

“WRINKLED WRAPPINGS”
Isaiah 61:10-62:3, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:22-40
December 26 & 27, 2020

Our Christmas Day celebration is finished. It was a good time rejoicing and praising God for all He has done in bringing His Son, Jesus, to the earth. We spent the day talking with family and fixing all the different courses of the meal we would have Christmas Afternoon. Wow! What a feast! What a blessing from God our Father! Good food, good fellowship, and a Great God!

But at the end of the meal there were so many things left, so much food that had not been eaten. What to do with what was left? Well, we sent most of it home with the kids and Grandmom (Audrey), but our refrigerator also found little space left for anything else. Packed to the gills with food, it was tough to get the door closed.

Well, this morning came along and when meal times happened, we asked ourselves, “What should we have to eat?” And the answer came back clear and simple. “Oh, let’s have leftovers!”

On this first weekend after Christmas, we find leftovers abundant. Not only left over food, but left over decorations, left over boxes, gift bags and wrapping paper, and even left over bills that need to be paid for the gifts we have lavished on our friends and families. Even here, today, we see leftover attendance in our worship services. For some, there are leftover hangovers from too much partying. For others there is a leftover mess to contend with. There are leftovers abounding all over. Thankfully we don’t have leftover snow this year to add to the mix. But that will come, too, all in time.

However, our first two Scripture lessons help us to see that with the Lord, there are no real leftovers. He has given us the fullness of His Son, Jesus - all we need for each day so that we may sing from the fullness of our hearts and rejoice with the abundance of God’s glorious gift of Salvation. In fact, God takes us, even as we are, and transforms all of OUR leftovers into something new every morning, so that we find gratefulness in our hearts and souls (Lamentations 3:23).

But our Gospel lesson for the Weekend following Christmas appears as though we have leftover people, Simeon and Anna. They are well into their years, one about to die, and the other living without

her husband for around 61 years. They are leftovers from the meal of life, and their withered, shriveled bodies appear to be wrinkled wrappings covering the leftovers within them. Yet, leftovers can become delicious as we turn them into marvelous main courses, if we'll take the time to discover their possibilities and invest in their wealth of flavors. And in our Scripture, forty days after the first Christmas, Jesus' birth on the earth, we begin to see the value and richness coming from these wrinkled wrappings. They saw something that day that no one else up until then, had seen. Listen to how God is recognized in Jesus at the temple as described in Luke 2:22-40. (READ Luke 2:22-40)

The shepherds had been stunned by the angel's visit and they searched out and found the new born baby, lying in the manger. Herod had become threatened by the prophecy that a new king would come to take his place as the King of the Jews. The religious leaders, scribes, and rabbis were right there in the Temple where the Messiah was presented that day, but none of them bothered to look to see whether God had provided Him or not. The only ones who sought out and recognized the promised Messiah, God become human in Jesus, were two aged people in wrinkled wrappings.

We're in the same situation today. Do we take the time to recognize all the good things that God is doing in our presence? Do we open our hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit so that He might guide us to the promises of God? Do we see God in Jesus today? Sadly there are 5.3 billion people in our world today that do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, for they are non-Christian. Though many Jews still pray for God to bring forth the Messiah, they miss what God has already done in Jesus.

So we are asked in this text, "What do you see in Jesus?" We wonder how Simeon and Anna could have such insight into the nature of Jesus. In our day we do not usually have a high opinion of old folks. After age 40 wrinkles come. You begin to lose hair and some teeth. Eyesight dims and glasses become necessary. Hearing gets more difficult demanding hearing aids. Fat accumulates in your midsection. Muscles shrink and joints stiffen. The heart gets less efficient and the flow of hormones declines. It is claimed that after age 45, you lose 100,000 brain cells per day. How could people in this kind of physical condition have such insight? In spite of their physical ailments and limitations, these

two old people had an insight into Jesus that many do not have. Apparently they had a fabulous new way of seeing. They can teach us how to get insight into Christ.”¹ Let’s look at six ways that Simeon and Anna gained such insight.

First, we see that they were **GOOD PEOPLE**, being described as righteous and God-fearing. It is true that sin keeps us from seeing God in the midst of our lives. Sin makes us dirty, and there is no way we can see clearly through dirty glasses. Sin also causes darkness that prevents us from seeing even the most exposed things around us. When we have the darkness of doubt, despair and selfishness active in our lives, it prevents us from seeing anything. Because of our sins this Christmas, we have not been able to see anything but a baby in a manger. Stores suffer huge losses from shoplifters stealing items from their stores, and that includes the employees. Many have become so consumed with the things going on with the elections and the fear of the future that they do not have room for Christ to come into their hearts. Jesus taught that it is the pure in heart that see God (Matthew 5:8). Medical experts can attest to a heart disease that causes blindness because of ulcers forming on the walls of the heart. Only the righteous, those with clean hands and a pure heart, can see God (Psalm 24:4).

Second, we recognize that Simeon and Anna were **DEVOUT PEOPLE**. Because of their devotion to God in the Temple, they were able to recognize Jesus, as Mary and Joseph brought Him in on that day of Mary’s purification.

Simeon was “*waiting for Israel to be saved*” (Luke 2:25), and Anna “*never left the Temple*” (Luke 2:37). But more than this, they both fasted and prayed, daily seeking the Lord and His ways. They didn’t just fast once a year, or even a couple times a month. It was a daily practice for them to be in prayer and to fast so that God could use them in a way that brought Him honor and glory. Day and night they prayed, constantly being in touch with God and seeking His presence in order to follow His will and His way. Prayer is more than just a one sentence said before a meal, or saying the Lord’s Prayer before going to bed. Prayer is developing a relationship with God through fellowship.

¹ (John R. Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, [Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing Company, Inc. 1975] pg. 58)

The apostle Paul teaches us that only those who are spiritual are able to follow the ways of the Holy Spirit, since they are focused on the Spirit. Those who seek their own ways and do not follow the ways of God, have no sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's direction for their life (Romans 8). This explains why so many people in our world today do not see God in Jesus, because their minds are not in tune with God's ways, so they cannot see by the Spirit. The only way to see Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, is to be in a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

Third, we see that both Simeon and Anna were **INSPIRED PEOPLE**. At forty days old, most babies look very much alike. Would it be too much to expect a person just passing by to recognize Jesus as the Messiah? Yet that is exactly what we see in Simeon and Anna. These old people in wrinkled wrappings were so in tune with the Holy Spirit that they heard His voice when He spoke to them, indicating that the child of Mary and Joseph was indeed the promised Messiah.

We hear that the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the Temple that day (Luke 2:27) having been assured that he should not die until he saw God's promised Messiah (2:25). It was the Spirit who identified Jesus as that Messiah to Simeon. Only then could he take Jesus "*into his arms, and give thanks to God...*" (2:28).

You see, it is the Holy Spirit who guide us into all the truth (John 16:13). Simeon was faithful to the Lord, so the Holy Spirit inspired him to continue his search for the promised Messiah. Simeon was open to obeying the guidance of the Spirit, so he made sure that he was in the Temple that day. So hopeful that he would indeed see the Lord's Messiah, Simeon obeyed the Spirit's call to him, and then the Holy Spirit opened up his eyes to see Jesus.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us enlightenment and vision to see the work of God right in the presence of a busy Temple, loaded with people, busy with priests saying prayers over the sacrifices of animals, and all of the people going and coming. It is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity of God, who gives us visions and dreams as we seek to follow God's commands. God has promised us the Holy Spirit's guidance as we faithfully seek Him in worship, and dedicate ourselves to Jesus Christ.

As we see God in Jesus, it is important that we also look at each other and begin to see the potential that each person has. If we were to look at a baby, would we be able to see that child's potential accomplishments in their life? Do we comprehend the total worth of that person, even as a baby? Though in worldly standards each person is only worth about \$160 based upon the chemical makeup of our bodies, God invites us to look at each other and see the great value that we have as we nurture life skills and develop abilities to serve the Lord with our lives. Pity the child whose parent tells them daily that they are worthless, no good, and a mistake to have been born. Sadly that child will begin to believe that it is true and they begin to live what they have been told. They give up on any pursuit of greatness because they are told right off the bat, while they are young, that they have no worth.

But when we look into the eyes of a baby and begin to see the huge potential of that child, it is best that we proclaim it to them, encouraging them and supporting them and building them up through training to become the person GOD has called them to be. It's like a man talking about his nephew's seeming natural instinct to work and figure out how things work. The investigative mind being nurtured and supported can become creative beyond anyone's imagination when they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to develop that potential within them. It's much like the old saying, "You can surely count the number of seeds in an apple, but who can count the number of apples in a seed?"

If you look at your child and see someone great, someday that very child may be just that! Look at the lives of your friends and family as people of character and promise and they will usually fulfill your high expectations.²

But more importantly about seeing Jesus as "God with us," the question comes naturally, "What are you going to do about what you see?" How are you going to receive Jesus into your life, and what are you going to do with Him living in you? To see Jesus as "God with us" in the manger is one thing, but to act upon it and to let Him develop you into the person that God has called you to be is quite another thing. Are you going to do anything about what you have seen and experienced this Christmas?

² (Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 61)

If you decide to allow Jesus to become alive in you, you will not be able to return home today and go on in life with a business-as-usual mentality. Let Jesus transform you and allow the Holy Spirit to move you and guide you into devotion to the Lord our God.

The fourth way that Simeon and Anna gained such insight to see Jesus as the Messiah was that they **WORSHIPPED HIM AS GOD’S OWN SON**. They responded to God’s Holy Spirit revealing Jesus to them as the Christ-child by worshipping God through Him. These faithful old people in wrinkled wrappings thanked and praised God for sending the Messiah to fulfill His promise. That’s the spirit of Christmas! It is common for us to sing the Christmas carol, “Angels From the Realms of Glory,” joining in the chorus “Come and worship, come and worship! Worship Christ the new-born King!” Yet is easy for us to sing the song, and fail to follow up with its invitation.

Do you know that only 26% of those who call themselves Christians worship weekly? 9% of self-professed Christians attend worship at their church once or twice a month. And 21% of all Christians gather for worship just a few times per year, while 25% find their way to church only once per year. A full 19% of those who call themselves Christians never attend worship at a local church where they can be supported, built up, encouraged and challenged to grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord God. It is those who see God in Christ Jesus who respond adamantly to the call of King David in the Old Testament to “*Come, let us go into the house of the Lord...*” (Psalm 122:1). “If Jesus is the Son of God, if Jesus is the Savior and Lord, then we must fall down before Him in adoration and praise”³ on a regular basis, if not daily! Simeon and Anna were rewarded with recognizing Jesus as the Messiah because they were righteous, devout, and inspired people who worshipped the Lord God.

The fifth way that Simeon and Anna were able to see God in Jesus is that they **DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO CHRIST**. They accepted God’s disclosure of Jesus being the Messiah. Anna began to tell everyone around her that the Lord’s Messiah had come. She “*spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free*” (Luke 2:38). Simeon took Jesus in his arms and sang a

³ (Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 62)

praise song to God, saying, *“Now, Lord, You have kept Your promise, and You may let Your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light to reveal Your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to Your people Israel”* (Luke 2:29-32). He had now seen everything worth seeing. God had revealed His own Son to Him, so he could die in peace. His life had now become fulfilled. He put his faith in Jesus as the Messiah trusting that he would have eternal life through Him. At that moment, Simeon was entrusting his all to Jesus.

This is the result of all those who come to see God in Jesus. They comply with Jesus’ parable, stating that when they find a pearl of great price, they are willing to sell all they have in order to obtain that pearl. They are willing to even give their whole life as they recognize that Jesus is that pearl of great price, the only one of His kind, the best of God given to the world for the benefit of all people who will see Him and claim Him as their own. Jesus is indeed, worth everything we have, even our own life, so that we may live for Him in all that we do, and die for Him, having lived our life for Him and dedicated everything to Him.

We see it in the life of the disciples of Jesus, who left everything in order to follow Him. We see it in the life of the apostle Paul, who stated, *“But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him...”* (Philippians 3:7-9).

We see it in the life of Francis of Assisi. When he recognized God in Jesus and claimed Him as his Lord and Savior, he took off all of his fine, expensive clothing before his father and the Bishop of the church, embarrassing both of them. He was making a statement that he would no longer be known by the wealth or affluence of his family, but solely by his service to Christ Jesus. *“To see who Jesus really is makes one fall down before Him and give Him complete and absolute allegiance till death.”*⁴

The sixth way that Simeon and Anna gained insight into seeing Jesus as “God with us,” was **IN**

⁴ (Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 63)

HIS SERVICE. They served in the Temple, Anna witnessed to those there that day that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph for following God's call in their lives to be the "parents" of Jesus.

"One who has found God in Christ wants to be Christ's slave or servant for life. To serve Him is a privilege and honor. Our highest pleasure is to do something for Christ and His kingdom on earth. We delight in His cause. We love to be in His presence. This is now our reason for living. This is what life is all about. We are here to advance the Kingdom, to serve the King...If God is in Jesus and He is really and truly the Savior-Lord and King, then I must serve Him gladly and willingly. To serve Christ is man's highest distinction. In the church and out of the church, in the home and out in the world, be Christ's happy servant. In that there is life and happiness."⁵

It is our calling to now recognize Jesus as the Christ. It is our honor to worship Him and give glory to Him for bringing us Salvation from our sins. It is our privilege to serve Him throughout our lives giving Him all that we are and all that we have so that we might let everyone know that He is the Lord of all.

Faith in Jesus is not to be sad-hearted, dejected and reserved in life. When we come to see Jesus as "God with us," as the One who has come to save all people from the penalty of sin, which is death, there is a joy that comes to us as we begin to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to do everything in life to bringing glory, honor and praise to God our Heavenly Father and to Jesus Christ our Savior. He teaches us to rejoice in all things, even in difficult times of disease pandemic and economic downturn. When we recognize Jesus as our Messiah, we are invited to be in service to Him wherever we are.

Simeon and Anna were saints in wrinkled wrappings, open to receive and praise Jesus Christ. If you have the spiritual qualities of these two old people of faith, you will be able to see Jesus as the Christ, and He will constantly bring joy to your hearts as you serve Him, to His honor and glory! AMEN

⁵ (Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 63-64)