

**PERSPECTIVES:
SPIRITUAL SEEKERS
LUKE 2:21-40
JANUARY 6, 2012**

Today is “Epiphany Sunday” in the church calendar.

An epiphany is a revealing,
when something unknown becomes known,
when the hidden is revealed.

Epiphany Sunday is the celebration of Jesus being made known.

The making known of Jesus was not a television special watched by millions.

It was not a YouTube video that went viral.

It came slowly, person by person, little by little.

Over the last few weeks we’ve heard the stories of how

he was born in little Bethlehem, in a stable.

It was quiet and out of the way.

A little cluster of shepherds were the first to see him.

King Herod got word of his birth.

At some point a group of magi came to worship him.

Each person or group had their own perspective on what this meant.

Today we’re going to read from Luke’s Gospel of how

Jesus was made known to a man and a woman who were spiritual seekers,

people who had been praying for and expecting God to do something big.

They were waiting, watching, seeking.

There are varieties of seekers.

Some seekers believe in God,

even believe firmly in some fairly solid theological convictions,

but are seeking a closer relationship with God.

Some are seeking to discern God’s will about a certain thing.

Some are seeking God’s help in an area of their lives.

And some seekers are not yet believers,

but they are open and seeking knowledge and/or experiences

that will help them reach a true conclusion about God.

Like the magi.

The seekers we’re going to look at today believed firmly in

the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel.

They believed firmly that God was bringing blessing and salvation to his people.

But they had not yet seen it,

nor did they know what that might look like.

So they were seeking confirmation of their convictions and some “fill-in-the-blank” specifics from God.

LUKE 2:21-40

Joseph and Mary were keeping the Old Testament law,

(21-24)

bringing Jesus for consecration to the Lord,

doing his circumcision on the 8th day after his birth,

(Ge.17:12; Le.12:3)

bringing the prescribed sacrifice for the redemption of the first born,

(Ex.13:2, 11-16, Nu.18:15-16)

sacrificing not the usual lamb, but a dove, the sacrifice allowed for the poor,

(Le.12:6-8)

and undergoing the ritual purification of Mary, Jesus’ mother.

They were good people, meticulously fulfilling the requirements of the religious law.

After they had taken care of all that,
 they were on their way out when they were intercepted by an old man.
 He had an aura of piety about him.

Not pious in the negative sense of self-righteousness,
 but pious as one who truly was seeking after God,
 not tooting his own horn as, "I'm more religious than you,"
 but one who sincerely loved the Lord.

Simeon had longed to see God move to save his people.

He prayed and studied the scriptures and watched for what God might be doing.
 He didn't see anything from the religious leaders and pillars of the community.

But when this anonymous little family came out of the temple,
 the Holy Spirit nudged Simeon to take a closer look.
 Them? They're nobody special.

But Simeon knew from Scripture that God so often moved in just that way.
 Simeon would remember the biblical story of

when the judge and prophet Samuel was sent by God
 to find and anoint a new king for Israel,
 God sent him to a little one horse village called Bethlehem,
 to the household of some guy named Jesse.
 Jesse's seven sons lined up for Samuel to see.
 Seven, a good biblical number.

But God made clear, from the oldest to the youngest,
 "Nope, not that one. Not that one. Not that one."

"Jesse, do you have any other children?"

"Well, there's little Davey, my youngest,
 but he's out tending the sheep."

"Better get him."

And when David, the youngest, number eight, came in,
 God told Samuel, "That's the one."

And the oil of anointing flowed down the boy's head. (1Sam.16)

So, Simeon laid aside any preconceived ideas of how God might move.

He may have thought,
 perhaps God would bring his messiah, the son of David,
 in the same way of obscurity.

Somehow, the Holy Spirit nudged him toward
 this unknown family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

I wonder what he saw.

A halo over Jesus's head?
 A golden glow like some TV or movie angel?
 I don't know.

But somehow, probably beyond all external senses, he knew.

Have you ever had one of those unexplainable inner nudges to
 do something, call someone, say something?

It could be the Holy Spirit.
 It could be last night's pizza, too.
 But it could be the Spirit.
 Don't write it off too quickly.

Simeon sensed the leading of the Spirit.
 So he took baby Jesus in his arms and praised God.

He praised God for this child and the salvation he would bring.
 He praised God for salvation reaching the Gentiles as well as Jews.
 He praised God for fulfilling his promise to let Simeon see him.
 He praised God.
 He said, "Now I've seen it all.
 My bucket list is completed. I can rest in peace."

Mom and Dad were amazed.

Of course, lots of Moms and Dads think their child, especially their firstborn, is perfect.
 At least until they get old enough to talk back.
 But this was something else, something more.
 They'd had their own visitations by angels before.
 But that had been nine months ago, and probably seemed like a dream.
 And now another human being, like the shepherds,
 was saying this child was God's way of salvation.

But Simeon was not finished.

He had a word from God for Mary.
 "This child is destined for the rising and falling of many,
 and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed."
 That sounds ominous.
 From our perspective today we know
 the rising and falling of many probably has to do with
 how people respond to Jesus,
 whether they believe in him, trust him, and serve him,
 or ignore or oppose him.

And then Simeon said something that would be more personal to Mary.

"A sword will pierce your own soul."
 Mary was probably puzzled by that.
 But how true it would be!

After working alongside Joseph as a carpenter,
 and then carrying on the business on his own,
 the day would come when Jesus would leave home,
 leave his mother Mary,
 to begin his public ministry.

Mary must have felt some pain at that.

A day would come when she and Jesus' brothers would be worried about him,
 wondering if what people said about his sanity might be true.
 And when they came to check up on him
 Jesus would say that his real family
 were those who followed him.
 That had to sting.

And then the day when Jesus hung on the cross,
 naked, bleeding, dying a shameful and cruel death.
 Mary was right there at the cross.
 No one but God the Father could understand the agony she felt.
 A sword pierced her soul.

Simeon went on his way.

Then a prophet named Anna came alongside them.

Drawn there by the Spirit, just as Simeon had been,
 she began to praise God and tell others that God would bring redemption through this child.

A female prophet,
 almost as if Luke wants to make the point that God speaks to and through both men and women.
 Actually, the Old Testament carries a tradition of female prophets.
 There was Moses's sister Miriam, (Ex.15:20) Deborah the judge, (Ju.4:4)
 Huldah (2Kg.22:14) and Isaiah's wife, (Is.8:3).
 And in the New Testament we find Christian prophetesses (Ac.2:17; 21:9; 1Cor.11:3).
 But they usually get left in the shadows.
 Luke points his finger into those shadows, as if to say,
 "Don't forget that God speaks to and through both men and women."
 In fact, in his second volume, the book of Acts,
 Luke reports that Peter quoted from the prophet Joel that
 God "will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
 and your sons and your daughters will prophesy."
 (Joel 2:28-32; Ac.2:17)
 Ladies, take note of the fact that God does not expect you to take a back seat.
 You have the same access to his Spirit.
 And you have the responsibility that comes with it.
 A responsibility to listen for the Spirit,
 and when you sense his leading,
 to respond in faithful obedience.

Simeon and Anna got to see Jesus because they were both spiritual seekers.
 They believed in the most high God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel.
 But more than that,
 they sought to hear the voice of God and detect the movement of God.
 They wanted to be close to God and in on the action.
 So they hung out at the temple.
 They prayed and fasted.
 It didn't just happen by coincidence.
 They intentionally sought God.
 They were spiritually open, and God responded to that.

The Bible promises time after time that those who truly seek God will find him.
 Moses told the Israelites,
 "You will find God if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Dt.4:29)
 King David told his son,
 "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him.
 If you seek Him, He will be found by you." (1Chr.28:9)
 Later God spoke to Solomon in a dream and said,
 "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves,
 and pray and seek My face,
 and turn from their wicked ways,
 then I will hear from heaven,
 and will forgive their sin and heal their land." (2Chr.7:14)

The prophet Azariah said to King Asa,
 "The LORD is with you while you are with Him.
 If you seek Him, He will be found by you." (2Chr.15:2)

The book of Proverbs reports God's promise,
 "Those who seek me will find me." (Pr.8:17)

Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.
 Knock and the door will be opened to you." (Mt.7:7)

The apostle Paul suggests God created us so that seeking after him would be natural:

“God did this (created the world as he did) so that men would seek him
and perhaps reach out for him and find him.” (Ac.17:27)

And the letter to the Hebrew Christians offers the promise,

“He rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (He.11:6)

Are you seeking him?

What are you doing to seek after God?

I’m not asking if you attend worship or if you’re on the membership role.

Are you truly seeking God and if so, what are you doing about it?

It doesn’t happen by accident.

Look at what Simeon and Anna did as they sought after God.

They fasted, prayed, and worshiped at the temple.

They were undoubtedly steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures.

And were open to however God might reveal himself to them.

And they were rewarded with getting to see God in the flesh,
the redemption of Israel and the salvation of the world,
in baby Jesus.

How about you?

Is that what you want?

To know God in a more personal way,

to hear his voice, to see his movement,

and to get on board with what he’s doing in our world?

If you’re serious about it, you might consider doing what Simeon and Anna did.

They were both regulars at the temple, true worshipers.

They routinely engaged in fasting and prayer.

And they remained open to God showing up in ways that might be
more than a little bit outside the box.

Even as a baby.

God is not playing spiritual hide-and-seek with you.

He knows you, and he wants to be known by you.

If you’re truly seeking to know God in a more intimate, personal way,

if you’re serious about it,

if you’ll build time into your life for worship, prayer and fasting, and Scripture,

God will come to be with you.

He promised: Seek and you will find.

He promised.

Some of you are old enough to remember when human beings first landed on the moon.

Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin touched down on July 20, 1969.

Armstrong took the first step and said,

“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

An entire planet probably trembled with a new awareness of God and His vast creation.

But something else happened that we did not hear about at that time.

Shortly after the men landed,

Aldrin radioed NASA and asked for a moment of silence

so that “each person listening in

could contemplate the events of the last few hours.”

During this quiet period, Aldrin opened little plastic packages containing bread and wine,

consecrated earlier by his Presbyterian pastor back on earth,

silently read a few verses of John’s Gospel

and received communion.

He later said, "It was interesting to think that the first liquid ever poured on the moon and the first food eaten there were the Christian communion."
 It was kept secret because the famous atheist, Madelyn Murray O'Hare, was involved in a legal fight protesting the reading of Scripture by the Apollo 8 crew. To broadcast a private communion might create an even greater uproar.
 So Aldrin was asked to "keep it quiet," and he did.
 It may have been kept quiet from the public.
 But Buzz Aldrin sought the presence of God, even on the moon.
 He sought and he found.
 So can you.
 Let's make 2013 the year we all seek after God.

PRAY

Come to communion seeking God, expecting him, open to him, desiring to commune with him.
 Seek and you will find.

SERMON NOTES:

The Holy Family, Simeon and Anna (Lk.2:21-40)

Mary and Joseph obeying Old Testament Law (Ge.17:12; Le.12:3; Ex.13:2, 11-16, Nu.18:15-16; Le.12:6-8)

The surprising anointing of King David (1Sam.16)

Tradition of female prophets (Ex.15:20; Ju.4:4; 2Kg.22:14; Is.8:3; Ac.2:17; 21:9; 1Cor.11:3; Joel 2:28-32; Ac.2:17)

Seek and you will find. (Dt.4:29; 1Chr.28:9; 2Chr.7:14; 15:2; Pr.8:17; Mt.7:7; Ac.17:27; He.11:6)