

## **Blessings**

Gifts of Christmas: Part 1 “Blessings”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 27th, 2020

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Christmas

**Readings:** Luke 2:22-40

**Reflection:** Psalm 148

**Greeting:** Christ is born; give him glory! Christ has come down from heaven; receive him! Christ is now on earth; exalt him! O you earth, sing to the Lord! O you nations, praise him in joy, for he has been glorified!

**Prayer:** Send, O God, into the darkness of this troubled world, the light of your Son. Let the star of your hope touch the minds of all people and so direct our steps that we may ever walk with joy to the manger where he dwelled, who now and ever reigns in our hearts, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 148

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!*  
(Psalm 148 NRSV\*)

We read the words of Psalm 148 and hear of praise. Much praise for all that God has done. We hear praise for all of creation. How can we celebrate God in all the things that we do? How can we proclaim God’s goodness in our daily lives? Do we remember God in the most mundane parts of our lives? Do we see God’s gifts in all creation?

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, help us to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Let us remember all the good that has come and all that is yet to come. Help us to remember promises made and promises kept. Help us to trust in your steadfast love. Let us both receive and share your blessings. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading is from Luke chapter 2, verses 22 through 40.

*When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 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 seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped 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. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

*(Luke 2:22-40 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Now I've focused on other parts of this reading before. But in this series during the Christmas season, I want to talk about gifts. And today's is about blessings. And the thing that I really focused in on when reading this is Simeon. Because Simeon does something and I think it's important for us to recognize that Simeon takes the knowledge he has, and he spreads it. And Simeon does something that feels a little out of place. Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph, blesses their little family. After speaking about all these things, about how he's so overjoyed to

have seen the Messiah, the spirit filled him with knowledge, and he knew. But the thing that caught me is that Simeon blesses them. That caught my attention. How often do you hear about somebody's blessing Mary and Joseph? You hear all sorts of things about being blessed. But he blesses them. And what that says to me is that blessing others is a gift that we can freely give. It's an important one, one that we often overlook. Often, we talk about being blessed and I know that's something that I have reflected on before. But what about what we can do to bless others? What we can do to lift others up. What we can do to inform them. What we can do to enrich them. It doesn't say that Mary and Joseph thought Simeon was out of his mind. It doesn't say they told him they already knew all this. They were going to do what is always done. Mary and Joseph are doing the routine. This is what you're supposed to do you go. Take the child and you present them to the Lord. You offer a sacrifice. That's normal. Run of the mill. Expected.

Simeon was not expected. Mary and Joseph are amazed. Now some people might say, why would they be amazed? Didn't we already have shepherds coming and saying all these things? What we have is that Mary and Joseph took all that in. But maybe that wasn't quite enough for them to fully understand what was going on. We know that Mary remembered those things, thought about them, and held on to them, but they're also still coming to terms with all of it, fully realizing their situation. And Simeon blesses them in multiple ways. In one way, he's giving them knowledge they didn't have before. He's letting them some know something that has been revealed to him that God has shown him. That he has the Holy Spirit, guiding him to bless them, to let them know how important this is, to let them know how wonderful it is. I started thinking about this because I started thinking, how often do we bless people in that way? That we say "I want this person to know what I know about them." And maybe it's been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and we know it. Maybe it's something that we think they just don't know. And maybe it's because the Holy Spirit revealed it to us, and we didn't know it is the Spirit at work. I know there's plenty of times that I recognize the Spirit at work later. I can look back and go, "Oh, that's what was going on." But what if we took those insights that we have about people we know about people we see, and we praise them for what they do. Praise them for the things that they may not know and the things they may not see themselves. And we'd bless them to let them know that God is with them. That we pray for them. That we lift them up, because it really does make a difference.

In this season of giving, it's important that we remember that the gift of our words is an important gift that we give. Because often we can say things to people that they may have doubts about. We can say things that they may have never heard. We can tell them things about themselves that they may not have ever thought. Maybe it's because we let the Spirit move in us and let us be a guide to others, lifting them up and showing them the good. Showing them the light where they see only darkness. We bless them, they may receive the Spirit as well. That they may be lifted up that they may find hope. That they may find solace. That they may find comfort. And the more I thought about Simeon and this newborn child,

though it lays a burden with knowing that things won't always be easy, there's also a relief the knowing there will be good. That somebody else has seen it. Maybe Mary and Joseph just thought, "well you know what we've heard those words, but I don't know, maybe I have doubts. Maybe I'm still worried that even after the things that I've seen, I'm still not sure." I can't help but feel that his words were words that would help. Words that, even if talking about difficulties ahead, bring a lot of good to come from them. And you know, even if it was just that he let them know that being able to see their child was something special to him, I can only imagine how comforting that must have been. If we step back for a moment and we focus in, not on the divinity for a moment, but on the humanity in a very human moment, you have two new parents worried about the future of child in what's already been a difficult situation and a struggle for them. And here is somebody saying that they have brought him joy.

What if, when we see others, and we see Christ in them, we praise them for that? What if we praise them for that act that shows Christ's love and Christ's mercy? What if we blessed them for reminding others of God's love? I can't help but think how wonderful that would be. So, maybe in these difficult times we can learn something from Simeon. About the gift that we can give others simply by recognizing the good that we see. Simply by recognizing that when we see a reflection of Christ in others that we tell him of the joy that it brings us. That we give them that same gift. Because though one can say, but this was special. This was the Messiah. This was the chosen. What we are called to do is to recognize Christ, and Christ tells us that we recognize him when we recognize others. That when we recognize the light that we praise the light. That when we recognize God's love, we praise God's love and whatever form it comes in. That when we see the spirit at work, we praise God and we let others know that what they do matters. And that when we see people doing something good, we let them know. Because it's good. Because if we believe that goodness flows from God that we know that God is at work, and that's good! And we should be able to praise those around us and bless them. Bless them for the joy that they bring to others. Bless them for the ways that they help. Bless them for the work that they do. Bless them for their charity, for their love, for their compassion. Because maybe, just maybe, when we let the Spirit work through us to give that gift, we bring them closer to God, and we bring them closer to Christ, and we let them invite the Holy Spirit in, if they haven't already. That we help to relieve the doubts that they may have on whether or not they are loved by God. And let them find comfort that someone has noticed. And that someone has spoken up.

So, let our words be a gift. Let us be eager to give a blessing. Let us be ready to lift up others so that they may understand that love, and that they may grow in it. That they may grow in Christ, that they may do even more. That they may be strengthened to continue, that their resolve be strengthened that somebody noticed the good when it's so easy to look around and see the hate. When it's so easy to look around and see the despair. When it's so easy to look around and see people disparaging the truth, because the lie is more comforting in the short term. And maybe, just maybe, if we recognize those things that we so admire in Christ when

we see them in others, that we all grow closer to a life in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our friend, our companion, our teacher. Because not only did we hear his words, but we lived them. We lived them by using our words to let them be a gift to others. One of the greatest gifts that we can give. May we always let the Holy Spirit guide us so that we can give that gift and that blessing. That we may live a deeper, richer, more meaningful life in Christ. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** Almighty and all-loving God, through your Son Jesus Christ you have reconciled the world to yourself. Help us now to be reconciled with one another, that again we might dwell in the warmth of your love. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to put aside the cloak of pride and put on Christ, that we might forgive and be forgiven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

\* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

## **Our Current Series – Gifts of Christmas**

Our series for the Christmas season is all about the gifts we give and receive.

December 27th – *Blessings* – How can we bless others with our words?

January 3rd – *Acknowledgement* – What does it say when we acknowledge others?

January 10th – *The Spirit* – The Holy Spirit is a gift we both give and receive.