

Can You See?

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Sometimes it is difficult to see something when it's right in front of your face. How many times have you misplaced something and looked everywhere for it? You know it has to be where you have looked but you simply can't see it. In desperation, you finally ask someone else for help and within a few moments, they easily see the missing item that you have overlooked time and again. Often times, it was right in front of you, but you just couldn't see it. At our house, we have come to use the term, *"If it was a bear, it would have bit you."* To indicate how close you were to what you were looking for without success and how easily it was for someone else to find it with relative ease.

Or how many of you have ever stared at one of those 3-D hidden pictures? When you first look at it, it's just a bunch of dots, usually blue and red, or maybe some lines on a page that make no sense at all. Then, someone says to look at the image from this way or that, and Voila! There it is. A picture starts to emerge, and it looks as if there's a 3-D image of an elephant or whale right in front of you. It's covered in blue and red dots, but it looks like the shape of a whale. The image was right in front of you all the time, but you just couldn't recognize it. Without help, you simply did see it.

From the Gospel reading in Luke for today, it seems that Mary and Joseph may have had a problem seeing. Even after all the supernatural announcements by angels, the arrival of the

shepherds, and their story of how angels had magnificently announced the birth of Jesus to them out in the fields. Gabriel told Mary the child was to be named Jesus and that He would be a king and reign forever. He also told her He would be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, God Incarnate. According to St. Matthew's Gospel, an angel told Joseph very briefly in a dream that the child was to be named Jesus and He would save His people from their sins. With all this, they had Jesus, really right in front of them, actually living with them in person but it seems God needed to give them some help to see who He was and what He was to be for them and for the world. We may ask, why was it so hard for them to see Jesus for who He was and what He was to become? Maybe with all the events that had occurred, they just needed to get on with their lives. Maybe they were tired. They had to walk 85 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Jesus was born and back 85 miles. Just eight days after Jesus' birth they had to take him to the Temple to be circumcised. Now, 40 days later they had to return to Jerusalem to fulfill the purification rites for Mary and, because He was their first-born child, they had to present Him to the Lord. All this was required by the Law of Moses. The walk from Nazareth to Jerusalem was about 90 miles one way. These journeys were no small undertakings - twice in a period of fewer than two months. So, while still caring for an infant and establishing and maintaining a new family, Mary and Joseph probably were not sitting in their home discussing the events of the past few months. They were just trying to cope and be God-fearing, faithful people.

I am sure the true effect of who Jesus was and what He was to do did not change the needs of an infant for them either.

Diapers needed to be changed, there were frequent feedings, a need for warm blankets, washing diapers, and clothing, plus maintaining their own lives were probably foremost on their minds. God, however, knows and sees such temporal demands in the lives of the faithful. And our God acts to help His people see that which is not always apparent. In the case of Mary and Joseph, God arranged for two people to help Mary and Joseph see who Jesus really was and what He was to become. Mary and Joseph knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but God wanted them to see more. God went beyond the descriptions already given of who Jesus was and was to be for them. In the temple, two faithful servants of God helped them see Jesus with another set of eyes. His servants were a man, Simeon, and a woman, Anna. First, they encounter Simeon. While everyone believed him to be aged, there is nothing other than his thankful praise to God that indicates he was old. Simeon, by the power of the Holy Spirit, helps Mary and Joseph, see. They marvel at what Simeon says about Jesus. They have heard some of this before, but they hear once again that Jesus will be the salvation of people and not just Gods' people of Israel but even the Gentiles. This was probably not the idea of who the Messiah would be and who He would save that Mary and Joseph had in mind. Then, Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph. Now, probably because Joseph died before Jesus, Simeon made a particular revelation to Mary. He told her that Jesus would be responsible for bringing many people in Israel to the point of making an important moral decision. Some of them would reject Him, and so "fall" spiritually, while others would accept Him, and therefore "rise" spiritually. So, Jesus would be a "sign" in the sense that He would be a demonstration that God was at

work. Simeon foretold the Stone that Jesus would become. He would be a source of stumbling to some, but a means of reaching heaven for others (cf. Isa. 8:14-15; 28:16). He would be the instrument of salvation for some, but condemnation for others. And, for this, He would pay a price. The price would be suffering the antagonism of those who would reject Him and dying for that rejection. Moreover, this rejection would hurt Mary. Simeon told Mary a sword figuratively would pierce Mary's soul as well. The word used for the word "sword" is *rhom phai a*, which describes a long javelin.

Following Simeon, God used a very old faithful widow named Anna. St. Luke says she is 84 years old. She went beyond announcing to Mary and Joseph who Jesus was and told everyone else around her. Her eyes were open as were Simeon's. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they could see what was before them. This baby was the Messiah. Their Savior. The Son of God.

Just as it probably was for Mary and Joseph, sometimes it is difficult for us to recognize what God's doing right in front of us. We all rejoiced with the angels and gave thanks for the First coming of Jesus a few short days ago. The problem is, in not so many days all the glitter and gloss of the Christmas celebration will be gone, and we will, like Mary and Joseph, get back to the living of our lives. In our lives, we often fail to recognize what has happened right there in front of us. God has acted to save us from our sins and guaranteed us the hope of life eternal with Him. And, if we of good faith cannot see this thing which the Lord has done what's more disturbing is that many other people outside our faith don't see it, and some don't want to. Being able to see what God's doing and how He fulfills His

promises isn't an easy thing, but, then again, God's Word teaches us that it's not really contingent on us. You don't have to go cross-eyed in order to see it. This recognition happens through and because of God's Holy Spirit.

Simeon had been given the promise of seeing Christ before he died. A lot of people saw Jesus after He was born, including Mary and Joseph. A lot of people in this Advent season heard carols and saw and sent cards with nativity scenes. But, just like that maze of dots on the puzzle I described earlier, they didn't really see what was there. Simeon just didn't see Jesus in the flesh, He recognized who He was. Simeon was not only given the promise to SEE Jesus, but he was led by the Holy Spirit to RECOGNIZE who Jesus really was.

The reason Simeon saw the whole picture and recognized that Jesus was fulfilling the will of God for the salvation of all people was because he "came in the Spirit." Now, what does that mean exactly? I don't know if we can describe it fully, but I know that in some way, Simeon was connected with the Holy Spirit. He was described in v 25 as ***"righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."*** Simeon was able to see Jesus (still an infant not even two months old) as His Savior, His Redeemer, His King. Simeon was able to see the image clearly among all the other babies who were in Jerusalem and he was able to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I have to ask you: "Is that where you are? Do you have the Holy Spirit?" The answer is: Why Yes! In Christ, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, to be our Comforter, to be our Counselor, to be our Paraclete—the One who walks with

us daily. And when did this happen? When you were baptized. God gave you his Holy Spirit. Every time you hear the Word of Christ proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is active, working in your heart, opening your eyes. At the Lord's Table, it's the Holy Spirit that assures you that you really are receiving Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit because of Jesus' promise and gift to us.

Simeon didn't have the Holy Spirit because he was righteous and devout. But Simeon was righteous and devout because he had the Holy Spirit. Simeon responded to the Holy Spirit's presence through a life of listening, responding, and recognizing God's works through the Holy Spirit. He listened to God's Word, listened to what the Holy Spirit revealed to him through the Scriptures, and listened to the Holy Spirit as it moved him to go to the temple that day. He responded to the Holy Spirit's prompting by going and doing what the Spirit said. And he recognized what God was doing because the Holy Spirit revealed it to him. The Spirit revealed his action and work in Jesus Christ to Simeon, which opened his eyes and his heart, allowing him to respond in faithfulness, obedience, and devotion. That's an important distinction. It's God's work and action that always comes before our response. God has revealed Jesus to us, his Spirit has worked faith in us, and we respond with thanks and praise in a way similar to Simeon. Jesus is the reason you came to church on Christmas Eve or tuned in on Christmas Day. You were responding in faithfulness because the Holy Spirit was working in you.

Sometimes God's actions aren't so easy to see. When we are living our lives, as Mary and Joseph were doing, the daily grind

clouds our vision, and we don't see what is right before us. Sometimes, we have to look to the Holy Spirit to see God in our lives and the salvation He has worked for us. We have allowed the Holy Spirit, or one of God's messengers in our lives, to help us see Jesus. Simeon and Anna served that purpose for Mary and Joseph. The things they said were not always comforting. Yet, they were true. And often when God acts, we don't want to see Him in the picture because the picture is not one we want to see. We chose only to see all the dots which seem to baffle us and miss the true picture. In these times we need to turn to the Holy Spirit and do just as Simeon and Anna did. We need to turn to God's Word, to come to Him in prayer, to come to His Holy house and hear the Word spoken to us, to receive the very Body and Blood of our Savior to allow the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts to Jesus and His work in us. And, like Mary and Joseph, we are the ones who are blessed to have the faith and know the path to take to open our eyes. What about those who are still confused? They see Jesus but they don't really see Him. They know Jesus was born in the flesh, was crucified, and was resurrected from the dead, and they don't see Him for who He was. They respond with disbelief, disgust, skepticism, and scoffing. For them, we, who have the privilege of being His disciples, are the Simeons and Annas who by the power of the Holy Spirit can help them see who Jesus really is and what He was and is for them. We have the duty to help them find the faith they may have searched for but simply cannot find, no matter how hard they look. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can help them find Jesus in their lives. We don't have to be eloquent theologians, or gifted counselors, or magnificent prophets. We just need to tell them that Jesus died

for them, just as He died for us. He saved them from their sins, just as He saved us and the whole world. And being found in faith, He will be with them in their lives on earth and come to get them to be with Him in heaven for eternity, just as He does and will do for us. It's easy to see, isn't it? It's right there for us because of the power of the Holy Spirit. As you continue your life today, after being blessed to celebrate this Christmas season, look for Jesus right where He is – with you in your life. And as you see Him there, share with someone who can't seem to find Him what you found. By the power of the Holy Spirit enable them like Simeon and Anna to be uplifted in the peace, joy, and hope of salvation in Jesus.

In the name of the Child of Bethlehem who is the Savior of the World. Amen.