

A Glimpse of Glory

Luke 2:22-40

Sunday, December 29, 2024

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Every once in a while, in the middle of our humdrum lives, we get a glimpse of glory. A football team signs a promising young quarterback and the fans instantly label their team Super Bowl contenders. A new president gets elected, or should I say *reelected*, and many citizens dream of better days to come. A new drug appears to be helpful in staving off Alzheimer's, or cancer, or Parkinson's, and millions of those affected begin to wonder: could this be what we've been waiting for?

Here's what I'm wondering: as we experience such phenomena, what have we really seen? We've seen a press conference with the new quarterback decked out in their team's jersey. We've seen a campaign trail filled with adoring crowds and one unbelievable promise after another. We've seen and heard of clinical trials that seem to be promising. So...are these sights enough? Are they enough to get your hopes up? Or are you more a glass-is-half-empty kind of person?

How about another scenario? A new baby is born. Mom and dad have come to the temple to present their first-born son to the Lord. Suddenly a weathered old man named Simeon, guided by the Holy Spirit, scoops up the baby into his arms. For some inexplicable reason, the old man is giddy with delight. He's so giddy, in fact, that his worn-out legs suddenly have a new spring to their step. And before the parents are ready to head for home, the old man says something utterly astonishing: "This is enough for me now. I have seen God's salvation. I can depart in peace."

I've said things like that before, crazy, astonishing things. The Minnesota Twins win the 1991 World Series and I had tickets to games 2, 6 and 7. *I can die now.* I climb to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro – 19,341 feet – the rooftop of Africa, and I touch the glaciers as I go. *I can die now.* I spend a sunny, gorgeous September at Holden Village in Washington with the Aspen trees a shimmering gold. *I can die now.* I've made that claim more than once, but here's the truth, I really didn't mean it. Old Simeon means it. He witnesses the birth of the Christ Child and promptly announces, *I can die now.*

It's amazing, isn't it, because what has Simeon really seen? It's just a little baby in his arms, a powerless, speechless newcomer to the world. Whatever salvation this baby might bring is still only a hope and a prayer. Whatever teaching he might offer will remain hidden for years to come. Nothing has happened. King Herod is still up to his old tricks in Judea. Augustus Caesar still rules in Rome. The promised peace has not yet come.

But that doesn't stop Simeon. He gets his hopes up. He stands there, cradling the baby, in grateful wonder. It's the future he holds in his arms. He has seen it. He has touched it. "This is enough," he says.

And then the prophetess Anna also gets in on the act. She's every bit as old as Simeon. She adds her own joy to the moment, but also hints of troubles to come. She'll soon be telling everyone about this incredible baby whom she saw and held for only a few minutes. And just so you know, Simeon and Anna are not grandparents to this little baby, because we all know how grandparents can be. No, they're more like aging saints who've been waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of a messiah for longer than we can imagine.

How is it that Simeon and Anna—and for that matter, the whole cast of Christmas characters—hold on to as much hope as they do? By the time Jesus is grown up and ready to go to work, Simeon and Anna will long be dead. So will most of the shepherds who with haste to see the baby in the manger, and maybe also the magi who journey from arar to worship the child. Thirty years or more will pass before the story of Jesus kicks into high gear. In the meantime, those who saw the baby will not know what became of him. They will know only what they saw back then. And what they saw was merely a glimpse of glory. How did they do it?

Friends, isn't that our question too? It's a faith question. How do we hang on to hope when the world around us isn't all that hopeful? When you think about it, what we have seen is hardly more than what *they* saw. In one form or another, Herod is still up to his old tricks and Augustus Caesar is still on the throne. There is very little peace on earth. And the world isn't in much better shape than before.

So, what do we really have in the birth of this baby? It depends on what we're looking for, I suppose. We have sacred scripture, like Simeon and Anna, which speaks to our attentiveness to the promises of God. We have something like the shepherds had, recalling a night of mysterious glory for years to come. We

have something like the magi would have brought back to their homeland, a vision of a different kind of king and kingdom. And let's not forget, we have children who've been entrusted into our arms for a blessing and who will, we hope, fill our hearts with a deep sense of gratitude.

We get merely a glimpse of glory, a glimpse into God's promised future. Is it enough? It is for Simeon. After laying eyes on the child, he breaks into a song: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace. I have seen your salvation. I can see that it's meant, not just for Israel, but for the whole world."

Simeon's song, in case you didn't know, is called the *Nunc Dimittis*. The first two words are Latin for *Now, Lord*. "Now, Lord, I'm trusting that whatever sliver of hope I've lived on for all these years is finally coming to pass. Now, Lord, I can depart in peace."

In the liturgy, the *Nunc Dimittis* is meant to be sung after communion. We're going to give it a try today. It's fitting. After all, when we come to the table, what are we doing but seeing and tasting God's promised future? Like Simeon, we hold the Christ Child in our hands. We take bread and wine to our lips and kiss it. We may not get all the way to the future ourselves, not in this lifetime. But we have seen it from afar and that is enough. And so we say, *Now, Lord, we can depart in peace*.

Friends, another Christmas has come and gone. January will soon be upon us. We'll be back to our humdrum lives. What have we seen? A child sleeping in a manger, some curious shepherds and wise men who come to pay him homage, an old man and woman who proclaim him *the hopes and dreams of all the years*. We have seen something, but whatever it is, it's still unfolding.

As we head into a new year, how do we hang onto hope when the world around us isn't all that hopeful? The same way old Simeon did: by worshipping the Christ Child, by singing a simple song of faith, by entrusting our future to God's promised future.

Is it enough? Is it enough to get our hopes up? In faith, we say *Yes, it is enough for now*. Amen.