

Series: Birth of the King

December 29, 2019

Title: The Long View

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Text: Luke 2:21-38

Simeon

Déjà vu all over again:

If you are of a certain age, you probably recognize the name “Yogi Berra.” Yogi played 18 seasons with the New York Yankees, won 10 world championships as a player, was American League MVP three times and is regarded as one of the greatest catchers of all time.

But he is perhaps better known for his “Yogi-isms” – impromptu comments that were both funny and wise at the same time. For example:

- “90 percent of baseball is mental; the other half is physical.”
- “You can observe a lot by watching.”
- “Always go to other people’s funerals; otherwise they won’t go to yours.”
- “A nickel ain’t worth a dime anymore.”

And one of my all-time favorites, delivered after watching Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris hit back-to-back home runs time after time:

- “It’s déjà vu all over again.”

Back to the Temple again:

For those of you who didn’t take French in high school, “déjà vu” means “already seen,” and it describes the feeling that you’ve been there before. When we get to the end of the Christmas Story there’s a hint of just that: *déjà vu*.

Once again, we find ourselves at the great Temple in Jerusalem – the place where God was meant to dwell in the midst of His people. This time a young couple climbs the great stairs south of the Temple Mount and enter a gate that leads under the Temple enclosure. A few minutes later they emerge from the underground passageway out onto a huge esplanade called the

Court of the Gentiles. The Temple looms before them, gleaming with white marble and pure gold.

They have come to present their baby boy to the Lord. In a most unexpected way an ancient prophecy is coming to pass:

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Malachi 3:1 NIV

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Simeon:

And once again we meet an old man who has come to the Temple. His name is Simeon. Like Zechariah the priest, Luke describes him as "righteous and devout." Like Zechariah, he has been praying for something for a very long time:

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Luke 2:25b-26 NIV

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.

The little phrase "the consolation of Israel" refers back to God's promise to one day rescue and restore His people after their long exile:

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Isaiah 40:1-2 NIV

*Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.*

*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,*

*that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.*

Simeon, and many like him, had prayed a lifetime for this to happen. King Herod had built the Temple and died. Prophets and freedom fighters had come and gone. Rome had consolidated its iron grip on God's people. But still Simeon prayed. He was willing to take the long view.

Promise Kept

The Lord in the Temple!

Simeon prayed. And Simeon listened to what God was saying to him. Prayer is not just a cry for help or provision. It's a conversation with the God who loves us and keeps His promises. And on this particular day God was about to keep that long-ago promise of coming to the Temple to make everything right.

Luke tells us:

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Luke 2:27-32 NIV

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:*

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

Simeon went to the Temple that morning *expecting* something special. The Holy Spirit had prompted him to be on the lookout for the Lord coming suddenly to His Temple.

When he saw Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus the Holy Spirit whispered: "There He is: the Lord you seek. He has come just as I promised!"

Promise kept:

As he took the baby in his arms, he felt the long carried burden of prayer lifted once and for. God had indeed kept His promise. The Messiah was here in His Temple. He had come suddenly and unannounced. But in his arms he held the Savior of the world.

The ancient promise to Father Abraham that God would one day bless the entire human family through his descendant was now coming true. This baby would grow up to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." No longer would the world be divided between Jew and Gentile. God's family would embrace them both because of this child. He was none other than God's salvation in human form!

And Israel would finally fulfill her glorious destiny. Israel would no longer be in exile, but would be set free by her Messiah. Simeon went on to point out that not all would embrace the new King. Some would rise; some would fall in Israel. His mission would bring pain and suffering to Mary: "A sword will pierce your own soul too." Such was the price God was willing to pay to redeem His world. Evil had to be defeated on its own terms once and for all.

And then, to confirm Simeon's prophecy, an old woman named Anna appeared:

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Luke 2:38 NIV

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.

The story of Jesus' birth began with an old couple praying for a miracle. It ended with an old man and an old woman who have prayed for the coming of the Messiah and have seen God's promise kept.

The Long View

God keeps His promises:

God keeps His promises. Not one of them ever failed. He planned all along to keep His promise to Abraham that through Abraham's descendants all the world would be blessed. He planned all along to send His Son. Peter reminds us that God had a plan to rescue us long before we started praying:

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1 Peter 1:20-21 NIV

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

God keeps His big promises and His "little" promises. He gave Zechariah and Elizabeth the child they had prayed for. But John was to be more than just a blessing to an old couple. He was the forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah.

The Long View:

That is why you and I have to strive to keep the Long View in mind. Like Simeon and Anna we are called to pray for God to bring His love, His justice, His healing to our world. Our prayers usually focus on the things most important to us: our family, our health, our church and community. Not one of them falls to the ground unheard.

But God has a bigger plan, one vast and wonderful beyond our comprehension. Imagine Simeon hearing God tell him to go to the Temple and be on the lookout for a young couple with a newborn. Imagine Simeon connecting the dots (with the Holy Spirit's help!) and realizing that Isaiah's words had come true:

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Isaiah 9:6-7a NIV

*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.*

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

It had been worth the wait. It had been worth the years of prayer and trusting God. Messiah was here in his arms!

God keeps His promises. Don't give up. Don't impose your time table. Keep listening and watching. Take the Long View.