



Simeon had waited his entire life for this moment. We can imagine that over the course of his days there were instances where he had wondered if the promise he had received would truly be revealed. Waiting has that affect on us. It stirs in us questions, and sometimes those questions can produce feelings of doubt and concern. Simeon's patience was rewarded on the day that Mary and Joseph came to the Temple to dedicate their son Jesus to the Lord.

How does Simeon respond to the realization of the hope he had carried for so long?

In our readings this week we have highlighted one of the core convictions of our faith. We need a Savior. Do you see that need in your own life? In what way? What are the promises of God that you are counting on eventually being fulfilled in your life?

.....

.....

GPS for Families

GrowPrayStudy.org/family

This Christmas, focus on the gift of Jesus and how we can give gifts back to Him. Ask: How do we know God loves us? How does God show us His love? Is it enough to say we love someone, or do we need to show it? How can we show love to our family and friends? How can we show love to strangers? Come up with ways to share God's love with others. Remember, Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Start with these ideas:

- Secret Angel Helpers — Make an effort to spread love by practicing random acts of kindness. Secretly do nice things for others without expecting recognition.
- Christmas Lights — Invite a family or friend to drive around to look at Christmas lights. Talk about how Jesus is the light of the world. Share the joy of simple pleasures like family and friend time and beautiful lights.
- Prayer — Each day or week take the Christmas cards you receive and pray over each family. You might send them a quick note or email to let them know you've done so.
- Christmas All Year — Put holiday cards you receive in a basket. Make a commitment for the new year to weekly pull out one of the cards at random and do something nice for the sender: drop a note along with a child's drawing, bake, send a flower, call, make a donation in their name. Keep the Christmas love alive!

MESSAGE "The Gift"
SCRIPTURE Luke 1:13-17

*Rev. Mike Ramsdell, Senior Pastor
miker@firstmethodistmansfield.org
facebook.com/mike.ramsdell1
www.mikeramsdell.com*

"The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

There is nothing that defines life more than sacrificing for someone and something we love. (Romans 8:32)

- We can only fully understand God through the sacrifice he chose to make for us in Jesus Christ.
- The nature of the Christian life can only be completely engaged when we choose a life of self-sacrifice.
 1. Sacrifice delivers — believe it, stop it, give it, do it.
 2. Sacrifice feeds the soul — nonnegotiable in nourishing impoverished souls.
 3. Sacrifice defines the Christian life — as an offering to God.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Holy and loving God, I give you thanks for the gift of Christmas. As I celebrate the coming of our newborn King, I pray that you would forgive me of my sin, bind up my wounds and cast out all my worries and fear. May the life I live this day and every day testify to my belief that Jesus has come to save my life and redeem the entire world. Amen.

Christmas is a vivid reminder that even on our best days we are still in need of a Savior. Paul opens this section by reminding us that all who have gone before and all who will come after us are in the same boat. "All have turned away," he writes, "there is no one who does good, not even one." We are all in need. Jesus is God's response to that need.

The guilt of our sin often leads us to feelings of isolation and despair. What hope do you find in the idea that we have all fallen short? Why do you think it's important to remember that we are all "alike under sin"?

Take a few moments today to give thanks for the forgiveness God offers in response to our universal need. Is there anything you need to seek forgiveness for today?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Psalm 137 recalls one of the darkest days in the history of Israel. In 586 BC the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, sending a large portion of the Jewish population into exile. It would be almost five decades before many Jews returned. Five centuries later, at the time of Jesus' birth, the Jews were still waiting for their nation to be fully restored.

Throughout the Old Testament we find the prophets warning Israel of their eventual destruction. Their inability to live in God's promised land according to God's instructions would eventually cost them dearly. How has your own sin or the sins of others cost you in your life?

Psalm 137 challenges the people to remember Jerusalem. Why would this be important? As we think about the coming of Jesus as our Savior, how do these words of lament from Psalm 137 speak to you?

.....
.....
.....

The Jews had lost everything. Their nation was destroyed and their people sent into exile. Their hopes and dreams had been crushed by the hands of a foreign power, and the Israelites knew that they themselves bore a large portion of the blame. They had rebelled against God's commands, and they had suffered because of it.

One of the last things we want to hear during the dark moments of our lives is "I told you so." In most instances we already know the error of our ways. We already know how much we have lost. How does God respond to the Israelites in Jeremiah 33?

These words from Jeremiah remind us that even the darkest of nights eventually passes with the rising of the morning sun. If you find yourself in a dark place, what words of hope might God be offering to you today?

.....
.....
.....
.....

We noted in our reading yesterday that the words from Jeremiah 33 remind us that even the darkest of nights eventually passes with the rising of the morning sun. Isaiah continues with that theme but adds a critical element to the vision of Israel's restoration. The "light that has dawned" will accompany the birth of a son who will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Looking at the first five verses of chapter 9, how does Isaiah describe the transformation that the Messiah will bring?

When Jesus was asked in Matthew 9 why he spent time with "sinners," he replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." How would you describe the sickness that Jesus is healing in your life? Take a moment to reflect on and celebrate the progress Jesus has made in healing you.

.....
.....
.....