**MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION**

December 28, 2014

Luke 2:21-40

Key Verse 2:30 “For my eyes have seen your salvation…”

Today is the last Sunday of 2014. 2014 is officially over. You can put aside the past mistakes, the past failures, and have a mind set to start a new year and turn over a new slate in 2015. The nice thing about a new year is that it brings new hope. But this scares some people. They may have had a good year in 2014. They may have gotten used to the way life was going, and wished that it would last forever. Or they might not feel that they have the energy or power to face another difficult year. The idea of anything new makes them scared and tentative. But no matter what changes we have to face in the new year, we can face it with confidence and hope because our eyes see God’s salvation in Jesus. Last week we learn that God sent his one and only Son Jesus as a baby in a manger in order to save us from our sins. It makes our minds dizzy to think of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe entering human history not as a superman, or conquering military hero, but as a little baby in a manger in order to be our Savior. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, imprisoned by Hitler during WWII, wrote to his fiancée on one lesson learned from life in prison: “A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes, does various unessential things and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.”

Now Jesus is eight days old. He was circumcised and presented at the temple according to the Law. Even though he was the lawgiver, he was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law. Let’s think about what it means that the Son of God was subject to the Law. Secondly, let’s learn about two faithful persons, Simeon and Anna, who were looking for God’s salvation.

**First**, Jesus became just like us. There are three different rituals in this passage. Jesus is God who is the author of the Law. But he subjected himself to the law. Jesus became like our brother. Hebrews 2:17,18 says, “for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus took upon himself the impurity of his people so as to save us from our sin and guilt.

Firstly, there was the circumcision of Jesus. His parents, according to Jewish custom, circumcised him on the eighth day. Circumcision was the sign of being God’s covenant people. When Abram was complacent after having Ishmael, a son from his concubine, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless” (Ge 17:1). It meant, “You should not live as an ordinary man. You should live as a chosen people and a man with a covenant with God.” Since then, Abram made a big leap of faith. He was no longer Abram, a noble father with no son. He became Abraham, a father of many nations. In the New Testament, circumcision is interpreted as circumcision of the heart. Human beings have a strong desire to be the greatest and at the same time to be very ordinary. Our God is a great God. He does not want his people to be clumps of desires. He wants us to be his chosen people and to be great, not at all petty, in his sight. Abraham was circumcised as a sign of his change from an ordinary country gentleman into a father of faith for all nations. So we also must have circumcision of the heart so as to be called the children of God. The children of God are ordinary people. But in reality, they are truly extraordinary people in the sight of God.

After circumcision, his parents named him Jesus, the name the angel had told them (21). The name Jesus means, “the Lord saves.” Notice it doesn’t mean, “the Lord helps people save themselves.” It means, “the LORD saves.” Jesus would be the Savior of the world. Our salvation wouldn’t have anything to do with what we would do. It would only depend on the Lord. Also notice that Jesus’ name is an active verb. “The Lord SAVES.” He would be the one who would die for the sin of the world. They didn’t have to look forward to the coming of a Savior anymore. It was time for salvation to begin NOW. No longer would God hold any sins against us. They would all be forgiven and forgotten. Just as God gave Jesus his name, so he has given us new names. Instead of calling us condemned sinners, names that we have earned, he now calls us “saints”, a name that Jesus has earned for us. This is what we are now. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we take on a new name. We are called saints and holy people. It gives us a fresh start. It’s a present reality. It is like we have been broken free from the chains that were bound around our neck. The devil can no longer accuse us of sin. God’s wrath can no longer touch us, for we know that God already punished Christ on the cross in our place. We are now holy in God’s sight.

The second ceremony was concerned with the purification of Mary. According to God’s law, a woman becomes ceremonially unclean for 40 days after giving birth to a son. After that, she needs to bring an offering to be purified. She is to present to the Lord a lamb. If she can’t afford a lamb, she is to present a pair of doves or two young pigeons. They are called offering of the poor. What did Mary bring for the offering? She brought a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Jesus was born into a poor family. This reminds us of what Paul said, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor 8:9) Before knowing Jesus personally, no one is rich. The more money they have, the more selfish and unsatisfied they become. They say that Americans give on average 2% of their income to charity. But the rich give only 1% of their income. Some rich people go to Florida vacation every Christmas, spending thousands of dollars. But they are unhappy, when they envy those who go to Australia where it is summer. On the other hand, those who have Jesus in their hearts are indeed rich, because their Father God is rich.

The third ritual was the presentation of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. At the time of Exodus, God killed all the firstborn sons of Egypt in order to free the Israelites. But God spared the firstborn sons of the Israelites by his mercy. God decreed that the firstborn sons belonged to him. The parents had to buy back or redeem their firstborn son by the payment of five shekels of silver. This they did when they dedicated him to the Lord. Behind these ceremonies there was a conviction of faith in the parents that their children were not their own, but were the children of God. They circumcised their children as a sign of dedicating their children to God. They taught their children the Law of God. By nature, all parents want their children to grow up to be greater than others. But most of them do not know how to raise them. So they give them much human favor, and thereby spoil them until they become useless. We must present our children to God and teach them the Bible.

**Second**, Simeon’s faith. To people’s eyes, Simeon was no more than an old man who sorrowed over his fate, thinking that he would die soon. As we know well, when the world is dark and evil, the most ominous characteristic of the world is that people do not believe in God. When people do not believe in God, they become fearful and restless. When people do not believe in God, they live according to their feelings and become very immoral and violent. At that time, the world was dark and full of despair. In such a world it is hard for anyone to believe in God personally. But there was a man called Simeon. What kind of person was he? Look at verse 25. “Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Simeon was a warrior of faith. At that time, everybody was sorrowful. But Simeon was not sorrowful, because he had faith in God. What kind of faith did Simeon have? Simeon had faith that God’s promises were true. Simeon had faith that he would see the Savior of the world with his own eyes before his death. Simeon was devout. “Devout” literally means “diligent.” The world was dark and people were very lazy due to their despair. Most people did not do what they should do. They were lazy people. But Simeon was different. As Noah wholeheartedly built the ark, working day and night, Simeon studied the Law of God with all his eagerness. In other words, he studied the Bible to seek God. He did not have much money. But he helped others diligently. He was an old man, but in truth, he was the whole church of God.

Simeon was also a man of hope. Verse 25b says, “He was waiting for the consolation of Israel...” Nationally speaking, the tragic situation of Israel in those times was simply appalling. Under the Roman rule they were hungry and angry. There was no hope in men’s hearts. But Simeon had hope because he had God in his heart. He believed in God’s promise that he would send the Messiah. Simeon had hope in that promise, and he was waiting for the emergence of the Messiah. In the midst of despair, he believed God’s promise that the Messiah would come and comfort and redeem his suffering people. What happened to this old man when he had hope in God? The last part of verse 25 says, “...the Holy Spirit was upon him.” When he lived by faith and had hope in God, God was with him and convinced him through the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Like Simeon we must live by faith and have hope in God. We should never allow any kind of despair into our hearts. We sometimes feel that our ministry is going nowhere with not many U of T students. However, because of God and his promise, we continue our work of one to one Bible study, believing that God will make Canada a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Look at verses 27,28. “Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...” Finally, his long-awaited hope was realized. Now he was holding the baby Jesus in his arms. When his hope was realized, Simeon began to sing. After the initial outburst of praise to God for the Messiah, Simeon blessed the parents and spoke prophetically to Mary.

The prophecy includes the ideas of touchstone, stumblingstone, stepping-stone, and sword. Firstly, “this child was destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel.” There are many kinds of people with different views of man and the world. Many think about their future destiny based on their own ideas. But they are wrong. Despite many ideas concerning human destiny, all men’s destiny depends on how they see Jesus. To those who believe in him, Jesus is the rock of salvation. To those who do not believe, he is the rock that makes them stumble and fall. Secondly, “the child was destined to be a sign that will be spoken against.” Jesus’ very presence on earth proved a tremendous rebuke to sin and unholiness, and thus brought out the bitter animosity of the human heart. Many hated Jesus because they felt condemned by the presence of the holy God. Thirdly, “and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” Simeon foresaw the mother’s suffering. The whole life of Jesus would cause pain to his mother; especially, his death on the cross would cause her pain like a sword piercing her soul. How costly it was to be the mother of Jesus! May God raise many women of faith like Mary among young Canadian students.

**Third**, Anna’s prayer. Anna was a prophetess, a daughter of the tribe of Asher, a beloved wife to her husband. One day her husband died. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84 (36,37). When she lost her husband, she could have spent her life as a sorrowful widow. She could have spent that time living in the past and longing for the good old days. She could have become the proverbial busybody, sticking her nose into other people’s business. She could have sat on the porch complaining to her neighbors about her aches and pains and the problems that come with growing older. But she didn’t. Instead Anna devoted herself to loving God. We must not forget that Anna had difficult days. We must not forget that Anna could have had moments when she wished that she could have remarried and had children. We must not forget that there were moments when faith was hard to express. But she made a decision of faith to devote herself to God and to pray for her people. Her prayer topic was the redemption of Jerusalem. She embraced all of God’s people with a mother’s heart and prayed for them one by one. She was also waiting for the coming of the Messiah. The moment she saw the baby Jesus, she knew he was the Messiah. She thanked God, for the promise of the redemption of Jerusalem had been fulfilled.

Like Simeon and Anna, we must have faith in the promises of God. From these old people we learn we should never become tired Christians who stop placing our hope in Jesus. We should not be too smart trying to save ourselves but simply trust that there is salvation in Jesus Christ. Let us pray God may help us also to be prayer warriors like Simeon and Anna and pray for the redemption of the world in the new year. I don’t know what kind of a year you had in 2014. No matter what changes we have to face in 2015, we can face the new year with confidence and hope because our eyes see God’s salvation in Jesus.