

“An Instant Replay of Christmas”

Luke 2:22-40, Christmas 1, Dec. 27, 2015

I am sure that most everyone here this morning is at least familiar with the concept of an “Instant Replay.” What you may not know is that the first instant replay—ever to be broadcast on television in the USA—took place some **52 years ago on December 7, 1963**. This is when a sport’s director for CBS, **TONY VERNA**, first figured out how to enable a videotape machine to instantly replay an important play in the Army-Navy game on television that year!

You see, before the marvelous invention of an instant replay, **FOOTBALL PLAYERS COULD COLLIDE ON THE FIELD!** The ball could be fumbled and possibly even change hands! A first down may have been completed, or unfortunately missed by inches! Therefore, whenever there was any confusion or disagreement about what had just happened; whenever there was a flag dropped on a play for a game violation by the referee: fans, sports’ writers and other officials would sometimes argue about what had just happened. Each person could testify to differing viewpoints as to what actually took place on the field there that day! **Playing back that play, especially in slow motion through the use of an instant replay, cleared up the mystery. History could be relived for the benefit of all.**

What is Christmas really? Of course, it is the celebration of Christ’s birth! And you may have even **HEARD PASTOR VOGES REMIND US ON CHRISTMAS MORNING**, that the word “Christmas” originally came about as the combination of two other words: “**CHRIST**” and “**MASS.**” For Christmas is when a mass of God’s people are gathered together under the unifying power of the Holy Spirit to hear his Word and receive his Holy Supper, to sing his praises and to come before in prayer. **Christmas, most simply put, is whenever Christ comes to us!** And that’s **why I personally, am so grateful to St. Luke** for what he is sharing with us in our Gospel lesson this morning, for these words are really an “Instant Replay of Christmas.”

When we read the Bible we become convinced, that **at the time of Jesus’ birth, that many people throughout the history of the Jewish nation had been looking forward to the coming of their Promised Messiah.** But what kind of Messiah would he be? Some people believed that the Messiah would be a great **Celestial Champion** who would descend upon the earth; so that the status Israel enjoyed under the powerful reign of King David could be reignited again. **But in contrast to all this, there were also some meek souls living in the province of Judea who did not have any dreams of violence and of power and of armies with banners.** They believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God.

And case in point, doesn’t St. Luke give us two great examples of such quiet souls in our Gospel lesson this morning—both Simeon and Anna?

Simeon, that person whom we meet first in our Gospel lesson this morning, was like that! In personal time spent in prayer, in worship, in humble and faithful expectation he was waiting for the day when God would comfort his people. **God had promised him through the Holy Spirit that his life would not end before he had seen God’s Own Anointed King.** In the Baby Jesus, he recognized that King and was glad. Now he was ready to close his eyes in death at any time, if need be. He was ready to depart in peace and his words have become that great song that the

Church has often sung at the close of our celebrations of the Holy Eucharist—the “Nunc Dimittis,” two Latin words meaning: “Now Leaving.”

It is now **40 days after Jesus was born, and his Mother Mary and Joseph are fulfilling an important ritual in connection with their faith at that time.** Yes, it was for Mary, the “**Rite of Purification,**” but it was also the presentation of her firstborn Son to the LORD God Almighty. **This**

event, recalled for every Jewish mother and father, **God’s mighty deliverance of his people of old, of their ancestors, in the Passover Event. You remember how God worked through a series of 10 Plagues to free the people of Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt under the harsh reign of the Pharaoh.** Finally, God tells the people of Israel to sacrifice a lamb or a goat, and to put the blood of the lamb or goat at the top of the door frames entering their house on the lintel (at the top) and also on two sides of the doorposts. When the angel of death flew over, the firstborn son of the homes of the people marked by the blood would be spared. **Otherwise, the firstborn of all other people, Egyptian and Jewish, not marked by the blood of the lamb would be slain.**

The Presentation of Jesus was a reminder of how the **firstborn had to be “bought back” from God by blood that was shed!** Those who **COULD AFFORD IT WOULD SACRIFICE A LAMB OR A GOAT,** but Mary and Joseph were poor according to all worldly standards, so they brought two doves to be sacrificed as an acceptable substitute prescribed already in the book of Leviticus.

YOU KNOW, IF WE WERE TO WATCH AN INSTANT REPLAY OF WHAT TOOK PLACE THERE IN THE TEMPLE THAT DAY, IT’S QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THE TELEVISION CAMERA COULD HAVE FOCUSED OUR ATTENTION ON A NUMBER OF DIFFERING GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE THAT DAY! No doubt, Mary and Joseph themselves, saw a great many people there that day!

The camera could **have focused our attention on the PRIESTS** who were busily occupying themselves with taking care of all the important affairs there that day!

The camera could have focused our attention on the **MONEYCHANGERS,** sharp businessmen, who operated small shops to exchange foreign currencies; money, because the sacrificial animals had to be purchased with temple coins.

The camera could have focused our attention on all **THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE THAT DAY WHO HAD JUST COME TO THE TEMPLE TO WORSHIP.** For some, who lived great distances away from the temple, it may have been a **ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EVENT.** But for others, like Simeon and Anna who were residing in Jerusalem, it could have been an event that took place most every day of their lives!

The instant replay St. Luke gives us this morning of Christmas focuses our attention on two senior citizens, both whom Luke tells us were “**RIGHTEOUS AND DEVOUT.**” **THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL—THAT IS, FOR THE PROMISED MESSIAH.** It tells us that Anna did not depart from the temple, worshiping, with fasting and prayer, both night and day!

And let’s think about our own lives in recent weeks and days! St. Luke would encourage us to personally remember how the Lord Jesus Christ has approached us! For Christmas is not just a

onetime event that happened two thousand years ago when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, **IT HAPPENS EVERY TIME THE SAVIOR IS BORN ANEW IN OUR HEARTS!**

That second birth happens for us in the reading of the Bible, and especially of the New Testament Gospels. In **JOHN 20:30-31** the Apostle writes, *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written down in this book, but these are written down that you too may be believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that believing, you might have life in his name!”*

That second birth happens for us in the waters of our Baptism. Remember, how our Risen Savior said, before ascending back to his rightful place in glory, 40 days following that first Easter morning: *“Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you! And lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the age!”* (Matthew 28:18-20)

BUT THEN SIMEON SPOKE SOME RATHER MYSTERIOUS WORDS TO MARY AND JOSEPH ALSO! *“Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed!”* (Luke 2:34-35). -- Here Simeon is giving to Mary and to Joseph a prophecy concerning the life and the life’s work of their little Boy.

(1). SIMEON TELLS MARY AND JOSEPH THAT JESUS WILL ONE DAY BE THE CAUSE BY WHICH MANY PEOPLE WILL FALL IN ISRAEL. This is strange and hard saying for us to ponder, but it is true! It is not so much God who, here initially, judges a human being; as it is human beings that bring God’s judgment upon themselves—and the judgment that comes about, **comes about because of their personal response, or lack of personal response to Jesus Christ!**

If, when they are confronted with the Gospel, with our Savior’s goodness and love, and their **HEARTS RUN OUT TOWARDS GOD IN ANSWERING LOVE, THEN THEY MAY KNOW THE JOY OF EXPERIENCING LIFE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD; THAT IS LIFE UNDER THE KIND AND BENEVOLENT RULE OF A LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER.**

(2) But also, if and when people are confronted by the Savior’s love and offer of peace and reconciliation, their hearts remains coldly unmoved or erupts even in outright hostility, then they may be condemned. There is, on the part of human beings, at times, a great refusal of the Christ who comes to us, at times, just as there are, on the other times, a **response of great “acceptance,” when we understand that our “acceptance” is something that the Holy Spirit alone makes possible for us, so that St. John prefers our using the word “receives,” rather than “accepts”** (John 1:12-13).

(3) THIRDLY, JESUS, SIMEON PROPHECIES WILL BE THE CAUSE WHEREBY MANY WILL RISE. LONG AGO SENECA SAID THAT WHAT PEOPLE NEEDED ABOVE ALL ELSE WAS “A HAND LET DOWN TO THEM TO LIFT THEM UP!” And this we know is the hand of Jesus which lifts a person out of their own way of life into a totally brand new way of life; out of sin into the goodness, out of shame and into glory!”

I believe that Pastor Voges again shared these same thoughts with us when he read those magnificent words from John 3 on Christmas morning: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only-*

begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life! For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and the people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God!"

Brothers and sisters, this does not mean, however, that if we receive Christ into our lives and therefore live out our lives in this world in the brightness of his light, and are filled with the fullness of his life, that we will never have any great times of personal struggle and deep questioning within ourselves in life!

Lisa and I watched a wonderful movie on television on Christmas night that we came across really, quite by accident while flipping through the channels; but a movie I would recommend to anyone here; a movie that could also be shared with children of all ages in your home.

BROADCAST FOR THE FIRST TIME ON DECEMBER 10 ON NBC, THE TITLE OF THE PROGRAM IS: "DOLLY PARTON'S COAT OF MANY COLORS," which is based on the true and inspiring story of Dolly Parton's remarkable upbringing. According to one review I came across: "This once-in-a-lifetime movie takes place inside the tight-knit Parton family as they struggle to overcome devastating tragedy and discover the healing power of love, faith and a raggedly patchwork coat that helped make Dolly Parton who she is today!"

This movie makes evident to us how deeply-committed Christian families can also can go through some very trying times, and **HOW GOD WORKS THROUGH THOSE TRYING TIMES TO CALL US TO FAITH IN HIM AND TO SHOW US THE GREAT NEED THAT WE EACH HAVE FOR THE NEW LIFE THAT ALONE CAN BRING TO US!**

Yes, a sword would pierce through Mary's heart one day as she knelt at the foot of his cross where her Son was being crucified. But she would also be there on that Resurrection Morning, when her faith and her love and her hope and her joy would all be abundantly restored to her in the fullest measure possible!

ANNA, TOO, WAS ONE OF THOSE QUIET PEOPLE LIVING IN THE LAND AT THE TIME OF OUR SAVIOR'S BIRTH. SHE HAD KNOWN SORROW AND SHE HAD NOT GROWN BITTER. HER HUSBAND HAD DIED ONLY 7 YEARS AFTER THEY HAD MARRIED.

Sorrow can do one of those two things to us. It can make us hard, bitter, resentful and rebellious against God, or it can make us kinder, softer

and more sympathetic. It can seem to totally knock the wind out of our faith, or it can cause the roots of our faith to grow even deeper into the Lord's own life instead! It all depends on how we come to think about our gracious God!

Anna was 84 years old and had never ceased to hope. Age can take away the bloom and the strength of our bodies, but age can do even something far worse to us than that—it can take away the life of our hearts until the hopes that once we cherished die, and we become dully content and grimly resigned to things as they are. It all depends on how we have come to think about our God!

If we think only about God as if he is distant and detached we may well end up finding ourselves in one gigantic pit of despair. But if we think of him as intimately connected with our daily lives, who always has his hand on the steering wheel of our lives, we too will be sure that the best is yet to be and the years will never kill our hope! Amen