

Title: Transforming the World one Person at a Time
FCC Decatur, January 6, 2020
Luke 2:21-35, 38-39
Psalms 8

Happy New Year to everyone.

New year's day on our calendar is eight days from Christmas, the birth of Jesus. The day Jesus would have been named. Before the eighth day, the entity was not considered human. January 1 is the start of the world calendar, and signifies the naming of Jesus.

Calendars are identified for important people. As we hear, "In the year of the reign of Caesar...", or "In the year of the reign of David". When Jesus was born, it would have been absurd to believe that one would ever have time marked by this child. And one cannot look at a calendar without being reminded about this child. All of history is impacted by this one family.

And today, most people think of Caesar as a salad or a pizza.

Have you ever had a moment where everything turned upside down?

Today's scripture from Luke focuses on a scene 40 days after Jesus' birth. Mary and Joseph have seen their life turned upside down at the breaking in of the Kingdom of God.

Mary and Joseph are likely around the Jerusalem area. Remember that Luke's and Matthew have different perspectives on the stories around Jesus' birth. The goal is not to talk through the differences, but to hear what Luke is trying to show us about the birth of Jesus.

Mary and Joseph are devout Jews, although they are not rich. They are from Galilee, from a small remote village for the working poor near the Roman building project of Sepphoris. They go to the temple to dedicate their first-born male child at the temple as required by Torah (Lev 12:1-8). The time of sacrifice would be a time of celebration for an extended family where possible, where part of the sacrificial meat would be given back to the family for their celebration. Mary and Joseph offer their sacrifice, two birds, the offering of the poor. They

likely would have some meat to eat after the sacrifice, although not a large spread. It would be clear they were poor, and they would be seen among the poor that day. And yet they came, and were observant, and expected to celebrate the birth of their son. Is there any surprise Luke records Jesus' praise for the poor woman to gave two copper coins (Luke 21:1-4)?

They were likely feeling poor after having to pay the special tax in Nazareth, as well as transit tolls getting to Nazareth. A census was about taxation and counting a population to estimate how large a military force could be obtained. Further, Joseph likely was not working for weeks now. Maybe Joseph had a side job as carpenters were always needed¹.

You can imagine how the last year went for Mary. A year ago, Mary was just a typical teenage girl learning she was betrothed to Joseph. Everything seemed rather typical, and life was progressing positively in their small town of Nazareth. *And then the angel came.* An interruption of the highest level. When Mary likely started showing and needed to leave, she left to spend time with her cousin Elizabeth, who was also pregnant with John the Baptist. In these days she could see the entire story. Mary returned to Nazareth very pregnant. Then the journey to Bethlehem and the birth in a stable. And yet, there were the Shepherds who visited after being told by angels about Jesus' birth. Many amazing times. And yet, things had been quiet for a few weeks. I'm sure even after Jesus' birth, Mary was still wondering about everything, nervous for an uncertain future that awaits. They would go back to Nazareth soon with their new child.

There is a phrase: "may you not live in exciting times," or a curse "may you live in interesting times." Mary was definitely living through interesting times. Maybe some can relate. [people here](#)

¹ There is a chance they stayed with Elizabeth, and in that case, things might have been easier, but nothing is said either way

We are introduced to Simeon. Simeon was well known around the Temple in Jerusalem, likely an important figure among that community. All the important people around Jerusalem and in the Temple would have often welcomed him.

Imagine Simeon's surprise as a spirit of God² leads him to a poor family in line to give their sacrifice at the temple. One would likely see a number of poor families that likely were at best invisible to the good families around Jerusalem. You can imagine a somewhat chaotic scene around them for the buying and selling of animals for the sacrifice. Simeon must have been confused why he was being led in this place, but follow he did.

An important Jew from the upper society of Jerusalem talking to a poor family from Galilee. Mary and Joseph were likely concerned seeing him approach them. Often, for the marginalized, life is better when they are invisible. Likely they would wonder what was going to happen to them. Did they offend someone? Would they be sent away? One would not initially expect anything positive initially in this situation. And the authorities would likely listen to him more than them.

And then comes this absolutely beautiful scene. Simeon realizes the Messiah will come from this poor child from Nazareth. "My eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon is elated and praises God stating his life is now fulfilled. It would not be lost on Simeon how absurd this would be that the Messiah would come from such a poor Galilean family. And yet here he was. This righteous man, praising and glorifying God for the child of this newborn child.

Can you imagine Mary's range of emotions? She probably is getting used to some unique experiences, but still, you have to wonder if they actually have the right child? And yet, it is

² Greek does not really say Holy Spirit. It is a bit unclear compared to later use. The second use is more likely Holy Spirit, but still not clear.

happening. Imagine the external validation by everyone around her. Mary likely had not had this type of validation by her community in a year.

Mary gets brought back to earth abit: “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Really, did you have to say that part? Jesus will be extraordinary.

Everything has turned upside down. The Kingdom of God truly is breaking into this world.

Simeon blessed this child and this family. It was a powerful blessing by a leading person in Israel that Jesus would be involved in “the falling and rising of many in Israel.” Change was coming. Just sit with this scene for a moment, and realize how powerful this story would be. Sit abit further with this scene knowing that God wants to turn things upside down for each and every person. God wants this for you as well. Each one of us.

No wonder this story was one that eventually made it into Luke’s gospel. It was likely a story that Mary would tell. A story told to those who did not believe they could ever push through all of their struggles and unexpected expectations to remember that there is hope and God remembers them. It is a story that so many need today.

And do you think that God does not want have the Kingdom of God break into every person’s life today? To bring the Kingdom of God into your life and your story? The Kingdom of God breaks in on Earth, and there is hope. If you think that you cannot make it or that God does not see your story, know God hears you and is walking with you.

Now everything has turned upside down. The Kingdom of God is truly breaking into this world. Not just the life ever after, but also the world here and now.

After this amazing experience, Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee. They returned to their normal life.

Do you think Mary coming home to Nazareth, with baby and Joseph, would have a lot of supportive comments? The community knew she got pregnant before being married. Oh, yes, God got her pregnant. The community would have believed that explanation about as well as we would today. Joseph would be going back to work, likely after not working for over a month.

We don't hear about anything else for 12 years other than Jesus grew up. Were there important moments? Yes, although most of the time would be in the normal day-to-day struggle.

And God was with them, even though it might not have seemed too eventful most of the time.

Sometimes we believe our life is too routine for God to transform. When it is transformed, we believe it will be one amazing ride. And yet, the reality is somewhat different. There will be amazing moments, and there is a lot of normal. Remember the amazing moments, the times when we sing out with the Psalm (Psalm 8) we heard this morning: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and New Year season. I hope it was an amazing experience. Maybe you got that great present. Or something unexpected happened. And it is a special, maybe even unexpected, moment.

And yet, many are left with the question of what now?

We have to return to our Nazareth, return to our day-to-day life, and the struggles that are still waiting for us. Sometimes difficult struggles.

New Year's resolutions get difficult to hold because one moves from amazing experiences, like what we experience in the Christmas holidays, to the typical day to day, with day-to-day struggles. Maybe you have made such a resolution. Maybe it is going well already, or maybe

it has already been a struggle. Decisions are made when the day to day is removed. It is always good to try, and to continue towards moving to the people God wants for us.

And God is with each of us, even though the day-to-day might not seem that eventful. And yet, there will be moments. Realize God is in the day-to-day moments just the same, and the day-to-day moments are needed for the important events. And know that everyone, absolutely everyone, is known and cherished by God. God's kingdom continues to break in on earth, transforming the world in day-to-day routine through amazing individual experiences.