**February 2, 2020 Luke 2:22-40**

***Super Bowl and Groundhog Day***

**Scripture:** Luke 2:22-40 NRSV

(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 (23)(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), (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." (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. (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. (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, (28)Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

(29)"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; (30)for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31)which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32)a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (33)And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. (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 (35)so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." (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, (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. (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. (39)When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. (40)The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

**Notes:**

1. Jesus was not born above the law; he ***fulfilled*** it perfectly.
   1. Simeon had been ***waiting*** for the Messiah to come.
   2. Simeon ***blessed*** this young family and prophesied.
   3. Anna, ***worshipped*** in the temple night and day.
   4. She worshiped God and ***told*** all who would listen.
   5. Jesus grew and became strong, filled with ***wisdom***.
2. ***Nobody*** is above the law
   1. Be ***patient*** and wait on the promises of God.
   2. Be ***watching*** for the Lord’s return, and call attention to it.
   3. Be ***ready*** so we can be with him forever in his kingdom.
3. What is your ***religion***?
   1. Religion is defined as a set of beliefs that you choose to follow ***blindly***.
   2. Where do you get your ***news***?
   3. Are you following the world, or the ***teachings*** of Jesus?
4. Turn to the ***scriptures*** and ***study*** God’s word.
   1. Study the ***signs*** of His coming,
   2. ***Recognize*** the tricks of Satan.
   3. ***Remember*** we have the ability to ask forgiveness.
   4. ***Remember*** our task, our job, our commission.
   5. ***Lead*** others back into a relationship with Jesus.

**Transcript:**

I am excited in some ways for the things that are going on today. What all is going on, that we should be excited about? Well for beginners today marks the end of the NFL season. The Super Bowl takes place this evening, and most everybody knows a little about this event and its festivities. There will be parties and get togethers; food and drinks in abundance. Many people will be watching, if not for the athletics; then for the commercials.

Then there is Groundhog's day, this morning on Gobblers Knob in Punxsutawney, people from all over the world gather together to see if Punxsutawney Phil emerges from his den and sees his shadow or not. If the groundhog sees his shadow, he will retreat to his den and winter will persist for six more weeks. If not, then spring will arrive early, the funny thing is I am not sure how early spring will arrive if this happens. I have heard about groundhog day for as long as I can remember, knowing that we talked about it in first and second grade at the Imler school; looking to this event to predict the remaining days of the winter weather.

What else is going on today that we should know about? Did you know that today is the feast of the Presentation? The day we celebrate the presentation of Christ in the Temple, the day we observe Mary’s purification after having her son Jesus 40 days earlier?

Most of us knew some of these things, how many of you knew that today was the Superbowl? And, how many of you knew that today was Groundhogs Day? Finally how many of you knew that today was the Feast of the Presentation?

We get involved with the things that are going on around us and sometimes we take our eyes off of the things we should be watching for; the things that should be most important in our lives; things like our relationships with our spouses, children, and parents, things like the duties we are called to fulfill within the church, and things that God is calling us to do in the world.

But the one thing we fail to keep eyes fixed upon is the coming of the messiah, Jesus. Our eyes are fixed upon the events of the world, the impeachment hearings, the presidential races and candidates, the unrest in the middle east, the Super Bowl, and Groundhog day. We can bring it a little closer to home, our eyes are fixed on our own interests; our financial woes, the cleanliness of our home, the things on our bucket list we want to accomplish, and our children. Oh we focus on our children; our children’s academic performance; we want them making straight A’s; our children’s musical, and athletic abilities, our children’s performances in the plays, band, and choir, our child’s athletic abilities in football, basketball, wrestling, and softball/baseball.

We are so busy with these things that we fail to make it to church as often as we should. We just don’t have time to fit church into our day. We miss a fellowship here, we miss a church activity there. We miss the bible studies on Wednesday evening because we are spread too thin. We miss SS, because our kids have events scheduled early afternoon; or we miss church all together because we are just too tired to crawl out of bed.

And as if these things are not bad enough, we fail to keep our eyes fixed upon the coming Christ. We are so busy doing what we want to get done; that we place him to our side, and figure we will get back to him when things settle down. But in our gospel passage today we find two people whose focus was upon the coming Christ. Two people who spent their days waiting; spent each day in the temple watching in hopes that they would see Him; that they would see Jesus, the Messiah. So would you turn with me in your bibles to Luke 2:22-40; and stand with me as we share in the reading of God’s word in this Gospel passage

*(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 (23)(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), (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." (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. (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. (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, (28)Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, (29)"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; (30)for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31)which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32)a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (33)And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. (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 (35)so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too." (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, (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. (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. (39)When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. (40)The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-40 NRSV*

We find Jesus as an infant being taken to the Temple for the purification. Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby's birth: First was *Circumcision;* every boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth. Circumcision symbolized the Jews' separation from Gentiles. It signified their unique relationship with God. Next was *Redemption of the firstborn.* A firstborn son was presented to God one month after birth. The ceremony included a "redeeming" or in other words, offering a sacrifice to buy back the child from God.

Finally, was the *Purification of the mother*. For 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the Temple. At the end of this time the parents were to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. Then a priest would sacrifice these animals and declare the mother to be clean. This is what Mary and Joseph are doing today in our passage. If you count it up, today is 40 days from the celebration of the birth of Christ. Jesus was God's Son, but he observed all of the law to show that he was not above it. his family carried out these ceremonies according to God's law. Jesus was not born above the law; instead, he fulfilled it perfectly. So Joseph and Mary bring Jesus into the temple. And they offered the sacrifices as described by the Law. Jesus and Mary were proclaimed holy; pure.

And then Simeon enters the picture; who is Simeon you may ask. Simeon was an old man who was good, moral, the scripture describes him as righteous He was also described as devout; meaning he was loyal, sincere, earnest and fervent. He had been waiting for the Messiah to come and the Holy Spirit promised; he would not die until the Messiah was revealed to him. So patiently, devoutly Simeon waits at the Temple for the Lord to be revealed to him. And on this day, while Joseph and Mary have Jesus in the Temple the Holy Spirit guides Simeon into the Temple. And here Simeon experiences the presence and power of God in the flesh. Simeon takes him in his arms, I imagine he looks into the eyes of the infant and Simeon begins to praise God saying, ““(29)*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; (30)for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31)which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32)a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*.”

Obviously Mary and Joseph were amazed at what Simeon was saying. Simeon blessed this young family and went on to prophecy, “*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed (35)so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too*.” He is saying that Jesus would have a paradoxical effect on Israel. Some would fall because of him, others would rise. With Jesus, there would be no neutral ground: People would either joyfully accept him or totally reject him. this widespread rejection he would face would grieve Mary.

Now we are introduced to Anna, described as a prophet According to my math she was very old having lived with her husband for 7 years until his death and then living as a widow until the age of 84. She worshipped in the temple night and day, fasting and praying. Scripture says she never left the temple. She too came upon the family and was drawn to them, assuming by the Holy Spirit. She too, like Simeon, began to worship God and tell all who would listen about the child. This is where our passage begins to draw to a close They finished everything that was required of the law. They gathered their things and returned to Nazareth in the area of Galilee. And they all lived happily ever after, right? No, but it does say that Jesus grew and became strong, he studied and became filled with wisdom, and God’s favor shown down upon him.

But there are other things that will take place. The wisemen have not come to visit yet, so at this time Herod doesn’t know of the Messiah’s birth. And we know what Herod does when he does find out, he murders all the boy children below the age three, those two and younger. Fortunately, Joseph is warned in a dream by an angel to leave. So Joseph takes Jesus and Mary and they escape by night to Egypt. They will make their life in Egypt until it is safe to return to Nazareth, and they do return after Herod’s death, after an angel of the Lord tells them of the news. Joseph returns to Nazareth, with Mary and Jesus, fulfilling the prophecies of old saying that Jesus would be called a Nazarene.

This is all great pastor, I like a good story, but what does this have to do with me? First of we learn that nobody is above the law. Each person is bound to the law; the law of nature, the law of science, the laws of man, and most of all the laws of God. Things like the 10 commandments, and especially the greatest commandment. To love the Lord with all of your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. We are bound by these laws and are required to obey them.

Next we must be patient and wait on the promises of God; promises like:

* **Proverbs 1:33** *But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm.”*
* **Isaiah 40:29-31** *He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary.* *They will walk and not faint.*
* **Jeremiah 29:11** *For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*
* **Matthew 11:28-29** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
* **John 14:1-3** *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also*.
* **John 14:27** *“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.*
* **1 Corinthians** *No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*
* **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*
* **Romans 8:37-39** *… I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love… indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
* **Romans 10:9** *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
* **Philippians 4:19** *And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

We must be watching for the Lord’s return, hand in action, and call attention to it. We must be watching and waiting like Simeon and Anna. So that when the Lord does return we do not miss it. We must be sharing what the Lord is doing so others do not miss it either.

We must be ready so that on that day when all of God’s promises are fulfilled, we can be with him forever in his kingdom. We all know that the Lord is going to return someday, but are we prepared for the day that he comes? Our relationship must be right with God, so when the Lord does return we do not miss it.

What is your religion? A religion is defined as a set of beliefs that you choose to follow blindly. I’ve heard this twice in the past two weeks from very different sources. Football is a religion. I’ve heard it said that whatever is given precedence over all other things in a person’s life, what they worship, what comes first and foremost; this is the religion they follow. People live by the schedule of the football calendar. They live for the NFL draft; everything stops so they can follow the draft. They have their high holy days, today Superbowl Sunday. There will be music, there will be praises, and there are people who make an effort to explain what’s going on to the people. The pastors of the NFL, the television commentators. Football is a religion.

But then again Groundhog day festivities are as well. There are people who will swear by the ground hog’s predictions. People gather in celebration of the day, there almost seems to be a cultic following who participate in these activities. Even American Politics has developed a religiosity to some extent. People fail to think for themselves and they follow the ravings of those who are bold enough to stand out; those who share their political propaganda, and so many people refuse to think for themselves and make an informed decision, so they follow the party line and they vote according to what suits their desires. What amazes me is that in a day when we are supposed to be the most informed; we’re loaded with misinformation and don’t know what’s true and what’s a lie.

What is your religion? Who do you follow? Where do you get your news? Where do you verify what is right and wrong? Where do we verify what is true and false? Are you following the world, or are you following the teachings of Jesus? Do you study His teachings and live according to them? It is very frustrating to live in this day and age, because it is difficult for you to know what is right and what is wrong.

So we must turn to the scriptures; we must study God’s word. We must know what God has to say about the things of heaven. We must know what God has to say about the things of this world. We must study the signs of His coming, not to predict when it will happen, but to know when he comes ; what to look for and how to know. We must learn the tricks of Satan, the things he will do you confuse us, the things he will say to deceive us, the ways in which he uses our desires to draw us away from God, how pulls us away slowly and gradually.

We must remember as long as there is breath in our lungs, we have the ability to ask forgiveness of our sins and shortcomings. To be forgiven and brought back into good standing with our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally we must remember that our task, our job, our commission is to bring as many as possible with us when the day comes. So we must remember to keep working toward and for the Kingdom of heaven; leading others through our relationships with them, back into a relationship with Jesus.