

DID YOU MEET JESUS?
LUKE 1:46-55, 67-79; LUKE 2:25-40
2024 -12-29

Just before we leave Christmas behind, (in fact we should never really leave it behind), I wanted to take 1 more look at why it is so significant. Of course, we've looked at the traditional passages in Luke and Matthew and considered the usual texts from the prophets Isaiah and Micah in the Old Testament. We've considered the wonder and mystery of it all, a message that includes angels and dreams and the heavens filling with the glory of the Lord and supernatural announcements telling of Jesus' coming. It just makes you want to keep coming back for more. It is no wonder that people typically experience a great let down after Christmas concludes. No doubt about it, the time and the message are very special indeed.

What I want to look at today is what happened to those who encountered Christ at the time of His first coming. These aren't the multitudes who met Him later in life.

Zechariah knew that things would be different after he encountered the angel Gabriel in the temple. Though he and Elizabeth were honoured by God to bear the One who would prepare the way for the Lord, a magnificent role for anyone, he saw that his son, John's role would usher in the God of Israel that would enable His people to be redeemed. And he praised God for it, for His faithfulness in doing what He said He would do. He acknowledged that what the prophets had said was now about to take place and that Jesus would make our salvation possible. It would be a salvation that would allow spiritual redemption and a salvation that would lift God's people from their enemies. Among those enemies would be Satan himself. God would show mercy, as He had done with Israel's fathers, and would remember His holy covenant. He would rescue "us" from the hand of our enemies.

But don't miss the next line of Zechariah's song: God will "enable us to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days." He adds that John will give God's people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, "because of the tender mercy of our God." It keeps getting better, "by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

So Zechariah saw the enormity of what God was doing by sending Jesus. Jesus would enable us to serve God without fear. Jesus would give us holiness. Jesus would make us righteous before God—all our days. Jesus brings us salvation by forgiving our sins. Jesus yanks us from darkness, (like Star Wars so eloquently portrays), Jesus yanks us from the dark side and rips us from the grips of death and guides us into the path of peace. And don't miss it: peace is impossible without being at ease with God, without being right with God.

Zechariah got the big picture. Do you think Zechariah was ever the same again? His life was forever marked by the tender mercy of our God. At the end of this, Zechariah would forever serve God joyfully, at peace and without fear.

What about Mary? Certainly, her role is unique. Of course she had much to rejoice over, but she also had much to fear. Much of what she experienced in those early days were absolutely terrifying. But she got the bigger picture. Her entire soul glorified God; her entire spirit rejoiced “in God [her] Saviour.” “The Mighty One” has done great things for her. But she saw beyond herself. God has done great things for you and for me through Jesus. Like Zechariah, she understood that God’s mercy extends to those who fear Him. God scatters those who are proud and brings down those who are arrogant, but He lifts up the weak, the humble. It’s good to hear that. He helps us, “remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever”, just as He said He would. Do you hear her heart touched by God’s mercy? Is that where your heart rests—in God’s mercy? Do you see yourself as part of God’s great plan for His people through all the ages? It’s much bigger than you or me, but it includes you and me. Do you think that Mary was ever the same again, after she “met” Jesus?

We’ve seen the shepherds’ response. They were moved to the core of their being—terrified, but then comforted and encouraged. Their hearts were moved to search out the Saviour, to follow God’s leading. And they were all in! When they found Him, they were awestruck that they would be included among God’s welcoming party! Do you ever think like that—how awesome it is to be included by God? All they could do was go out from the stable praising God & telling everyone they met what they had seen. Is that your overriding response to your encounter with Jesus to tell everyone about Him and what you have seen or experienced? Do you think the shepherds were ever the same again?

The wise men travelled a long and difficult way to get to Jesus. They saw Him for who He is—the King of all kings. And they came for one purpose—to worship Him. They brought gifts. But more importantly, they brought wonder and worship. Is your highest goal to worship God? Is that the most important thing in your life? Have you retained the wonder of it all? Would you, have you travelled the long and arduous road to worship God? Are you faithfully meeting with Him every day and worshiping Him collectively every Sunday? Do you think the wise men were ever the same again?

Herod? Yes, he was also touched by Jesus. We despise him, but in fact he resembles what’s worst in us. There’s always a part of us that resists Jesus, that inner core that we don’t want to give over to Him, the parts of our life that we want to keep in our own control. And there are the Herods out there who are threatened by Jesus, who continually try to take Him down, to diminish who He is, to oppose Him, to stand with the devil. We need to expect to encounter Herods, to be ready for them and not be thrown off by them. It’s obvious Herod was never the same again after rejecting Jesus. His life was ruined and his life ruined others. Are you resisting Jesus in any areas of your life?

Simeon is one of my favourite characters. Here’s this old guy just clinging to life. But he’s waiting for Jesus. That’s all he’s waiting for. And when he sees Him, his life is complete. He’s satisfied for God to call him home; he’s at peace. He’s been waiting for the consolation of Israel all his life. And at the temple he finally gets to set his eyes on Jesus. He sees God’s salvation, face to face, something that God has “prepared in [plain view] of all people.” And here it is again—wait for it—“a light for revelation to the Gentiles”. Jesus is the promised light—a light that exposes deeds of darkness, but also a light that shows the way, the right

way, the way to God. Simeon's last recorded words speak of Jesus as being, as conveying the glory of God's people, for God's people. Do you think Simeon's life was the same after he met Jesus?

Is your total being just waiting for Jesus? Would you describe your life as being complete, your purpose as being fulfilled when you see Jesus face to face? Is He your light of revelation? Do you understand Jesus to be the peace that you're missing? Would you describe your life as a patient and quiet waiting for God, humbly and faithfully expecting God's "Comfort" to arrive? Contrast Simeon's reaction to Jesus with that of Herod. It's that difference that will cause some to rise and some to fall. We will either surrender to Jesus or be at war with Him.

Anna had known sorrow. Eighty-four, a widow. Some here can relate to that. Did she get bitter, or did she get better? All her life she had never ceased to hope. Age can take away the strength of our bodies. But it can do much worse. It can suck the life right out of our hearts such that the hopes we once cherished die within us and we become grimly resigned to things as they are. It's your choice to get bitter or better. How do you think of God? Do you think He's distant and detached or do you think of Him as intimately connected with life—with your life? Do you believe that the best is yet to come? Then the years will never kill your hope.

Anna was able to keep that hope because she never ceased to worship God. She spent her life in God's house with God's people. God gave us His church (& each other) to nurture each of us in the faith. We rob ourselves of a priceless treasure when we neglect to be with His worshipping people. Finally, Anna never stopped praying. In God's strength our weakness is made perfect. Do you think Anna was ever the same after she met Jesus?

So, I leave you with this. Did you meet Jesus this Christmas? Is Christmas over? Well, it is if you haven't met with Jesus during this time. If you have, then Christmas continues all year long. If you didn't or haven't, the good news is that He still wants to meet with you. All you need to do is to ask Him & He promises you a close encounter of the most personal kind. After it, will you ever again be the same? History says, no way!