the power of his Spirit, we pray to him. Imagine the many fervent prayers and pleadings which those two aged saints, Simeon and Anna, offered up over the years! So, too, we pray without ceasing: ***“While the prayers of saints ascend, God of love, to mine attend. Hear me, for your Spirit pleads; Hear, for Jesus intercedes”*** (LW 207:4).

By the power of his Spirit, we speak of him to others. Luther wrote, “Anna did not only thank God, but she also spoke of him to all who were awaiting the redemption. Faith and knowledge of Christ cannot remain silent. Faith breaks forth and testifies in order to help others and to share its light, as Psalm 116[:10] says: ‘I have believed, and so I also speak’” (Luther’s Works 52:143).

It will not be long before the Christmas decorations will be taken down. The beautiful Christmas carols will fade away until the next Christmas season. But their absence need not lead to confusion about where to look for God's grace and presence.

God is with us (Immanuel), incarnate in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is with us through his means of grace. He is here as he has promised to be wherever two or three of his people gather in his name, and where his word of forgiveness and life is proclaimed. He is the true, permanent Temple bringing the light of his salvation to our temporary temples. He is here for all who are searching. The Spirit leads us to the temple, where we embrace the Messiah, praise him, bring our needs before him, and bear witness of him to others.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

(Psalm 84)

Where do we find Jesus? Right here (hold up Bible) and here point to Sacrament and right here point to heart) and in our lives here at church and wherever we are and wherever we go as children of God. Merry Christmas and God bless!

Amen