

# First Sunday in Christmas

December 27, 2020

Elim Reformed Church – Kings, IL

*Please pray and observe silence to prepare for worship.*

Scripture for Meditation

*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.* Galatians 4:4-5

Prayer of Preparation

God of glory, your splendor shines from a manger in Bethlehem into the darkness of human night. Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

## APPROACH to GOD

Votum Psalm 124:8

**Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Amen.**

Hymn 33<sup>v5</sup> All Creatures of Our God and King Francis

**Let all things their Creator bless,**  
**And worship Him in humbleness,**  
**O praise Him, Alleluia!**  
**Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,**  
**And praise the Spirit, three in one,**  
**O praise Him, O praise Him,**  
**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**

Sentences

Psalm 148:1-6

*Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above.*

***Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.***

*Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.*

***Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.***

*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them for ever and ever—he issued a decree that will never pass away.*

Hymn 188

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Latin Hymn

Salutation

*from various* Epistles of Paul

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

## CONFESSION and ASSURANCE

Call to Confession

When Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, he became like us in all things but sin. May we who have been reborn in him be free from our sinful ways. Let us confess our sin to God.

Prayer of Confession

O God, we need Christ to renew our commitment.

**We confess that our lack of faith has made us fearful.**

May your angels sing again to us of peace for body and soul.

**We acknowledge that we have foolishly let our desires lead us astray.**

May your light once more set our course firmly in your direction.

**We have turned our faith into a lifeless ritual.**

May your manger call us again to expressions of love and devotion.

**We have carefully kept our gifts and have not freely given our goods and our hearts to you.**

May the Wise show us the spirit of giving.

**Lord, may your Spirit linger in our hearts and bring renewal in our lives. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

*based on Luke 2:14*

People of God, through the coming of Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate, the Lord has comforted and redeemed us too!

**In Christ we receive the salvation of our God.**

**Glory to God in the highest!**

Gloria Patri

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

## THE WORD of GOD in PROCLAMATION

Prayer for Illumination

Worship Sourcebook

Son of God, you humbled yourself and became a servant, raising us up to share in your glory. We were in darkness and you have given us light and strength, peace and joy. Lead us according to your loving will;

make us a people who follow you in holiness. Give us generous hearts to hear your Word, and produce in us abundant fruit, through the power of your Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

*<sup>10</sup> I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

*<sup>11</sup> For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.*

*<sup>1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.*

*<sup>2</sup> The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.*

*<sup>3</sup> You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

Gospel Lesson

Luke 2:22-35, 39-40

*<sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."*

*<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for*

*the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

*<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."*

*<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

*<sup>39</sup> When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

Hymn 191      Hark! the Herald Angels Sing      Wesley  
Sermon      Jesus Presented in the Temple      Rev. Winn

*<sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.*

What exactly did the Law of Moses require of Mary and Joseph?

Ritual purification required that a woman, upon giving birth, could not enter the Sanctuary for 40 days. Her husband could not enter the Sanctuary on any day of her "uncleanness" if he had touched her. Leviticus 12:1-4; 15:19

Undoubtedly, many will find such a practice to be peculiar. Most, today, would see it as discriminatory and offensive to women. I might share that view. However, it is a highly questionable practice to assume that this was initiated as a means of hampering or dishonoring women. The more likely reason is that it served to protect the mother and child from unnecessary risks. Tying it to religious observation greatly increased the likelihood that one would adhere to this beneficial standard rather than if some "medicine man" suggested the same behavior.

Mary and Joseph complied with each and every regulation. The foremost of these was the requirement to present the first-born for consecration to the Lord.

*<sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),*

The Old Testament passage from which this quote is taken (Exodus 13) does not say firstborn "male". It says, "*the first to open the womb*". Based on a later reference to male animals, the NIV translation, which we read, concludes that the addition of "male" is appropriate here.

Most translations, I checked, did not make that addition even though the Scripture which initially sets forth the practice is explained with.

*Redeem with a lamb every firstborn ... Redeem every firstborn among your sons.*

*“In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.’ Exodus 13:13b-15*

I do not believe the maleness is the primary concern of this requirement. The point is that the first-born is to be declared sacred or dedicated to the Lord's service. In fact, at a later point in Scripture, it is said that an offering is to be given for the first to open the womb whether son or daughter.

By the time of the Levitical instructions on this matter, a provision for the poor had been established. Mary and Joseph were clearly numbered among the poor.

*<sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”*

What we learn about Mary and Joseph is that they were faithful to the traditions passed on to them from the Fathers. They did not withhold their only Son but offered him up and then paid the price for his redemption. Hopefully, you can see in this pattern a shadow and type of God's redemption of us.

Our passage continues.

*<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout.*

The Greek words used to describe this Simeon as *righteous and devout* have specific meanings. The word for righteous means that he was one who strove to keep the commands of God. Devout means that he was a reverent God-fearing man. By this expression it becomes clear that we are to take his witness seriously because he takes God's word seriously.

*He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.*

Simeon's labor was dedicated to watchfulness. He was likely an intercessor for the nation. His prayers would be for the swift arrival of the promised help from God which would bring comfort and peace to the nation.

For his faithful endeavor, Simeon was given his own consolation. It was not that he would see the deliverance of Israel but that he would see its deliverer.

*<sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.*

I think the reason why it is said that *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit* was to dispel any notion that this was merely of his imagination. This was not a matter of reasonable insight but of divine sight.

*<sup>27</sup> Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.*

The same Spirit which informed him, persuaded him to act.

*When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

These verses are packed with beautiful imagery.

1. What the parents did, they did for Jesus.

In one sense the religious acts to which a parent submits their children could be viewed as things they do **to** their young, but it is far more faithful to see them as what they do **for** their children. These acts may be sacramental (as in baptism), educational (as in Sunday School), or foundational (as in Worship) but each has as its goal: the enrichment of the child.

I think there are many reasons why one might engage in religious activity. It could be a reverent fear, which is always appropriate. It could be a holy habit, which is generally desirable. It could be a fervent longing, which is never to be trivialized. But there is something beautiful about engaging in these activities for the weakest among us, our children.

2. *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God.*

The gentleness of the moment cannot hide the splendor of Christ’s coming. The one *by whom and through whom all things were made* <sup>John1:3</sup>, he who held creation in the palm of his hands, has so condescended to our frailty that he must be lifted-up by those who have always been dependent upon him for the life in which they are sustained.

3. *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

Simeon’s faithfulness is absolutely tied to the faithfulness of God. We are never expected to love God so that he will love us, rather, we love because he first loved us.

And beyond that, we are to trust him whatever befalls us because we know him to be the promise keeping God. It is uniformly acknowledged that Simeon is stating something far more significant than “Good, now I can go. My work is done here.” No, this is an absolute surrender by entrusting every matter to God’s care, even death.

We often assume Simeon was old, but we do not actually know. Some have assumed he must have been ill, but that is not revealed either. I fear that these conjectures arise from the sad reality that we see such utter submission as only feasible for those who are without hope. Remember, these were the words of one who had all his hopes confirmed.

*30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”*

Simeon has absolute peace. Why? Because God has revealed his salvation for the nations.

*33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.*

I am always dumbfounded by the understated reactions of those who clearly had been informed. Both Mary and Joseph had been told who their son was and what he would accomplish, yet they often seem surprised.

Some have stated that this marveling only applies to a *light for revelation to the Gentiles*. They state that it was unexpected by the Jews. This argument is easily dismissed. The faithful had always seen their call as “being a blessing to the nations.”

*34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

We expect a blessing to be anything but dire. But this is not a joy-filled declaration. Simeon is warning Mary that the redemption will come at a heavy cost. The true nature of humanity will be revealed, even her own.

*39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

Over the past 32 years it has been my privilege and pleasure to preach, teach and serve in Christ's church. I hope that I have been, even if in too small a way, like Simeon, righteous and devout. I hope that I am undertaking my departure from active ministry with the confidence exhibited by that good man so many years ago.

While I know that difficulties and trials are sure to test each of us, I know the God who richly promises and abundantly pardons is faithful to his word. I am truly glad that God bestowed upon me the honor of proclaiming this truth to you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## OUR RESPONSE to GOD'S WORD

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Offering – Please remember to submit your tithes and offerings.

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father, this morning we are grateful for those who waited faithfully for the coming of your Son, our Savior. We thank you that the witness which they brought has been received and heeded by the countless who have joined them in their joy.

Knowing your goodness, we lift up our hearts and voices in confidence. Thank you for hearing our prayers.

*Please offer your personal prayers remembering:*

- Covid-19 victims and their families.

## Readings for Second Sunday in Christmas

**Monday:** Jeremiah 31:7-14    **Thursday:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-13  
**Tuesday:** Psalm 147:12-20    **Friday:** Ephesians 1:3-14  
**Wed.:** Revelation 21:1-6a    **Saturday:** John 1:(1-9), 10-18

**Memory Verse:** *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.* <sup>John 1:14</sup>

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**\*\*Notice: The Read-Along at Home Worship** will not be distributed for next Sunday, January 3. Your Consistory will contact you with details of worship possibly resuming in-person at Elim on Sunday, January 10.

*The Elim Waterfall newsletter* distribution will also be delayed with the transfer of pastors in early January.

There will be an **Annual Meeting** for the Rochelle Christian Food Pantry on Thursday, January 21 at 10:00 a.m. in Hicks Hall of the Rochelle Methodist Church. It will be a time to learn what has happened at the pantry and ask any questions you may have.

**Thank You:** Betsy and I are grateful to you for your kind words and generous spirit. May the Lord continue to bless you.

- Family and friends in need of your healing and comforting presence.
- Nursing and Convalescent home residents. (DeWayne Adams, Joyce Bennett, Marge Stouffer, and Diane Terviel.)
- All who live in fear or grieve loss.
- Communities suffering from injustice.
- Medical facility personnel, first responders, retail, factory, and charity workers whose health is at risk daily.
- Small-business owners, farmers, and the unemployed who are struggling financially during this pandemic.
- Our leaders and a peaceful transition of power.
- The spread of the gospel.
- Second Reformed of Fulton and Pastor Stephen

Strengthen us by your Spirit as we join in praying the prayer our Savior taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn      Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing      Fawcett

Benediction      II Corinthians 13:13

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*