

Can you believe this is the last weekend of 2019?! It seems like this year has flown by. This week we usher in the new year, and with it, a time to think about our life leading up to this point. A chance for self examination, to think about areas we're proud of and areas we need to improve upon. Welcome to Heritage today, my name is Dustyn, I'm one of the pastors here at Heritage. This Christmas season has been a blast for our family. Having a two year old at home, seeing everything basically for the first time makes the season all the more special.

Through the month of December we've been working through a **series called witness**. We've followed multiple different witnesses to the birth of Christ over the last several weeks culminating in Mary on Christmas Eve. I wanted to close out the series with an incredible story about the birth of Jesus that doesn't get the same focus as the beautiful manger scene we all know and love. But I'll get to that story in a moment!

I know that Christmas so often brings up a lot of emotions. For some it's just sheer joy. Like a two year old, you're amped for this time of year. Others of us, it's such a tremendously difficult time of year. Loneliness is high.

Remembrances of loved ones lost fill our mind. Winter depression kicks in and the realization that another year is finished. Are you searching for something? Have you been waiting for relief? Join us starting next week in our new **series called H2O** as we discuss how there is living water that brings relief. One of our lead pastors, Andy, has put together an incredible slate for January, including messages from Joel Wharton our Care Pastor as well as bringing in one of my former professors at Ashland Seminary, Terry Wardle. Terry and his books have been instrumental in speaking into Heritage's own journey in our healing ministries. We can't wait to worship together and learn about this healing water as we welcome in 2020.

I don't mean to brag, but I was a really good baby. If a baby could be a professional baby, I probably would have been. Now obviously I grew out of that. I can't be a baby now, that would be weird. But back when I was like two months old, I was a really good baby. I did all the normal baby things, like crying, eating, sleeping, and I did them really well. Actually (pause)...In some ways I was a professional baby.

I promise, I'm not making this up. People actually paid me, to be a baby. Now I know that sounds weird. No, I didn't make it onto the Gerber baby food jar. I wasn't the spokesmodel for Pampers. The story goes though, that when I was little people would stop my parents, my aunts and uncles, or anyone else that I was with, in stores, at restaurants, on the sidewalk, and they would talk about what a great baby I was. And then, they would give me money. This wasn't an isolated event, it happened multiple times. To the point my parents opened a savings account for me with this money. It wasn't like people were handing out Benjamins, but they would give them a few bucks here and there, sometimes five or even ten bucks, just because I was a baby, a really good baby, maybe I was a good looking baby.... I don't know.

I was reflecting on this weird phenomenon recently and asked my parents about it this past week. Because, in my 38 years of existence I have never seen a baby and been compelled to give it money. And let me say, I've seen some incredibly good looking babies. Never once did my hand reach for my wallet to start making it rain on that baby and its parents.

So I thought today, I would unveil a picture of baby Dustyn for you all. Now before it comes on the screen, I want to pause and give you all a moment. We already took the offering, so this isn't arm twisting to make you give more to the church. But before you see this baby photo of me, you may need to prepare yourself. Make sure your wallet and purse are out of reach. I only ask that if you do feel compelled to give to the baby make sure you pelt the stage

with paper money and checks not with quarters - please no quarters because they do hurt. If you need to throw your wallet across the room now is the time, whatever it takes.... You've been warned.

Alright, here it goes, a photo of baby Dustyn:

### **Baby photo - SLIDE**

Check out that baby! Look at them cheeks, you can't resist the cheeks. Is that a leisure suit, what year is this? I got a chain to the pocket watch, man! I have the patented baby comb over and the ears of a five year old. Bells on the shoes, and a look that says, "Mom, you better check my diaper."

To this day, my family doesn't really understand it. It's something we remember and joke about. It's an odd fun story. For whatever reason, there was a time in my life where people felt something around me. Something that compelled them, that drew them in. And there have been moments in my life where I have felt something similar for someone else in my life. And I bet you have too.

Have you ever met someone and thought, there's something about this person that's different? Maybe there's someone you've naturally been attracted to, and every time they come around you just get a feeling. Something just clicks. Maybe that's how you met your spouse, something just clicked, it was love at first sight from the beginning and everyday since you see them and it's rekindled. Maybe there's a particular uncle, cousin, or family member that you are just hoping makes it to the celebration this year, because they make everything better and more fun. Maybe you have a close friend that you just have this connection to that is different from everyone else. And maybe possibly it's strange babies you meet at Walmart.

Just a few days ago we celebrated the birth of an incredible baby. A baby that would literally change everything, for everyone on the planet, throughout history. From conception, this baby was exceptional. Mary and Joseph were both told of his coming through an angel. Shepherds just doing their daily chores were visited by an army of angels singing this baby's praises. And some foreign rich men seeking wisdom in the East followed a star to be introduced to this baby. Somehow the birth of that exceptional baby had been foretold through the stars in the sky.

But there are two more characters in this nativity story, that don't get all the press. While shepherds and wisemen are generic terms of unclear meaning, there are actually two people who were instrumental in Jesus' first month of life that often go unnoticed. But I can tell you they are important and their introduction to this baby is nothing less than spectacular.

Now I know your nativity set at home has a nice consistent grouping of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, three wisemen and some random collection of barn yard animals surrounding baby Jesus in a manger. But I think there needs to be an expansion set that goes with the nativity. An expansion set that includes a temple, and two new characters, Simeon and Anna. See what our current nativity sets don't show you is that more than likely the wisemen came after Jesus was moved out of the manger scene and into a house. Jesus was not a newborn, but probably somewhere under the age of two when they finally arrived. In that time between the manger and two, lots of life happened. Today we're going to look at one piece of that story. And as we're now four days after celebrating Christmas, it seems like the perfect time to see what happens next.

So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke chapter 2. As always it will be on the screen behind me. If you need a Bible we have them available, and you are welcome to take it home with you, it's a gift from us for you. So turn to

Luke chapter 2 and we'll be starting in verse 22, just after Luke describes the scene with the shepherds. It says in verse 22:

**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. 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 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 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."**

#### **Luke 2:21-24**

Let's pause here and discuss what's going on. Mary, Joseph and Jesus are Jewish and there are laws dating back thousands of years that the Jews have tried to respect. Laws between God and His people. If you have ever read the whole Bible, or maybe tried to read the first couple books of the Bible, you would notice some narrative, but also a lot of rules and regulations for the people of God.

Now this ceremony Mary and Joseph do for Jesus, is required in the book of the law, found in the first five books of the Old Testament known as the Torah. We know these books as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Whenever a Jewish person had a baby, they had some cleansing and sacrifices they needed to accomplish to be right before God and his law. Much like when you have a baby today, there are a numbers of dates that arrive on the calendar too, such as check ups, immunizations, legal documents that need sent in, etc.

There are three rituals that need performed, and because Jesus is a boy, they have a different schedule than if he were a girl. The first is the naming and circumcision which is found in the fourth book of the Bible, the book of

Leviticus chapter 12. Today, if you have a Jewish friend, you may be invited to the Bris, which is this ceremony. On the eighth day, a Jewish priest performs a minor surgery and the baby is officially named. This usually happens in the home, the family doesn't need to travel anywhere. It's celebration with the family for the baby.

The next ceremony is on day forty and involves two parts, the redemption of the baby and the purification of the mother as found in Exodus 13 and Numbers 18. Now with our 21st century lens, there are aspects of this ceremony that seem gross, and offensive. Remember these laws weren't meant for us today, they were meant for a different people in a different time and different context. Many of these are no longer valid because of this baby Jesus, which we'll discuss later.

The redemption of the child signifies that all life comes from God, and that the parents understand that only God has the power to grant life. There is a blessing the priest does and the family must bring a sacrifice, here we see that they bring a dove or pigeon.

Secondly, the purification of the mother happens as well. During child birth a mother is declared unclean for a certain period of time. She can't enter the temple and must make a sacrifice to be declared clean, a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The point of this is for the protection and health of the mother as well as an understanding that God is the author of life.

Luke continues his telling of the encounter in the temple in verse 25 of chapter 2 where it says:

**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.**

## Luke 2:25-27a

So Mary and Joseph are trying to be good parents, and specifically good Jewish parents. They go into the temple and find a an older man named Simeon. The Bible doesn't tell us a great deal about Simeon, it can be inferred that he was an older man. It would seem odd to say he wouldn't die before he saw the Lord's messiah if he were in like his twenties. Some scholars have thought he may be in his eighties at this point. So think, older man with a long white beard who likes children. **(SHOW PICTURE OF SANTA - SLIDE)** - No not that old man in a beard - another one.

We know Simeon isn't a main character in the nativity story. He's a man that has been left waiting. He's probably seen the conquering army of Rome sweep through Jerusalem. He's seen the dominating power that the Caesar wields throughout the empire. He's seen the puppet king Herod placed on the throne who is crazy about keeping his own limited power. He's seen the Jewish nation losing faith in the promises God made to their ancestors. And all the while he's been waiting, knowing that he will see the promised Messiah before he dies. He's been coming into the temple searching and waiting.

Imagine an older man walking around the temple everyday, waiting for the next family to come into the temple for the dedication ritual. Every time he'd wonder, is this the one? He'd make his way toward the family, and ask to hold their baby. Some might oblige and others would've shied away from this stranger. For years, he'd hold these babies and always give them back, maybe with platitudes of how great the baby is, but always knowing, "Nope that's not him." Even when families came into the temple confident their special bundle of joy is the promised messiah, Simeon's closeness to the Holy Spirit would reveal the true story.

Simeon was led by the Spirit to the temple per usual when Mary, Joseph and Jesus came in, and this is what Luke describes happened, Luke chapter 2 starting on the second part of verse 27,

**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: a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”**

**The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.  
Luke 2:27b-33**

By this point in his life, it may have been known to the area what and who Simeon was looking for. If he had been doing this for years, there’s a good chance most people had at least heard the rumors of an old man who liked to hold babies. They might have come to the temple knowing his purpose and process. So Mary and Joseph hand this precious baby into the arms of Simeon and immediately Simeon knows there’s something different about this baby. This baby isn’t like the rest of them, it’s special.

Simeon recognizes his personal purpose has been fulfilled. However long he’s been waiting to see this baby, he can now die in peace. This moment the promises made to a nation and to Simeon personally were being fulfilled.

Notice too, Mary and Joseph marveled at what Simeon said. Why would they marvel? Did they forget about the visit with the angel nine months ago? Did the shepherds forget to mention the sky filling with angels praising God when

they arrived? They knew who Jesus was destined to be, it had been brought to them long ago, but I think sometimes when you get big news it's hard to know all of the implications. Knowing Jesus is the Messiah is one thing, but recognizing the massive earth shattering details filled them with marvel. This tiny baby would have family planning, nation leading, history shaping, eternity changing consequences - and they were just beginning to wrap their minds around this.

Simeon turns to the father and mother and Luke says in verse 34,

**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."**

**Luke 2:34-35**

Notice Simeon tells Mary directly...Some people are going to love your baby. And some people are really going to hate him. Imagine you come on stage here at heritage for a baby dedication, and Matt, the Children's Director, holds your baby and tells you this. Imagine if you were receiving this message. My response might be, "Um, can I have my baby back now..." and then promptly walk off stage, head to the car and drive away. Talk about an odd baby dedication. Your baby is going to be controversial. Your baby is going to be the most hated and loved person of all time.

Throughout the Bible we see this played out often, Jesus is loved dearly, but just as often he is hated. Let's be honest though, this isn't isolated to Bible times, is it? Mention Jesus in the right setting today and we instantaneously have found a bond with someone we've never met. Mention Jesus in the wrong setting, and experience the hate that people have for him and by extension now you. No one else in history is so polarizing. Simeon, through the spirit, saw this in baby Jesus when he was only 40 days old.

Not only did he see the extremes people would experience with the person of Jesus, but he also leads us Mary to the first hint of the cross. Simeon tells Mary that a sword will pierce your own soul too. Mary is the only person that will both see the birth and death of the Jesus. She is the mother who sees the treatment her son will endure throughout his life. She will be the one who cries those tears in empathy for her baby boy. Like a dagger through Mary's heart Simeon sees it from the start.

That's the last we see from Simeon in the Bible. He steps away from this family, and maybe finally found the peace in death that he was waiting to experience.

While Mary and Joseph continue to marvel about this encounter with Simeon, they are met by a second person that day in the temple. Luke says in verse 36 of chapter 2,

**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.**

**Luke 2:36-38**

Luke does an interesting contrast between Simeon and Anna here. We know very little about Simeon other than he was waiting for the Messiah and would see him before he died. Anna on the other hand it gives a bunch of background information, she's a widowed prophet who seems to have been widowed a long time ago and rarely leaves the temple. We know what tribe of Israel she was from, and who her father was.

For Simeon we know exactly what he said and have a clear picture of what happened. Anna's interaction doesn't give specific details of what was said, simply a general idea.

While Simeon's encounter it seems was spoken intimately and personally to the family, Anna excitedly announces to anyone within earshot. It doesn't tell us specifically what she said, other than to say she gave thanks and looked forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Maybe the starkest contrast between the two, is that Simeon gave the couple a dose of reality, namely the hardship that this baby was going to face and by extension what Mary and Joseph would experience as well. The road forward was going to be difficult, and deadly.

Anna, on the other hand also gave them a dose of reality, that whatever they would experience it would all be worth it. That no matter how hard and lonely and terrible and agonizing and deadly this path was, there would be incredible thanksgiving and redemption at the end of it.

No one gets excited to walk the hard road. It's not usually a happy place. We don't chose it, in fact, if we're honest we prefer the road with the least resistance. The path that includes all the highs and none of the lows. So when someone gives us news that we've been dreading, that dose of reality that I don't want to hear, the way I handle it often depends on the outlook I have on the end of the road. Do I focus on the hard part now, or the destination at the end?

Some of you here today, 2019 was the best year you've had in a while. You finally had a normal year, a reprieve from years previous. Your health has improved. Your job has stabilized. And your personal life is fulfilling

everything you need. You're sailing into 2020 excited for what's to come. I'm excited for you, and I hope 2020 is even better... but your dose of reality might be that there's difficulties ahead, it's not always going to be better. The path of life isn't one long high perfect path but has a lot of dips, turns and rocks. Enjoy where you're at, be thankful and ready for your path ahead when things will not go as smoothly.

However some of you have had a rough 2019. You barely made it through, you just scraped by. You've lost loved ones. You have friends that aren't speaking to you anymore. Your marriage is on the rocks. Your job situation became more complicated. Your retirement is not going as planned. You're failing your classes. Your health has deteriorated. And your income doesn't match your expenses. At this point the reality of your situation is overwhelming. I can't promise you 2020 is going to change everything for you, and all the sudden January 1st life will be 24/7 puppies and rainbows. But I can tell you, the fight will be worth it. The fight is worth it. I know you wouldn't have chosen 2019 to go this way. I know you don't understand how God could let the path get so rocky. But through this little baby Jesus, there is thanksgiving and redemption at the end of your path. Keep fighting, keep pressing, and don't give up. Find your strength from the end of the path, find it through the path in the perfect vision of Jesus.

2020 vision is generally considered perfect vision. Most of our eyeglass prescriptions are trying to correct our vision to get us to 2020 vision. To correct us when we cannot see clearly on our own. Are you seeing the path laid before you clearly? Do you need to adjust the lens in which you see your path?

Two thousand years ago there was a baby that completely changed the path of the world. The world thought the path to redemption was found in armies, in policies, in strength and in security. If we are strong enough, good enough

and smart enough we can fix what's wrong and redeem ourselves. But God showed the world that redemption is a person. Your difficult path only has purpose because that little baby grew up, lived a perfect life, was hated to the point of death, died a horrific death and was resurrected on the third day. The only way we see the crib clearly is through the cross.

So today we have the opportunity to remember the cross. Jesus before he went to the cross had a final meal with those that loved him. Knowing the difficult path that lay before him he sat down with his followers and instituted a ceremony to remind us that only he has the power to grant life in the midst of our death. We do communion as a moment to remember the cross and his triumph over death.

Remember his body that was broken for you, Take and eat

Remember his blood that has redeemed us, Take and drink

Pray