

"Mary's Christmas" | Rev Craig Chapman | December 27, 2020

**Old Testament Reading** [Isa 61:10-62:3](#)

61<sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup> For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

62<sup>1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.

<sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.

<sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

**Epistle Reading** [Gal 4:4-7](#)

4<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

**Gospel Reading** [Luke 2:21-35](#)

2<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. <sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, <sup>28</sup> he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

<sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word;

<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen Your salvation

<sup>31</sup> that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

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

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about Him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

**Introduction**

In the year to come, what are we longing for? In this Christmas season we longed for the enjoyment of being with family. But, what about Mary; how was Mary's Christmas? Two points: (1) Jesus is what we long for, but (2) He is not what we expect.

**Background**

1. Jesus is what we long for.

- a. In [Derek Thompson's](#) article "[We're Never Going Back to the 1950s.](#)" he longs for the physical community in our culture that's being lost to Civic Fragmentation. Now, almost all the spaces which support our physical community has gone dark (e.g., restaurants, gyms and theaters). Thompson describes the problem: A longing for community; but he offers no solution.
- b. So, where does this longing for community come from? It comes from God; because community is what God designed us for. Think about it: What is it which has always been? The Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Perfect Community. Because we are made in His image, our design makes us long for community. He made us for community with Him and with one another (vertically and horizontally).
- c. Simeon also longed for community (Luke 2:30-32). Simeon longed for God's promised restoration of the vertical and horizontal community between God and man and between all peoples, Jews and Gentiles. It's this baby Jesus who is God's salvation, the promised Messiah, come to fulfill that for which every human heart longs. Jesus brings the transforming power and presence humanity needs to restore people to community and peace with our Creator and with one another.
- d. Mary, this is your child: Mary's Christmas; so, Mary, how is your Christmas?

2. He is not what we expect.

- a. In Luke 2:33 Simeon relates that Mary and Joseph marveled at what was said about their child; and went on to show Mary (and us) that although Jesus brings what we long for, Jesus is not what we looked for (what we expected). Simeon goes from the good news that Jesus saves us to the bad news that He also divides us (Luke 2:34-35): He is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign of opposition; so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Simeon moves from Jesus being meek and mild to the Jesus of [Rev 19:13](#) (clothed in a robe dipped in blood). Simeon warns that Jesus' salvation comes with and by way of pain: He'll restore community through opposition between people and within people.
  - (1) **Opposition between people:** Jesus' audacious claims about Himself divide people; He's not merely a moral sage but a God in the flesh and He owns us. Jesus calls all to choose: resist or relinquish; He'll make you fall (following your own glory) or rise (enveloped in His Glory). He claims to be Life and offers it freely to anyone who admits their need for Him: e.g., Rich Young Ruler [Mark 10:17-31](#)). Jesus polarizes as He gathers a community restored; His Church.
  - (2) **Opposition within people:** Who Jesus claims to be brings opposition between people and who He cares about brings opposition within people, in our hearts
    - E.g., [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's](#) comment on the human condition: the line separating good and evil passes not through States nor between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart.
    - E.g., [J C Ryle:](#) When we become Christians, a new piece comes into our lives; and a new conflict: like antiseptic on a wound: the sting brings healing and peace. The only way to get Christ's Peace is to receive the sting of repentance.
- b. When we turn from sin and trust in Christ's salvation, God treats us like we have accomplished all Jesus has and we have suffered as Jesus has. Then God clothes us with garments of salvation (Isa 61:10); and we are adopted as God's sons (Gal 4:5). To receive such peace and community we must pass through repentance, which requires us to admit we have selfish, sinful hearts and we can't change them. We need another person to forgive us and to change us; our only hope is God's Mercy. He offers the hope of His Mercy freely to all, non-Christians and Christians.
- c. [Martin Luther](#) said a Christian's life is one of repentance. When we first come to Christ, we receive His Peace; the rest of our lives is a matter of living in that Peace and that is a battle: Jesus is determined to uproot every small corner of evil in us. He uses His sword (Luke 2:35), surgically, to bring our repentance just where our hearts need circumcision, for wholeness and Christ-likeness. Through a sword, pain and opposition, Jesus brings us Peace and community. That's Mary's Christmas.
- d. In light of Simeon's full message to Mary, we followers of Christ can live clear-eyed, knowing that trouble, suffering, difficulties, opposition are a part of Jesus' gathering His Church and bringing His Kingdom to come. We know God will provide for us. He will use any of our trials to refine us to reflect Him; we need not despair.

**Discuss**

1. How do (a) secularists and (b) Christians answer “What has always been?” (§1b)
2. In what way did Simeon long for community? Do we also long for community? (§1c)
3. Why is Jesus not what we expected? (§2a) Because He divides us? (Luke 2:34-35)
4. How is the hope of Christ’s salvation offered freely, even to non-Christians? (§2b)
5. How is the matter of living in Christ’s Peace a battle? (§2c)
6. Does God’s incarnational design for us involve community and showing up (Conc/App)

**Conclusion/Application**

•Two weeks ago, Tim cited an annual Gallup survey noting that those who regularly attend church describe themselves as having better mental health than any other group surveyed. This is one thing our regular experience of community in the church does for us. Thank God for the technology which allows our members who are most at-risk to the covid pandemic to continue to participate in our church community worship. As we approach 2021, praise God that a vaccine is coming so that more and more we will be able to return to in-person worship. So that our temporary covid-accommodations don’t become a regular habit of perceived convenience.

•Our younger members may not know that AT&T used to sell long-distance phone service by the minute; to encourage its use its advertising slogan was “Long-distance, the next best thing to being there.” The same goes for virtual worship. Second best is not God’s best. Because the Incarnate One has made us for incarnate community.

•Recently a close friend has been part of extensive special training to better understand and help those who struggle with addiction and substance abuse. One insight she shared with Craig from her training was: “The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it’s community.” This applies to our call for community this morning. Because, likewise, the remedy for our sin is not only abstinence from it, its community; the community of faith in Christ’s Church, with Him and with one another, helping each other bear our burdens, encouraging each other to love and good deeds.

•So as we progress into 2021, may the temporary accommodations of this pandemic fix in us a practiced delight in God’s incarnational design of us, His image bearers, and the importance of community for us where we keep showing up. Where the community bar (altar table) is open to us every Sunday with a truly divine signature drink and chef’s special for real and abiding life and hope.