

Scripture:

Luke 2 :22-40

“Prophecy fulfilled ----- New Covenant.”

January’s Song ----- by Ann Weems.

“There is a rumour on the streets
that Christmas is over.
Lights and ornaments are packed away,
trees dragged to the curb,
people back to business as usual.
We’re no longer in the party mood;
the humbugging is back in vogue.

This is January...
How can Christmas be over?!
The Child is just newborn,
the song of Peace and Goodwill
still rings in our ears.
The shepherds and sages still kneel
to this One who is born to us...
just born to us!

How can Christmas be over??
The story of the gospel is just beginning.
We who saw the Star
now live in its Light.
We who saw and heard
now believe.

Christmas is not over.
We’re just beginning
to follow this One
who calls us now to
Live in the Light of Love.
Christmas is not over.
It’s just the beginning
and this is January’s song!!”

Weems is on to something -----
 “How can Christmas be over??
 The story of the gospel is just beginning.”

“Christmas is not over.
 It’s just the beginning.”

The story of Jesus is just beginning.

We have been waiting patiently ---- very patiently.

We have been waiting and waiting and waiting --- longing through Advent.

And now we finally have something to celebrate --- and the celebration doesn’t just last one day --- Christmas ---- rather Christmas is more like a kick off to a new celebration.

All the patient waiting of Advent has finally resulted in celebration and fulfillment.

And in Luke’s Gospel reading today we have two people whose whole lives have been dedicated for this great moment of celebration and fulfillment.

Simeon and Anna have anticipated this moment for years.

In Simeon and Anna we have the poignant reminder that yes ---- those who wait patiently for God --- do eventually experience the fulfillment of God --- and find all the meaning they need in that fulfillment.

Picking it up at verse 25 from Luke’s Gospel today ---

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:
 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
 you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
 For my eyes have seen your salvation,
 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
 light for revelation to the Gentiles,
 and the glory of your people Israel.””

Simeon waited patiently --- day in day out.

Day in and day out he went to the temple as men and women and babies came for their presentation --- and for their purification.

And for years he went home not having seen God’s chosen one.

And yet he waited patiently ---- day in and day out --- year after year after year.

Until finally ----- fulfillment ---- he met the Christ child.

And it’s a similar kind of experience for Anna as well.

Picking it up at verse 36 from Luke’s Gospel today -----

“There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Day after day ---- indeed as verse 37 says --- Anna never even left the Temple.

Day after day she worshipped there ---- and she fasted ---- and she prayed --- -- and she too ---- like Simeon ----- like Israel as a whole ---- waited ---- and waited ---- and waited for God to act.

And then finally --- fulfillment.

The child who will redeem Israel is finally presented at the Temple --- and Anna --- like Simeon ----- is found waiting ---- ready ----- anticipating.

And so the story of Jesus turns another page ----- and we move from waiting to fulfillment.

And just as we saw in the first chapter ----- the birth chapter ---- here in this next chapter of the story of Jesus --- there is both fulfillment ---- it happened as Isaiah had prophesized ----- but there is also a twist ---- there are also signs of the new covenant.

In Jesus Christ there is fulfillment for sure.

But there is also something new and totally unforeseen when it comes to Christ as well ----- there is the New Covenant --- and new way of being that confused and upset people.

And following Jesus required flexibility and openness ----- a flexibility and openness --- a trust and a faith that that very few people had --- at least initially anyway.

So Christ ---- fulfillment ----- but fulfillment with a twist.

Fulfillment ----- Isaiah 7 ---- verse 14 --- “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

But then the twist ---- He was born in a stable in a manger --- hardly how most people though Immanuel ----- “God with us” --- the Anointed One --- the Saviour --- The Messiah would come --- in a feeding trough in a barn among animals and hay and dirt on the outskirts of town in the quiet of the night.

Fulfillment ---- Luke 7 verse 21 ----- just before our passage for today --- “On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.”

Done according to the Law of Moses.

And then from our passage today ---- fulfillment --- Simeon and Anna both experience that which God had promised them.

And again from the gospel today ----- fulfillment --- Mary and Joseph travel to the Temple for the purification rites required by the Levitical Laws.

But then twist --- something new and different --- a poor family's sacrifice -- -- "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" ----- instead of the usual lamb.

The lamb of God ----- is presented --- not with the usual sacrificial lamb --- but --- "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" ----- weren't not even told which one --- was it 2 doves or 2 pigeons --- we don't know.

But forget about the doves and pigeons for a minute ---- why not a lamb?

Why not a lamb for the Lamb of God ---- doesn't it seem fitting? ----- a lamb for the Lamb of God? ---- why not the usual accepted sacrifice?

Clearly this was intentional on God's part ---- fulfillment yes --- but fulfillment with a bit of a twist of the unexpected.

And it's fulfillment ---- but with a twist --- precisely because Jesus is the long awaited Messiah --- but He is a different kind of Messiah ---- He is an unexpected ---- New ---different --- kind of Messiah.

Yes ---- Simeon and Anna are there the day Jesus is presented at the Temple --- but after making their proclamations --- off they go and there is very little fanfare about the whole thing.

You would think that with the presentation at the Temple of the Anointed One ---- the Chosen One --- the long awaited Messiah and Saviour for the people of Israel --- their new King ----- there would have been some kind of acute awareness on the part of the Priests and elders and Temple officers.

Why wasn't there a complete halt to the operations --- and a sudden stop and pause and celebration --- a pulling out of all the stops ---- and another visit by the angels who came to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds --- why not a whole heavenly host of angels and jubilant celebration and Holy feast --- trumpets a blaring ---- dancing --- and so on ----- but no.

Fulfillment ----- yes --- but fulfillment with a twist ----- a New Covenant --- a New Way.

The New Covenant in Christ is far different than expected ----- and we see this right from the very beginning.

From humble birth --- to humble presentation at the Temple --- to humble childhood and so on --- all through His ministry ----- at the transfiguration --- in His death --- resurrection --- ascension --- things are always a bit different than expected.

His whole life is a kind of balancing act between prophecy fulfilled and a new way of doing things.

Jesus was all that was expected --- and at the same time --- He was all that was expected but in a completely different way than ever anticipated.

Think of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem just before His execution.

Celebratory ----- yes ---- it was a parade after all.

Celebratory yes ---- He does enter in riding on a beast of burden --- something He really hadn't ever done before --- He was usually walking or in a boat --- but here he's on a donkey.

But at the same time --- it's a kind of lack luster parade and celebration --- at the last minute they throw their coats down and wave branches --- - the dignitaries aren't even really there --- it's mostly just common folk who greet Him as he enters into Jerusalem --- no priests --- or elders --- or governors.

And in truth the parade is a kind of off to the side ----- a quiet humble parade that most people didn't even attend --- or know about in the first place.

Fulfillment yes ---- from Zechariah 9:9 --- "See your King comes to you --- gentle and riding on a donkey --- and on a colt --- the foal of a donkey."

But also a twist --- not many are there --- at least initially there isn't much fanfare ---- yes before long the whole city is stirred up by this odd and at the same time prophetic entrance --- but initially it's pretty quiet and low key.

Wouldn't you imagine huge fanfare as the Saviour of the world entered into the city hew as about to perform His most triumphant act in.

Fulfillment yes ----- Christ was the Anointed One --- the Messiah --- but not the kind of Messiah many had come to expect.

Yes Christ was a mighty conqueror --- mighty conqueror of sin and darkness --- but He wasn't the kind of mighty conqueror the people expected and wanted.

They expected and wanted a militant --- armed conqueror with swords horses --- armies and fire power --- a freedom fighter --- and freedom provider.

Yes fulfillment ---- Christ was a liberator ---- but not the kind of liberator many of the people anticipated or expected.

When Jesus is born Israel is occupied and run by the Romans --- when Jesus dies ---- Israel is still occupied and run by the Romans.

He wasn't the kind of liberator the people expected --- they wanted Israel to be free from Roman rule ---- they wanted Israel to crush the Romans ---- and bring them to their knees.

Isn't this what their new king would accomplish --- overthrowing the Romans and restoring freedom once again to God's chosen people?

But Jesus didn't do this --- at least not in the way they expected.

Fulfillment yes ----- Jesus was a King --- King of the Jews.

And freedom --- Jesus did ultimately free all people from any kind of human rule and oppression.

But it all happened differently than expected.

His throne was different --- a cross --- instead of a big chair.

His birth was different --- in a manger in a stable.

His presentation at the temple was different.

Step by step --- chapter by chapter --- event by event --- in the story of Jesus ---- there is a kind of tension between prophecy fulfilled ---- and New Covenant.

And so it remains today.

Jesus comes to us --- calls us to Him.

Acts in this world ---- reveals Himself.

Both in prophetically fulfilling ways --- and in unexpected ways.

Virtually every story of Jesus has an unexpected twist ---- and not just the miracles ---- but the day to day stuff as well ---- somewhere along the line virtually every event in the life of Christ --- has an unexpected twist.

“You have heard that it was said...” ---- Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount ----- and then He quickly follows it up with --- “But I say unto you...”

In other words --- here’s what has been said --- the wisdom of the elders and Rabbi’s --- and then here is what I have to say --- which is build on the wisdom of the elders but with a twist.

Anna and Simeon all the while recognizing that the arrival of the Messiah was fulfilling the prophecy---- were also anticipating the difference Jesus would make in bringing divine justice --- a New Covenant to Israel and indeed the whole of creation.

God always fulfills His prophecies ----- acting in ways consistent with previous examples of His grace --- but God also moves and reveals Himself in unknown --- unforeseen ----- and contemporary ways.

The challenge for us today --- is to remember that as Christ's church ----- as disciples of Jesus Christ ----- we are called to testify --- we are called to bear witness --- and we are called to interpret what God has done ----- just as Simeon and Anna waited for --- bore witness ----- and then interpreted the arrival of the Messiah.

And of course sometimes this can be challenging --- sometimes this can be extremely challenging --- but we must do it.

And for certain at times the interpretation part can be particularly challenging.

Listen to what Simeon had to say to Mary and Joseph about their son -----
 “Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

“Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ----- these are pretty tough words to say to a mother with her first child in hand --- even if she was aware about just who the baby would one day become.

Fulfillment ----- yes --- but also something else --- something new ---- a twist.

We musn't ever think we have Jesus figured out.

We musn't ever think we know or understand all of the Jesus story ---- and how and why and when --- it will come to its timely conclusion.

And --- we musn't ever domesticate the gospel ----- or domesticate Jesus.

The Jesus story is prophecy --- its prophecy fulfilled ---- its Old Covenant --- Old Testament ---- and it's New Covenant --- and New Testament ---- it's predictable and it's also totally unpredictable ---- and it's everything in between as well.

We are a part of the Jesus story and at the same time the Jesus story is far beyond us as well.

It's beautiful and it's challenging ----- it provides great meaning and at the same time it can be incredibly disorienting.

At its heart it's all about just how great God is.

And truly that is the refrain of Christmas --- and that is the refrain of Christians.

God's goodness.

Jesus ----- prophecy fulfilled for sure ----- but Jesus ----- New Covenant as well.

At Christmas --- in the season of Christmas ----- the 12 days of Christmas --- December 25th to January 5th ---- we celebrate a new life --- that of the baby destined for great and marvelous things.

And in the season of Christmas --- we also remember that this little baby ---- is all about a New Covenant --- and a new way of being --- and living.

Christmas isn't over just yet.

Christmas is really just the beginning of something new and wonderful and transformational.

It's prophecy fulfilled for sure --- but it's also something completely new.

New life --- new way of living ---- New Covenant in Jesus Christ.

The cradle points to the cross ----- the cradle leads to the cross ----- and the cross changes everything --- absolutely everything.

And so the journey continues --- from cradle to cross ---- and beyond.

Prophecy fulfilled ----- and New Covenant ---- the expected and the unexpected.

We musn't ever domesticate the gospel or domesticate Jesus ---- God is up to marvelous things in Christ ----- and the story continues.

Next week the Magi ---- the wise men join in the story of Jesus and offer their perspective.

Another chapter in the ongoing story of the little boy born in Bethlehem ----- who is forever bringing people together and changing lives.

And so the story continues...

Amen.