



Sermon Growth Guide

December 27, 2020

Wonder – What I Have Seen

Luke 2:22-40

Key Verse: Luke 2:30-31 “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.”

Big Idea: God is always on the move; watch for Him!

Foundations

Like a bride waiting for her groom, Simeon was eagerly awaiting the Messiah as he moved through his day-to-day business in the Jerusalem temple.

First, we find Simeon waiting. “He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him,” our text states. Has the wonder of the Christmas story moved you to a posture of active waiting?

Second, Simeon is listening. Luke 2 continues, “It had been revealed to (Simeon) by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” Has the wonder of the Christmas story moved you to a posture of active listening?

And third, Simeon is watching for the Messiah: “Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.” Has the wonder of the Christmas story moved you to a posture of active watching?

When we strive to live in the tri-fold posture of active waiting, listening and watching, we become fueled with Kingdom wonder and are better prepared to partner in the healing that God continues to pour out over the nations.

Gathered together with your circle, open your time of study in prayer. Ask the Spirit to guide and guard your spiritual formation, your growth in Christ.

Understanding God’s Word

What do we learn about Simeon in Luke 2:22-28? What hard, but true words does Simeon give directly to Mary in verses 34-35? What does this mean?

Enter Anna in verse 36. What do we learn of Anna’s devotion to God and her life of worship?

Applying God’s Word

James Boice writes, “Do you want to celebrate Christmas? Then be amazed at it. Allow it to stretch your mind.” God is always on the move; watch for Him!

Drawing from the lives of Simeon and Anna, what one aspect of your devotion to Christ would you like to see sharpened in 2021?

Witnessing God’s Word

We read these words about Anna in verse 38: “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” What a witness! How can you narrow your focus to “be an Anna” in this New Year? Who would you like to come to know Jesus in 2021? With a wonder-filled posture and with your circle, pray for this salvation moment to happen.

Merry Christmas! It's good to be together again on the other side of Christmas. I hope you had a blessed celebration in spite of our current limitations. As we continue exploring the wonder of Christmas, I invite you to turn to Luke 2:22-40.

I can't tell you how grateful I've been for this year's Advent series on **Wonder**. It's one that I'm greatly in need of. G.K. Chesterton noted, **"The world is not lacking in wonders, but in a sense of wonder."** He was naming our tendency to see things that are incredible, but not become moved by them. During this season of Advent, we've been leaning into a sense of wonder, longing for more frequent responses of "Wow!"

Like so many of you, wonder at Christmas time wasn't lacking when I was growing up. Children are naturally captivated by the magic of this season and all that it brings. But when I reached my 20s and the years that followed, that sense of wonder diminished. I allowed myself to become pulled along each year by the familiarity and busyness of this season. Too often I finally felt ready to really celebrate Christmas about the time it was ending. That led to a longing in recent years to

experience anew a sense of awe at the bigness of what God has done for us. So, I'm delighted by how this series calls each of us to celebrate our Lord's coming with a sense of wonder. James Boice offers a similar admonishment: **"Do you want to celebrate Christmas? Then be amazed at it. Allow it to stretch your mind."**

I hope you've experienced a sense of wonder in the days leading up to Christmas—but don't think that this window has closed! As gifts are returned and we move toward putting away decorations, opportunities for wonder still remain. We want to continue looking for moments of amazement in the days ahead—but not so we can experience a warm and fuzzy feeling when we do so. We want to respond with awe, giving God the praise and worship that He's so deserving of. Today's passage tells us of two who experienced the wonder of an encounter with Jesus following His birth. It also offers some wonder-fueling postures that can guide us in the week ahead.

Our text begins with Joseph and Mary's actions following Jesus' birth (Luke 2:22-24). Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to Jerusalem to fulfill two requirements of God's law from Leviticus: a mother's ceremonial cleansing 40 days after the birth of a son, and the dedication to God of a first born. Their faithful obedience offers a glimpse of why God selected these two to raise His Son.

Unexpectedly, this family was approached by someone they didn't know. A man named Simeon, described as "righteous and devout" was about to experience a moment of wonder. As we look at his story, I want us to catch the three postures Simeon was in that helped facilitate this experience.

First, **Simeon was waiting** (Luke 2:25). Luke tells us that he was waiting for the "consolation of Israel." In other words, he was waiting expectantly for the promised Messiah, sent by God to save His people. Keep in mind that God's promises were made hundreds of years earlier, yet Simeon remained in a posture of waiting for them to be fulfilled.

The second characteristic we see in this godly man is that **Simeon was listening** (Luke 2:26-27a). God comes to those who are receptive to hearing Him, and Simeon heard from the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah during his lifetime. Simeon's attentiveness to the Spirit's prompting also led him to the temple courts one day when Jesus' family was there.

Finally, **Simeon was watching** (Luke 2:27b-28a). Simeon's encounter with Jesus' family didn't come in a socially distanced group of fewer than 50 people who were six feet apart. The temple courts were

crowded that day, like many others, with those who'd come to worship or adhere to laws of purification. Simeon had to look intently at all who pushed around him in order to recognize the Messiah in Mary's arms. Because he was watching and led by the Spirit, Simeon identified Jesus in the arms of humble parents who didn't stand out in the crowd. And because he was watching, Simeon could declare in subsequent verses, "My eyes have seen your salvation."

Filled with wonder, Simeon responded by praising God (Luke 2:28-32). Simeon declared that he could now depart this world in peace, after finally seeing God's plan of salvation for His people. He observed that in contrast to his private moment, God's saving work would one day be witnessed by all people. And Simeon rejoiced at the light that Jesus would bring into the darkness of our world.

But this moment between Simeon and Joseph and Mary wasn't over (Luke 2:33-35). After praying a blessing upon Jesus' parents, Simeon addressed Mary directly. He described the disruption that Jesus' coming would initiate, and the pain this would cause His mother. This is the first reference in the Gospels to the struggle and suffering that Jesus would experience during His ministry.

Joseph and Mary were still processing Simeon's words when they were approached by another stranger (Luke 2:36-38). Anna was a prophetess, who was also waiting and longing for the promised Messiah's coming. It's thought that she was over 100 years old, and Anna had served God faithfully over the years thru worship, prayer and fasting. This was a moment of wonder for Anna as well, and she responded by giving thanks, then telling others. Though her words weren't recorded, Anna added confirmation to the extraordinary nature of this child.

There's a beautiful balance between the stories of Christ's birth provided by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Each provides details not included by the other; combined, they provide us a more complete picture of this wondrous event. For example, Luke concludes with the return of this family to Galilee (Luke 2:39-40). There's no mention here of Matthew's account of the family's flight to Egypt after the visit by the Magi. It's believed that this probably occurred between this moment we read of today, and Luke's description of the family's eventual relocation in Nazareth. Luke's final verse then provides a rare glimpse of Jesus' growing-up years.

Do you
want to

experience more wonder during the weeks ahead? This example of two who experienced it during their encounter with Jesus can help prepare us to do so.

Simeon's story encourages us to develop a wonder-fueling posture in three ways. First, **we wait**. Waiting is a big part of Advent, as we anticipate Christ's coming and our celebration of that. But waiting doesn't end with Christmas; God's redemptive work in our lives and world continues on. As most of us have learned by now, God's initiative comes to us in His timing, not in ours. Our waiting to experience His life-giving activity in, through and around us becomes an act of faith. Would you lean forward in anticipation in the days ahead, ready to respond with "Wow!" in moments when you encounter your Lord?

Second, **we listen**. For weeks, we've been listening to holiday music, Christmas greetings—and yes, to COVID-19 updates. Listening to God's still, small voice requires an even greater attentiveness within. But it's an attentiveness that's worth it, when we experience the wonder of hearing from our Lord. For unlike Santa, who puts things aside for another year, God's speaking doesn't end with Christmas. There'll always be something He longs to reveal to us, new insights that can move us when we hear them. Would you invite God to surprise you with words resulting in wonder, and carve out time this week to listen? If you don't currently

have a personal relationship with Jesus, would you be willing to listen for His wooing message of love?

Finally, **we watch**. Many in the temple courts that day missed out on the Messiah's presence because they weren't watching for it. Jesus entered our world, not only to save us from our sins, but to give us new life today and every day. If we want to experience the wonder of an encounter with Him, we need to be watching for it, like Simeon. For God is always at work, and He longs for us to see what He's doing in a way that prompts our awe and propels us to join Him there. Would you look for God's fingerprints in and around your life—glimpses of His quiet presence or activity that can stir wonder within?

When we do experience moments of wonder, let's also follow Anna's example. She responded to her encounter with Jesus by telling others about it. Sharing our wonder with others helps them also move to a posture of "Wow!" at what God is doing.

I've forgotten many of my
childhood memories by
now. But one remains
seared in my memory:
how difficult it was
to get to sleep so
many years on
Christmas
Eve! I
knew

Christmas wouldn't come until I'd fallen asleep, but I was so excited waiting for what was on the other side, I remember going to sleep felt like an impossible task. I didn't know the details of what would happen when I awoke: but I knew it would be wondrous.

Friends, would we have the same posture when it comes to God? Though we don't know the details out ahead of what He'll do, we do know that we follow and worship a God of wonder. Would you wait expectantly? Would you listen intently? Would you watch closely for glimpses of the Lord's presence and activity in and around your life?

I hope you've already experienced moments of wonder this Advent season. I also hope you'll continue experiencing wonder in the days ahead that will prompt you to bow in worship. Wait, listen and watch for what our Lord is up to, and then share it with others. To encourage us in this direction, let me repeat the earlier admonition that I quoted: "Do you want to celebrate Christmas? Then be amazed at it. Allow it to stretch your mind."

May your days this week continue to be filled with wonder.