

Sermon 3 January 2021
“Looking the Right Way“
Luke 2:22-40

Gracious God, be with us today
in this place, in the
Scriptures and in our
words.

May the words of my mouth and
the meditations of our
hearts praise your Holy
name. Amen.

How many of you observed the
Christmas Star this year?

Not so much a star but the
convergence of Jupiter and
Saturn in the evening sky.

It was at its peak on December
21st and they won't appear
together in the night sky
like that again until March
2080.

I don't think I'll live long enough
to see them again.

Fortunately, Emily and I did see
them together while
delivering her newspapers
one evening.

Here is a starry story for you.
The story goes that there were
these two astronomers.
They had been up all night
studying the stars.

They were taking measurements
and recording data as
astronomers do.

As morning approached, it
became too light for them
to make their
measurements, so they
started checking their data.

The two of them were there
humped over their star
charts and computer
printouts.

The opening in the large dome of
the observatory was pointed
to the east and had been left
open.

One of the two astronomers
looked up from his notes
and charts and saw the
brilliant colors of the
sunrise and he said,

“God does paint a pretty picture.”

The other one, who I guess was
the skeptic of the two
astronomers, said,

“God! What do you mean ‘God
paints a pretty picture?’”

You know that is nothing more
that the rays of the sun
being refracted and bent in
the earth's atmosphere and

then reflected off cloud formations producing a distortion of the wavelengths.”

The first scientist said,
“Oh, yea! I know that! I can even identify the precise cloud formations and gasses in the atmosphere that produce each color. I can also diagram the process of fusion that produces the light from the sun in the first place.

But when I see a sunrise like this I can still see the hand of God in it.”

The skeptic replied,
“Well explain this to me. How come I can look at the same sunrise and not see the hand of God?”

The first astronomer turned to the skeptic and said,
“You’re not looking in the right way.”

You know, people are hard headed.
Many people are like that skeptical astronomer.
There he was looking right at the hand of God at work and he couldn’t see it.
In fact his life’s work was

studying the stars and yet he couldn’t see the crafter’s stamp on the work.

He couldn’t see the hand of God because he thought he had it all figured out.

He saw that sunrise and like any good scientist he searched his knowledge for an explanation and he found one.

Then he decided that because he could explain it, it was just a scientific phenomenon.

So he said to himself, “This is just a common ordinary sunrise.

It is just light being reflected and refracted to produce differing wavelengths.

Nothing special.
How can God be part of that?”

Like many people, he couldn’t see God in the ordinary because he wasn’t looking at it the right way.

Having made the point that many people are hard headed, let us turn to the text for this morning’s sermon.

The story is basically that an old woman and an old man, who were both very pious and faithful people, were

led by the spirit of God to
proclaim the baby Jesus as
the Messiah.

To us there is nothing shocking
or surprising about this
story.

It doesn't seem odd that people
should recognize the infant
Jesus and acclaim him as
Messiah.

It seems right and normal to us
because that is the story we
have all heard from
childhood.

We were brought up hearing that
the Son of God came as a
baby.

So we are not surprised when we
read that an old man picked
up Jesus and blessed him as
the Messiah, or that an old
woman ran about telling
people that the Son of God
had come.

It's nothing new to us.

Yet that was not at all the way
the Children of Israel in
Jesus' day were expecting
the Messiah to come.

When they were looking for the
Messiah, they were not
looking for a baby.

They expected the Messiah to
come in clouds of glory.

They expected to see the heavens
torn open and the Son of
Man to descend with
armies of angels.

And all the peoples of the earth
would see it.

Then they expected the Messiah
to sit on a throne and rule
the world with a mighty
fist.

They were looking for a clouds
of glory kind of Messiah;
not an infant.

It didn't fit their expectations that
the Messiah should come
quietly in the night to be
born of common people.

It wasn't what they had been told
would happen.

They thought the whole world
would see the Messiah's
coming.

Instead, only a handful of
shepherds heard of the
coming.

Many who saw Jesus in the days
that followed didn't know
he was the Messiah.

They had it all figured out.

The Messiah would come in
clouds of glory, and sit on
David's throne.

They didn't see God's hand in
Jesus' birth because they

weren't looking in the right way.

These expectations even made it harder for faithful people to see clearly what was happening.

Even Mary didn't fully understand what was going on.

If there was anyone who would be likely to see these events clearly it would have been Mary.

After all, the angel Gabriel had appeared to her and explained it all.

But after Jesus was born and the shepherds had come and told how the angels had appeared to them, it says that Mary,

“Pondered these things in her heart.”

Even she didn't fully understand what was going on. She had to think about it.

Simeon and Anna were no different.

They were faithful people who spent much of their time at the temple.

They heard the Scriptures and the explanations of the

teachers.

I am sure they expected the Messiah to come in clouds of glory like everyone else.

Simeon especially must have thought a lot about the coming of the Messiah.

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before the Anointed one of God, the Christ, came.

So year after year he came to the temple expecting that one day he would see the Messiah come.

He probably stood outside of the inner court and imagined the Messiah coming out of the heavens and descending into the Holy of Hollies.

Yet when the Messiah did come it was not like he or anyone else expected.

Instead of coming out of the sky the Messiah came through one of the gates just like anyone else.

Instead of ending up at the Holy of Hollies Jesus ended up at the place where infants were purified.

Now Simeon and Anna had seen hundreds probably

thousands of children come through the temple to be purified.

It was a common everyday event. There were probably other people having their children put through the rite of purification that day too. Yet both Anna and Simeon knew that this child was different. The Spirit revealed to them that this child was the Savior of the world.

Now many people saw Jesus being brought into the temple.

Why didn't they see that he was the Messiah?

It is because they weren't looking in the right way.

Anna and Simeon were looking with the eyes of faith.

Other people looked at Jesus and said,

“Oh, what a cute Baby.”

They did not see anything special about him.

Yet Anna and Simeon were able to see the hand of God at work in that common everyday event.

People expect to see God in extraordinary events.

They expect to see God in miracles or in earthquakes. They don't look for God in the ordinary.

I guess people figure that God is so great that God can only appear at certain times and in extraordinary ways.

I think that is why people often expect to encounter Christ at special times of the year.

Maybe they think that since Christmas time is such a special time that they are more likely to meet Jesus at Christmas.

They expect to encounter Christ in the special only and not in the ordinary.

Then Christmas is over and many people are disappointed.

All the specialness of the season is past.

And there are 355 days before it comes again.

The special time to remember the Messiah is over and they think their chance to see God at work in their lives is past for another year.

But I have some good news!

The Messiah is here.

God's hand is at work in our

lives.

You may say,

“O.K. preacher then why can't I
see it?”

It is because you are not looking
in the right way.

Jesus is with us in the midst of
common every day events,
that is the Gospel truth.

Yet we can only see the hand of
God at work in everyday
events with eyes of faith.

We have to be like Anna and
Simeon.

We have to expect to see the
anointed one, the Christ, of
God.

If we meet all of life with that
expectation then the
presence of God will be
revealed to us just as it was
to Anna and Simeon.

We will be able to see the hand
of God where other people
just see ordinary everyday
things.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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