

**Sermon preached by Rev. Chris Popadich at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, December 27, 2020**

**ORDINARY PEOPLE BEFORE AN EXTRAORDINARY BABY**

**Luke 2:1-40**

**INTRODUCTION:**

This was Christmas to us, an explosion of presents, wrapping paper. Dad attempting to hand out gifts orderly, mom trying to keep track so that we could send thank you cards and who gets what. Let's just say we often got something. If there was any distinction it was our favorite colors, mine happens to be blue. In 20 minutes it would all be over, wrappings on the floor, new clothes scattered, toys in hand and we would be off playing around the house leaving mom and dad to clean up. It was in short, a mess. Trust me, it is a test of patience that at our house we now open one gift at a time.

Did your floor look like this on Christmas? Was it a mess? And I wonder, was there a moment when you thought, oh,

**READING OF THE SCRIPTURES**

**1** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

**2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

**3** And everyone went to their own town to register.

**4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

**5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

**6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

**7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

**8** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

**9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

**10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

**11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

**12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

**13** Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**14** "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

**15** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

**16** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

**17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

**18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

**19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

**20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

**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"),

**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."

**25** 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.

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

**27** 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,

**28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

**29** "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

**30** For my eyes have seen your salvation,

**31** which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

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

**33** The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

**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,

**35** so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

**36** 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,

**37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

**38** 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.

**39** When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

**40** And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Ordinary people

We are going to work from the end of the passage this morning though the text.

First let's look at Simeon. Simeon, whose name means "One who hears." He is an old man who is known for his righteousness and devotion to God. He has been waiting for something. Something wonderfully had been promised to him by God. He would not die until he has seen the "Lord Messiah." Holding on to that hope, day and night, night and day he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He knew from the scriptures a messiah would someday be Israel's comfort. That the messiah would bring rest for God's people. Maybe on his mind that morning was the messianic prophecy from Isaiah 9.

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.***

***And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***

***7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.***

***He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.***

***The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.***

It is unclear where Simeon was in the temple complex but, just like in the old testament when the Spirit of the Lord would rest on people like King Saul, David, Samson, and the prophets, the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon that day and moved upon him to go to the part of the temple complex called the Court of Women. This space, large enough to hold 6000 people was the main open space for all Jews after passing through the Eastern Gate.

Simeon seeks out Mary and Joseph. I can only imagine a joy filled older man skirring up to the young couple and without a second thought, takes baby Jesus from his parents and holds him up Simba style loudly proclaiming, in the court.

"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."

A old man with laughter and smiles and I just imagine tears of joy returns to the young couple. Now with everyone looking at them I suspect. And just as Mary and Joseph are taking in what Simeon has proclaimed Simeon leans into Mary, Now not tears of joy but of sadness as he speaks of the rise and fall of many in Israel and the piercing of his mother's heart.

I am sure that was sobering as baby Jesus is returned to Mary. Such joy in that moment and such hard words of sorrow for this young couple just trying to do what the Lord required though the law of Moses.

Who knew entering God's temple would bring such joy and also such warning of sorrow to come.

Of course they don't get to settle long with Simeon's words that an old woman comes up to them; Anna the Prophetess.

Anna is a widowed Jew who is intensely devoted to God. Her presence at the temple was a constant. Whether she was 84 years old or 106 years old is unclear. It is not clear in the text if 84 is her age or her time in the temple. Considering most girls were married between 12-14 years old she was probably around 20 when she became a widow. Either way, she is a decades old fixture in the temple at Jerusalem complex every day in the Court of Women. I am sure everyone knew her and saw for years and years.

What was she doing there possibly from sunup to sundown? She is worshiping, praying, and fasting. Her devotion to God may have been even a match for the righteous Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders at the time.

Now you might think that a prophet is someone who tells you about future events to come. But that actually is only a small portion of what they do. Yes, at times they do tell about future events, often doom and gloom for not acting in faith and following God's commands. But for the most part, prophets throughout the Bible have a bigger role of calling God's people or rulers to be faithful to God.

They are God's spokesperson to say "Hey! You are going the wrong way, come back to the right path. Come back to the path that puts your faith in God!"

What exactly Anna says is not written. But considering the author, Luke, just mentioned she was a prophet I suspect she spoke with words that pointed people to put their faith in God. To put their faith in the little baby. A baby who little baby held tightly in its mother's arms. Tightly I say because, if Simeon kind of rushed in there to pick up baby Jesus from his parents who else might snatch him up and carry him around!

Of course the running up of strangers wanting to see baby Jesus started the night he was born with some smelly, sheep herding shepherds.

It is amazing the possibility of belief found in these strangers. I imagine them going house to house KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

"Hey, was there a baby born here tonight, and is it possibly lying in a animal feeding trough at the moment?"

"No, okay".... And then doing that again and again.

Or maybe one of them says, Hey I hear a baby crying....a newborn! Lets go over to that house!

Did not Jesus say in Matthew 7 that those who are seeking him need but ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened?"

And eventually the door was opened. To Mary and Joseph.

Mary, who like I mentioned, was marriageable age of 12-14, maybe 16 by this point, just gave birth to her first born son, likely resting when she hears some gruff men knocking, maybe pounding at the door with that crazy question, "Hey was there a baby born to night and is he in a feeding trough?"

I know parents have these things they never thought they would be asked of. I would suspect, "Is your baby in a feeding trough?" is one of them. And even worse to say "Yes" to that question.

Then comes in these shepherds, all smelling like sheep, which may not have been noticed because they were in the animal portion of the house anyways.

These men, who are better known for their thievery, crudeness, and dirtiness--these men from the outskirts of Bethlehem, sheep herders who may, themselves have been delivering lambs earlier that evening with their own flock, now stand or maybe kneel, we don't really know before a new born baby boy.

What is profound is that what they do before encountering Jesus and what they say after. These men were doing what shepherds do at night, keeping watch over their flock within likely a crude sheep pen of sticks and stones, keeping their ears open for thieves or wild animals, were suddenly terrified out of their minds when an angel pulls back the vail of heaven, showing the full force of heavenly glory to these men.

Not only was the angel present but spoke with a message. First of message of peace “Don’t be afraid” and then a message of Joy not just for them but for all people. Everyone in the whole world. The Messiah has been born!

Even for uneducated shepherds they knew where the town of David was. They knew that to be the town of Bethlehem. They also knew who the coming Messiah was a big deal!

As if one angel was not terrifying enough, a hold host of angels appeared and begin singing. “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels stopped singing and the heavens closed up I can’t imagine what joy they had. I am sure jumping up and down. “DID you see that!” “Did that Just happen!” “WOW” “We got to go!” “We got to go find that baby!” and they went dashing off towards Bethlehem.

Yet notice, when I said they were knocking and looking for a baby they were not looking for simply a child wrapped in cloths. This was the normal practice to wrap the baby’s up tight with strips of cloth and was believed to keep the child warm and comforted. The two key pieces of the shepherds search is a brand new born baby and one that was lying in a feeding trough...like one they would use to feed their sheep!

These shepherds were outsiders, on a crazy quest, in the middle of the night, sent by heavenly beings to a house with a new baby who is laying where they would normally feed their sheep! IT’s NUTS!

But they were convinced. They were **amazed**. These shepherds were convinced enough to go search for the baby and then because of what they saw, they become the first evangelists, they told everybody they saw. Even as crazy as the story was, they could not stop glorifying God because of what they have seen and heard.”

PAUSE

and “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

APPLICATION:

Friends you know the Christmas story. If you have grown up in this church or any other church you know Christmas time is the season for carols, pine wreaths, and pageants.

You know this is the season when we tell this story of the birth of Jesus with passionate songs and flickering candles.

You know this is the season for gifts, and wise men, and extended family you see only once a year....maybe for good reason.

Yet today, two days after Christmas, have you pondered all these things in your heart?

PAUSE

Every person in this story is normal. Even Joseph had to pay taxes. How much more normal could that be then paying taxes and visiting relatives. How much more normal could it be than for a young couple to find themselves in a complicated situation around pregnancy.

How much normal could it be to be doing a hard thankless job out in the middle of nowhere away from family or friends to earn your living like the Shepherds did.

Or How much more normal could it be to finding faithful men and women widows, and widowers, interceding to God on behalf of the future generation. And how normal it is for older adults to delight in seeing newborn baby.

But of course the question you need to ponder this morning is not the normal things about normal people doing a normal life at least for Bible times.

What we need to ponder about is the extra ordinary pieces of this story. A story that, including chapter one, includes dreams, visions, prophecy, three angelic appearances, two miraculous births, and the fulfilment of multiple Old Testament prophecies.

Jesus, newly born baby Jesus, has not said a word by the end of chapter two. The most he has done giving his mom pain in childbirth, cried, nursed, soiled his diaper, and slept. Maybe by the end of chapter two he is cooing and awning but that's about it.

But everything said about this baby and all the events surrounding this little baby cradled in his mother and fathers arms is not ordinary. It is extraordinary. It begs the question, did they all make this stuff up or is this baby really the Messiah, the one who would bring Joy to this world. Joy to the people 2000 years ago and joy to you and I today.

What you need to ponder is, is this baby actually that extraordinary. Is this baby really the Messiah! Is he really the one to bring peace to the whole world? Is he really the son of God, born of a virgin. Is he really everything you have been hoping for, for the redemption of your life?

Friends, we need to ask our selves and ponder, like ordinary Mary did, is this extraordinary baby and the stories surrounding even his birth, worthy of believing in.

And if they are, are we willing to run like shepherds to meet him and proclaim what we have seen and heard to everyone we meet.