

Text: Luke 2: 22-40

[This meditation followed upon a dramatized conversation between the two characters of Simeon and Anna.]

It is a little shocking.

WE are still in the stable, with the baby Jesus, imagining the cooing sounds, and revelling as we would with any baby: "Look at how small he is! Look at his perfect fingers and toes! Isn't he cute!"

But the gospel-writer Luke has already moved on.

Exactly 21 verses after the joyful angelic choir sings "Glory to God in the highest" Luke is talking about the sword that shall pierce Mary's heart. How's that for dropping a little chill into our party in the stable?

This Jesus will lead to some falling and others rising: here is that "upside down kingdom" again, the poor being raised up and the rich being sent empty away. It will be good news to the poor, the blind, those in prison, but not so pleasant to those who *think they know* who God is.

This Jesus will be "a sign opposed": Who could oppose this sweet child?

This Jesus will expose inner thoughts. YIKES. How many of us would welcome our inner thoughts revealed?

Who is this baby, anyway?

For people like Luke, even though he devotes more than any of the other gospel writers to the actual birth story, it's not really the birth that is important; or to put it another way: the birth is important for how it launches us into his life, which led to a violent death, and then the surprise that God holds even that death in creative hands, which means that God holds all of us in creative hands.

So maybe Luke is trying to warn us, right from the get-go, before we get too snugly with this cute little baby: this Jesus will be good news only for those willing to follow him through it all, from birth, to cross, to tomb, through all the despised rejected part, the death, and **thus** into the resurrection. For those who truly seek redemption, and salvation, Jesus IS good news.

It's a hard sell, though, because we find it hard to trust that someone who sees our inner thoughts can still love us, and only desire good for us.

So we Christians have this strange strange message found in the person of Jesus Christ: We do not need to be afraid of the painful truth about ourselves. We do not need to be afraid of any pain, the pain of death, or grief, or rejection, for in Christ, all is held: everything about each one of us, and all of us together. And if we are willing to "feel the sword", and lean into the pain, we will know life. How strange is that???

For those who truly thirst for LIFE, Jesus is good news. The joy in knowing this strange strange man and experiencing his forgiving love carries our fear—of everything, and changes us irrevocably. We become less and less able to despise anyone. We become less and less able to look upon the world, and everything in it, with anything but irrepressible joy.

Let us pray that we too will be led, along with Simeon and Anna, to say, with great joy:
“Our eyes have seen your salvation,
Which you have prepared in the sight of all people!”

Offered to the congregation of MacNab St Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, ON
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