

Collins Street Baptist Church

Summer Worship: Prayers & Readings

Sunday December 27 – The First Sunday after Christmas Day

Introduction

Each year, on this first Sunday after Christmas Day, we are reminded that, in the church calendar, Christmas is not a single day but a season; 12 days to reflect upon the significance of a story which dares to suggest that God is present in the world in unexpected ways, out of the way places and in people who do not conform to broader conceptions of divinity or religiosity.

Prayer

God – whose arrival has surprised us, and whose presence has challenged us;
in these days following our celebrations, our gatherings, our gift-giving, our busyness,
renew in us a sense of the significance of your birth among us.

Remind us of your persistent and surprising love.

Enliven us with joy of your unexpected arrival.

Inspire us to join our voices with those of the angels who are so certain that the life of the Christ-child
will change the world.

Help us to recognise your life in our midst: sometimes small, vulnerable or hidden;
sometimes unexpected, challenging our assumptions and gathering unlikely companions.

Like the shepherds, we arrive by your side with no airs or graces,
no priceless artefacts or well-schooled wisdom.

We simply bring ourselves, and the awe and wonder of the unexpected delight
of discovering Emmanuel – God-with-us.

Teach us to be with you, as you are with us. Amen.

Scripture Reading – Luke 2: 25 – 38

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Reflection

In the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, the characters have a tendency to burst into song. There's Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah. There's a choir of angels. We often finish the story with the cast of the nativity play gathered around the Christ-child in a manger but, of course, this scene is just the first of many in the life of our Saviour.

8 days after the birth, Mary and Joseph, following the custom of their faith, bring Jesus to the temple for his circumcision, naming and presentation.

Simeon, the old and faithful priest, has been waiting for this moment – perhaps for an entire lifetime. While holding Jesus in his arms we are told that he lifts up his voice in praise. He gives thanks to God that in Jesus "his eyes have seen your salvation". He is in the temple to perform a familiar ritual and one imagines he has done so hundreds of times. Yet in his advanced years he is willing and able to sense something new and sacred. He is open to the potential of the moment and the astonishing significance of the fragile life he holds in his arms.

Like Simeon, most of us, has had hundreds of temple moments. We have sung familiar songs and prayed much loved prayers. We have participated in the rituals of the faith again and again.

Simeon's faithfulness, however, is accompanied by an openness to be surprised and inspired. He is ready to burst into a song of praise. He is willing to be amazed. He is not going through the motions but, in the midst of the ritual he knows so well, he senses a new experience of salvation – not just for himself, but for us all.

Nearby, the similarly faithful prophet Anna, a widow who is dedicated to a life of prayer in the temple, senses the newness and possibility inherent in the fragile body of this baby.

God's gifts to the world often go unseen and unacknowledged – but to Simeon and Anna, a life of faithfulness has prepared them not just to worship the God they have always known, but to experience the joy and hope of the new thing God is doing.

May our eyes also be opened to see God's new life salvation here and now.

Blessing

God is born among us! May you see salvation with your own eyes, and know it is God's gift for you.

God is born among us! May your see salvation with your own eyes, and know it is God's gift for others.

God is born among us! May your hearts be humble and your eyes always open – for God's greatest gifts are often unperceived by those who presume they already know, they already have, they have already received.

God's life is a gift to you and the world. Receive it with gratitude.

Amen.
