

MESSAGE - *Now What?*

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So how was your Christmas?

Everything we hoped and planned it would be?

Perhaps everything turned out well....or maybe it didn't.

Either way....despite all the trappings of the Christmas season, the commemoration of the birth of the Christ child has happened and now we, what, everything goes back to normal?

The most incredible story of all humankind has begun and do we just go back to what we were doing before?

Let's look at some of the others in the story:

- Angels proclaim and praise and return to heaven.
- Shepherds checked it out and glorified and praised God and returned to their flocks.
- Next week, when we hear the story of the magi, we learn that they too eventually make the long trek for home.

I'm quite sure their hearts are never the same. While they go back to doing what they were doing before, the daily task take on new meaning or they are accomplished with more joy and hope than ever before.

But for Mary and Joseph, nothing is ever the same again....they have a new life set before them, much like every set of brand new parents who realize that their sleep patterns and really everything about their lives are now changed.

Let's take a look at what they do next:

Luke 2: 21-33

²¹ 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. ²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male

is to be consecrated to the Lord"^[b]), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."^[c]

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They began their work of faithfully raising the child

In the same way every other Jewish child is raised....they move through the faithful rituals.....*much like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ brought Kash's today for baptism.*

Their child, Jesus – who becomes the new covenant – is faithfully given the sign of the old covenant through circumcision and given the name that the angel instructed before Jesus was conceived.

Then a month later, they go to the Temple for purification rites

According to the ancient law, after a child is born, both the child and mother are to go to the Temple and make an offering in order to be declared ritually clean once again in order to enter the Temple to worship.

This shows their faithfulness to God's plan.

As we think about "now what" after our Christmas holidays, this might give us an answer.

To be faithful to God's plan:

Jesus was born to fulfill God's plan to create a new reality and just as Mary and Joseph took the next faithful steps, we have steps to take as well.

We were just reminded of those steps in the baptism ritual:

To repent of our sin

To resist evil, injustice and oppression

To confess Jesus as Savior and Lord.

These questions aren't just for the baptism ritual, they are our next steps; our every-day steps in life. They are the "what's next" in being faithful to God's plans.

While they are in the midst of those faithful rituals, something else happens:

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> It had been

revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss<sup>[d]</sup> your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

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In the act of being faithful, Mary and Joseph are given the great gift of confirmation about the child.

I don't know about you, but there are times when clarity gets fuzzy....

Is this what I am supposed to be doing?

Did I imagine my call to ministry or make it up?

When routine sets in

When exhaustion comes

Am I right about this?

And after the wonderful story of Jesus' birth, a month later, after some sleepless nights, and the reality of a newborn sets in, could that all have grown dim for them? Could it have all seemed a bit much; did they have delusions of grandeur about this child?

Did I hear what the shepherds said right?

Did we understand everything right about this child?

Are we going down the right road?

Countless stories of people who get excited about a life in faith...experience a conversion. Accept grace. Receive pardon. Make commitments to live it out.

And then with time or hardship or skepticism, those mountaintop experiences can dim and that "God" experience feels a long way off and we can be left with "was it all just a dream?"

And if we talk ourselves into it, we can leave that whole "God" experience behind and go back to the way things were.

I'm not saying this is what Mary and Joseph were experiencing, but I do know that what happened in the Temple that day with Simeon must have been a real gift for them because they did have a long road ahead of them in raising this child. What they received that day was another confirmation of who their child is....from someone outside of themselves.

Simeon declared that Jesus is God's salvation

That everything they had heard from the angels and the shepherds were not of their imagination. It was real.

So what comes next for us?

We follow in Joseph and Mary's path

We take the next steps in faithfulness

And we look for those signs that remind that us all of this – this good news that comes in Jesus - is real.