

Here we are, the end of another year, the celebration of Christmas has come and gone. Gifts are unwrapped and Santa is back at the North Pole! Soon the decorations will come down and be put away for next year. Although there is some difference of opinion on this: Some of our South Carolinian friends say it is “bad luck” to leave the decorations up into New Years. However, our family tradition is that we will wait until January 6th marking the traditional day that the Wise Men come. Not sure which is correct, but my wife informs me, we’re sticking with the Wise Men!!

And, so for some, this Christmas was one of enjoying a family get-together. Families came to share a meal, they came to laugh and talk. For some this was Christmas. But, perhaps there were others for whom Christmas was a more depressing and hurtful time - maybe it was loneliness, shattered families or other health and financial problems.

Of course Christmas means different things to different people, it brings different feelings, based on your life circumstances. And for the business world, it is an opportunity to make profits. While for the Christian world it is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus and it is another new years beginning on the Christian calendar. A contrast between the Christian year and the secular year, starting January 1st. Our world seems divided into two parts, that of our Christian Calendar which of course starts with Advent in late November or early December and runs toward Easter and the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, followed by the time of Pentecost and the building of the church. On the secular side it marks the end of another football season, memories of long past summer vacation at the beach. And a time to measure our financial world, to take stock of what was good this past year and what we need to change.

All of this, is the contrast of our Christian year and our cultural year; two different “books” in our life. Two different books with chapters yet to be written. And I wonder what Christmas meant for us spiritually? Or were we too busy entertaining & unwrapping gifts, or did we take time off to withdraw from the celebration for a moment and offer ourselves as a gift to God. Was Jesus born in our heart again or is that something we have put off for a later date?

Today’s gospel story tells us about a man called Simeon who waited his whole life time, for Christ to be born. Simeon seemed to have only one goal in life, and that was to see the Savior, the Messiah! Scripture says he was waiting or longing for the consolation of Israel and it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Savior. Now, Simeon was not a Godless man. Scripture says he was righteous and devout and full of the Holy Spirit. Yet, was there something missing in his life? Without Jesus, his spiritual life was incomplete. Now, there are many people who are satisfied with their spiritual life. They console themselves by saying, well I volunteer once in a while with food collections, or with the community thanksgiving dinner, I also help out in Church, and I put a little something in the offering plate each week, I say a prayer when I can - all this is better than what maybe some others do, and maybe this is enough to get me to heaven. Now, I’m not sure about this, I’m not sure if there are any short cuts in getting to heaven, but I think I know an easier way - just allow Jesus to be born in your heart. So part of the question is: Where is Jesus, in the plan for your life?

Simeon was not about to pass on from this world to the next, without meeting his Savior. In a very real way, Simeon's dream can come true in each of our lives. Knowing Jesus is more important than anything we can ever imagine. It is a dream within our grasp. Each one of us must have that longing that Simeon had to know the Messiah personally.

Friends, I don't know what dreams you have for your life. I don't know what the final chapter in your book will look like? I don't know what it is that you've been waiting and longing for? I don't know what occupies your mind the most? I don't know what are you thinking of the most? Simeon knew what his goal was. More than anything else, Simeon wanted Jesus in his life. Simeon became an old man waiting, but his dream came true. His waiting was over. His seeking was over. Scripture tells us, if you seek God with all of your heart, you will find Him. If you haven't found Jesus, the only reason is because you have not sought Him with all of your heart. Sometimes, two people can be in the same Sunday morning service, hear the same message and one might say, Wow! I felt God's presence, while the other might say, it was boring, I wish I stayed home and watched TV". God simply does not fit in the plan of some people's lives. For some there is no desire for him. There is no room in their heart; just like there was no room in the inn.

Even though Simeon, was an old man, he never lost hope. Every moment of every day he was expecting the coming of the Lord. What expectations do you have when you come to Church? Do you expect God to speak to you, Do you expect to be blessed, Do you expect healing and forgiveness? What do you expect - or do you come just because it seems to be the right thing to do.

Finally, Simeon personally received Jesus. Can you imagine the joy of the old man, who spent a whole life for this one special moment? Seeing the child, he didn't admire him from a distance; he didn't say how cute but I don't want to pick him up, something I have been accused of with my grandchildren - Simeon stole that wonderful opportunity to cuddle the child in his arms and bless God.

What a feeling it must have been to hold the creator in his arms? Simeon personally received the Christ child into his arms and into his life. I wonder, do you have that personal experience of receiving Jesus into our lives? Simeon got to this point not by accident - He waited, and He expected and so He received. Simeon had his priorities right. He had to personally receive Jesus before he was ready to die. After picking up the baby in his arms, he said "now let your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation".

But I have this nagging question: what did Simeon do with this new found experience or knowledge? How did the book of Simeon's life finish up? What was Simeon going to do with these final days of his life? Was he going to be so enamored with this gift from God, and then do nothing? Our passage in Luke gives us no clue of what happens with Simeon. Did he spend his life seeking the Messiah and then go off to die. Or did he take this opportunity to do something wonderful, with his life and new found gift from God?

We celebrate Christmas and Jesus is born again into our lives, and what do we do? Do we just go on living the life we live today or do we take this new found experience and knowledge and write another chapter in our own book. Do we make a profound change in our lives to live the life of a disciple? Do we start to change our lives and become one who makes disciple of others?

Just over 30 years ago a young boy by the name of Terry Fox woke up one morning with a sharp pain in his leg. Soon he found out that he had bone cancer and that his right leg would need to be

amputated right above the knee. I know how devastating this can be, a friend of mine in high school had the same issue. He passed away about a year later, just after we graduated high school. The story of Terry Fox continues. The night before his surgery he had a dream that he would run across Canada, from shore to shore. He never forgot that dream. And later he told friends and his family about his dream and his desire to run, to run across Canada. Of course his friends and family told him, nice idea, but it was never going to happen. You only have one leg and you are not going to be able to run across Canada, on just one leg. Of course we know today the miraculous things that can be done with prosthetics. But not so 30 years ago.

Months after his amputation, along with a well fitted prosthesis, Terry began training. He worked up to 13 and a half miles a day. Then in April of 1980 he began his marathon across Canada. The aim was to raise money for cancer research by asking people to pledge for every mile he completed. He started his run by dipping his leg into the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Newfoundland, and off he went to run across Canada. He averaged 28 to 30 miles a day. A thousand miles out, he was not much noticed. But Terry kept on running and soon people started to take notice. Pledges started to pour in with every mile Terry ran. News spread that Terry was running and soon would run through the town ahead; and people would line the streets to see Terry and his one leg and his prosthesis crossing Canada.

After 5 months, Terry Fox had put thirty-three hundred miles behind him, but as he began approaching the Rocky Mountains, he started coughing and getting weak. He kept on going, but the cough got worse and the legs began to weaken. And then they found cancer in Terry's lungs. This time they couldn't stop it. But the amazing thing was, the donations kept on coming in. Money continued to pour in, in support of Terry's run for cancer. Several months later Terry Fox lost his battle to cancer, but not before he was able to raise \$22 million dollars for cancer research. You can go on the internet today and type in Terry Fox, and there you will find a foundation dedicated to raising money for cancer research. What a final chapter for a young man to write!

In the case of Terry Fox and despite the prevailing opinion, despite being told by everyone, he knew that he could run across Canada. Terry Fox went out and continued to battle against all odds. And how many stories have we heard of people interacting with other people to change their lives? Sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad. We are all too aware of the events taking place around the world today: The current fighting between Israel and Hamas. The Russian invasion of Crimea, the ongoing struggle at the Ukrainian boarder, life in Syria and Iraq, and the Ebola epidemic breaking out in Africa, ISIS killing anyone who does not believe like they do. And right here at home the disastrous situation happening at our boarders and our congress and President unable to address the issues. And the list goes on and on! All of these actions, or lack thereof, creating a situation that would not be pleasing in God's eyes! You might wonder, why God bothered with this new born baby in a manger. Yet these deeds of disaster continue to happen in a world where we believe that God is in control?

Yet on the other side of the aisle, there are an untold numbers of stories where people are reaching out to help others. To change the lives of those around us. We have the story of Terry Fox and if we watch or read the news, and yes there are good stories that find their way into print, or as the final story on the evening news. There are good people doing good things in the name of our Lord and savior.

Doing things to help those around us and those thousands of miles away from us. People are writing their final chapters with good deeds that start with the birth of this baby in a manger.

Christmas is when Christ was born. Christmas season is a good time for him to be born in our lives. Listen to Simeon; he is telling us something! You must have a longing for Christ; it must be your life's goal. You must be willing to wait for Him and then when he comes to you, you must be willing to hold him and receive him into your life. Yet there is still more to this Christmas story. Christ is not just being born into our lives, Christ has come calling us to be servants. To be disciple makers in this world. He's calling us to write a final chapter in our books. I just wonder what my final chapter will hold. And I wonder, what will be the story that you write, for your final chapter?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.