

“Seven Swans A Swimming or Hogamanay”
1st of Christmas – December 31, 2017

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 61:11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. 62:1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. 62:2 The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. 62:3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Luke 2:22-40

2:22 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 2:23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 2:24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 2:25 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. 2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 2:27 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, 2:28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 2:29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 2:30 for my eyes have seen your salvation, 2:31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 2:32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 2:33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 2:34 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 2:35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." 2:36 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, 2:37 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. 2:38 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. 2:39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 2:40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The department store Santa clause hangs up his suit in the storeroom at about 10 on Christmas eve and as he smooths the crushed red velvet he utters a sigh because the obvious is all to clear; his job is over until next year. He mutters a final 'ho, ho, ho' and leaves glad that he has plenty of time to get to the church for the 11 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service, all too eager to trade that 'ho, ho, ho' in for "Silent Night." On Christmas day the family gathers piles of brightly colored wrapping paper in the warm glow of the Christmas tree with hot chocolate in the cup and a cinnamon bun on a napkin and the sounds of the season on the stereo and they tell stories based on memories and traditions created throughout the generations of the family. They celebrate, they welcome new members into the family circle and mourn those no longer there, they share a festive meal, and like the meal, long in preparation but so quickly consumed, the season of so many days in preparation is quickly over and the family disperses to their own households with children getting back to presents opened and too quickly abandoned and parents dreading putting Christmas away for another year.

In the spirit of the season all sorts of charitable groups, even prisoners in the local jail, gather, repaint, repair and fix toys for children in need. These Santa's elves prepare but never deliver and when Christmas comes they wonder how they are received and suffer some let down because the effort has

been expended , the bell has been rung and the kettle put away, the task is completed, Christmas is over.

In the church we prepare for months our celebrations of the birth of Jesus, and the days come and the halls are decked, and the songs are practiced and sung, and there is general good cheer and warm feelings but soon the decorations will come down and even today seem a bit over used and we are slightly depressed wondering what to do with all the energy we have left.

The Sunday after Christmas is a rather strange time in the church, even being New Year's eve, which really has no expression in the faith, our church year beginning in Advent, we want to hold onto some of that Christmas spirit, but it just doesn't seem quite the same. On the way here this morning we pass trees already resigned to the curb for pick up, houses which only a week ago were all lit up are quiet and dark. We get here and thank goodness it's still decorated but in truth it is isn't quite so spiritually uplifting as the flickering candles and silent night of the Christmas eve services nor so almost raucously joyous as the sticky sweetness of the fellowship on Christmas morning.

We are on this Sunday after Christmas caught in between the sheer joy of Christmas and even anticipating some new year celebration, with or without the Jags cooperation, and then, even that, will be done... Although some on the morrow may be still experiencing the residual effects of auld lang syne. We

are far too quickly in between the time off for the holidays and more winter days ahead that seem a little heavier somehow this year.

Your pastor, in an attempt to hold onto the spirit of the season, tries to make a connection between the wonderful story of the birth of Jesus and the songs of the season and the story of Jesus no longer in the manger today by recalling 'seven swans a swimming' on this the seventh day of Christmas but there are no five golden rings, or a partridge in a pear tree or the rest around us. And I promise you my heart is still in it, I even wore the Christmas coat today, but we're a little weary.

We're kind of like children who, at about 2 in the afternoon, or earlier, on Christmas day, just run out of gas and we find them cuddling the newest stuffed animal and fast asleep. With them, we kind of ask the rhetorical question, "Christmas seems to be over....now what?"

Scripturally it's over in a flutter of wings and an echoing against the hills "Gloria in excelsis deo," with Mary pondering and shepherds shepherding the news 'that is for all the people,' in Luke. Liturgically we're not given much time to 'o come let us adore him' before Mary and Joseph bundle up to little gift of God and hustle him off to the temple. It's kind of a sweet story – kind of like the family getting in the SUV with the newest member of the family in arms and heading off to see grandma and grandpa who will lay eyes on him or her for the very first time. The parents, almost loopy from lack of sleep, not so much

because of the baby who thankfully and miraculously sleeps in heavenly peace but because of the 4 year old who decided that 4 o'clock was late enough to lie in bed on Christmas morning.

So today we find Mary and Joseph, fulfilling the obligation of the law, Jewish this time and not Roman, heading to the temple. It will be Jesus' first visit there. A visit that will heavily foreshadow one to follow 33 years later. There they meet grandpa and grand ma in the person of a couple of old temple dwellers who have been hanging around waiting for some new life to show up in the place. Not just any new life, but some very special new life. First order of business makes it seem like this was 'the second day of Christmas' as two turtledoves are to be sacrificed, but more likely it was the 7th or 8th. Grandpa, well in truth an ancient by the name of Simeon lays eyes on Jesus and lights up like that Christmas star.

Now when loved one see a new born for the first time it behooves them to say something special about the child. Something sweet and endearing and nice. They need to say that the precious one has the 'face of an angel,' even if the child – well – doesn't. They need to proclaim and predict great futures. "look at those hands – he or she will be a great ball player . Look at the intelligence in those eyes. "You have a little genius here."

But think about what Mary and Joseph heard in first a muttered prayer, "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."

Luke says, "And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him." My guess is they were a little terrified. "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." And with that Mary's burden of things to ponder begins to grow.

Then, grandma, or Anna, who was of a great age, who never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day, upon seeing Jesus began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

It must be some comfort for Mary and Joseph and any new parents to have their child first and so closely examined by those who have shared their anticipation, their eagerness, and of course their anxiety.

That in truth, is the purpose of this sweet story for us today. For all the days of Advent we've been – expecting – and then the baby comes, born again, and we behold him, and we're encouraged to pick him up in our arms and to take him into our hearts. And then, what?

And then we go home. And then we live. And then we nurture this one born to us again. Luke says, “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.”

What do we do when Christmas is over? We’ve done what was required of us, we’ve decked the halls, we’ve heard the angels sing, we’ve quaked with shepherds and have gone to Bethlehem to see this thing that has come to pass, we’ve seen the star in the east and have even hung it from the highest bough – *we’ve had ourselves a merry little Christmas now*. So now – what? We allow the babe, born in Bethlehem to wondering parents, to come home with us and dwell with us in our heart so that we might become strong, and filled with wisdom, and find ourselves, because of what he does in us, and through us, in favor with our God.