

LOOK FORWARD WITH HOPE

Christmas 1 – Cycle B: Luke 2:22-40

**by Ralph Weigold, Pastoral Intern,
Christ Lutheran Church, Waterloo and Trinity Village Care Centre, Kitchener**

Happy New Year! Another year has ended and a new one starts. How did you bring in the New Year? Did you go out to a party, gather with family or friends, or just stay home and watch the New Year's Eve celebration on TV; Times Square with the big ball dropping at the stroke of midnight?

Ellen and I just sat at home together and watched the New Year's celebrations, flipping through the channels; and at the stroke of midnight lifted a glass of our favorite wine and toasted in the New Year.

Some people make New Year's resolutions. You know the common ones, such as "This year I am going to go on a diet," or "I will quit smoking." Well, I didn't make a resolution this year, because I knew that whatever I would say, in the end it is usually never kept.

What I like to do however, is reflect upon the past year and remember all that we have done, and what has gone on in the world around us. I can remember our trip out east during the summer and how much fun it was; I can remember the struggles of seminary in trying to get all the assignments done on time; I can remember all those lovely people at Trinity Village who have touched my heart, and those who have died. How they have blessed me with their courage and faith in God!

In our world, it is hard to forget the economic troubles that have affected so many people, and still do; to remember all those who have strived for democracy in Africa. And there are so many other events that I could mention.

I also reflect on what the future may hold: will the economy get better; will there be peace in the world; where will I be in six months or at the end of this year? If only I had a crystal ball that could tell me the future. But there is one thing we do have, it is faith and hope: faith given to us by the Holy Spirit breathing in God's Word which, in turn, gives us hope.

We have heard today in our reading from Luke of two individuals, Simeon and Anna. Both were righteous and devout; both had a lifelong faith and were also looking to the future with hope. Then they saw what appeared to be two ordinary people with a baby, entering the temple, doing what the law instructs them to do, that is to present the baby to God and to offer a sacrifice to God. Being poor, they had a pair of turtledoves. Normally people who had more would have sacrificed a lamb.

The temple may have been busy with people who had come to worship and pray. It is here that we find Simeon and Anna.

Simeon was "guided by the Holy Spirit," and when he saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Messiah. He reached out and embraced the baby and praised him, overwhelmed by the culmination of faith and hope. I cannot imagine the feeling Simeon would have had at that moment – overpowering joy, tears possibly, for he has seen and embraced the Lord. Simeon had great insight and perhaps even a vision, because he says to 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 heart". He foretells the future, a future in which God's presence in Jesus will challenge people to change; to live a new kind of righteousness. And he foresees Mary's suffering.

Anna, who was a prophet, also saw the baby Jesus and started to praise God and tell everyone she saw about the baby. She recognized him as one who would bring about the redemption of Jerusalem. She was also guided by the Spirit and recognized that God was at work in the world.

We do not read about Simeon or Anna after this point, and can only assume that their significance is to identify the baby Jesus as the Messiah, the chosen one, for Luke's readers. But on this the first day of the New Year, what a good story this is! It is almost as if Simeon and Anna were giving a New Year's resolution to the world. A resolution which, in this case, was kept.

I believe that we can be and are, in fact, like Simeon and Anna. We also are guided by the Spirit, just as they were. We are called to embrace the Word; we are called to be God's servants, helping those around us. We are called as ordinary people, and we are called to provide comfort through having God's Word take life in us. We are also called to point to the cross and to the resurrection of our Lord as a sign of hope.

It is the same hope that I share at Trinity Village when I visit with a person who is very sick. I offer the comfort of prayer and am able to assure them that God is with us always; that we are never alone. Faith and hope are found in community wherever we are – here at Christ Church, as well as Trinity Village. The community strengthens our faith and in turn, such faith gives us hope.

The old year and what was is gone; but now we look to the future, just as Simeon and Anna did. We are called to have faith and hope for a better future. I am not sure if the economic problems of the world will be resolved this year, or that there will be a peaceful democracy established anywhere in Africa. But one thing I do know is that with the gift of the Holy Spirit within us, and with our embracing of the Word and the Sacraments, we will recognize that hope is always there.

In closing, I wish to quote the creed of the United Church of Canada, which addresses in so many ways the benefits of having faith in God, specifically the gift faith provides for us to look forward with hope.

A New Creedⁱ

We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God: who has created and is creating;
who has come in Jesus, the word made flesh, to reconcile and make new;
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence; to live with respect in Creation;
to love and serve others; to seek justice and resist evil;
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

ⁱ The New Creed taken from the United Church of Canada, revised in 2003