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The Sacred and The Mundane
Luke 2:21-40

Was it another of those typical Advent/pre-Christmas and Christmas seasons for you again? You know – when you met yourself coming and going, when sleep seems to have been at a premium, and more; even after you vowed that this year would be different so that Christmas truly would be meaningful and special and at a more relaxed pace. It really is amazing how busy we can be after Thanksgiving and during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Time can certainly get away from us.

We may feel as Marj Carpenter wrote in a *These Days* devotional series:
It's that time of year again. Sometimes I say, 'Christmas comes but once a year. Thank goodness'. At other times I say, 'I wish we could spread the love, giving, and caring of the Christmas season throughout the year.'

For children and youth – it was waiting for school to get out, but still having tests, homework, projects, concerts, games, chores, practices and rehearsals, family events, and more. For adults – there were the daily activities, chores, and routines, work, shopping, rehearsals and practices, concerts, holiday programs, celebrations & parties, sporting events- as part of the crowd or as a participant, decorating, cooking and baking, cleaning, volunteering, worship, church events and/or responsibilities, sitting in traffic and trying to find parking places, cards to send, presents to wrap, hobbies, reading, phone calls to friends and family, listening to holiday music, and so much more.

Again, as Marj Carpenter has written:

All of us celebrate the Christmas season one way or another. Some of us run up debts purchasing Christmas gifts. Some deck the halls and decorate everything in sight with decorations we would consider gaudy the rest of the year. We attend parties, and some get inebriated, completely losing sight of the meaning of Christmas. We enjoy the music yet often the low tinkle of the bell asking for help for the needy is unheard. We try to remember the ill and the shut-ins, although it's difficult to work this in between all of the Christmas programs, parades, concerts, shopping, and partying.

We occasionally think of the very lonely at Christmas, who are not enjoying the celebration. We may take time with the children to make decorations and cookies, and help them wrap gifts to learn about giving. Even so, where is the Christ child in all of this? Let us ...take the time to kneel at the manger, remembering the newborn Babe and what he means to us all.

Yes, it is all too easy to get burned-out, to lose our enthusiasm, to be ready for Christmas to be over and so hopefully back to our normal routines.

J. William Harris, in *From Bedlam to Bethlehem – Finding Christmas in Chaos* wrote:

Is it not ironic that we put forth so much time and effort getting ready to observe the birth of our Lord and then, when Christmas comes, we are anxious to turn our attention to other things?...Let's not simply give the Christ child a hasty expression of praise and then return unaffected to our regular routines and responsibilities.

Nell Mohney put it this way in *Advent; A Calendar of Devotions*:

Sometimes the enormousness of God's gift in Christ is lost to us amid crowded malls, too many social events, overspending, overeating, or just plain fatigue. But we have control over our schedules and we can control our reactions. We can't control other people's actions or many of the events of the Advent season, but we can control our reactions.

When we are tempted to feel that Christmas is too commercialized, let us stop and give thanks that people who never enter a church are hearing the story of Jesus' birth through Christmas carols broadcast at the malls. When we are irritated by the traffic, we should stop and think how marvelous it is that a baby born 2000 years ago in the Middle East can cause a traffic jam halfway around the world in our city or community. The secret, of course, is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to stay focused so that his life and message tower over the confusion.

We need to remember that for Mary and Joseph it was into the same kind of busy/rushed/over-extended world that Jesus was born. They had the added burden of travel and needs arising from this due to the Roman government's census order. But God used that to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so that Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, could be born there in the city of David.

Even with all the excitement, specialness, joy, and awesome meaning of the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had to go on with their normal daily living. They could not be frozen in time in the manger with the shepherds sharing the good news they had heard from the angel host. Work, cooking and cleaning, taking care of a baby all had to happen. Daily prayers and worship in the local synagogue took place as well. They were devout and practicing Jews. Eight days after he was born the baby Jesus was circumcised, as proscribed in the Jewish law.

Following the rules and regulations as set forth in Leviticus 12 Mary was considered unclean after childbirth. At the end of her proscribed time the family went to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus to the Lord.

We are aware from the sacrifice they offered, 2 turtledoves or pigeons instead of a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon, that Joseph and Mary were poor but humble and faithful in their religious practices and faith. And they offered the appropriate sacrifices to show that the time of the uncleanness of Mary had come to an end.

Just as Joseph and Mary had to go on with the routines and necessities of daily living after the birth of Jesus, so do we after Christmas. They had their journeys –to Jerusalem, the flight to Egypt, and the journey from Egypt back to Israel and then to Galilee to settle in Nazareth.

Their travels with a newborn and infant can remind us of our journeys home after good but tiring Christmas travels. Working, cleaning and cooking, more gatherings of family and friends, returning of gifts, shopping, writing of thank-you notes, worship and church work, un-decorating,

appointments, medical tests and/or surgery, playing with or becoming accustomed to some Christmas gifts, travel, meals out, entertainment, birth, death, injury, accidents, illness, and more still happen; life still goes on. Time does not stop in the beauty, majesty and awe of the moments of Christmas celebrations.

As a writer of an Advent devotional booklet put it, after Christmas is like

...unpacking after the return from a trip, which signals the return to the routines of everyday life. We are thrust back to the reality of laundry and bills and work that have piled up while we were gone. But the returning to the routines of life, as we do once Christmas is over, doesn't have to be something we dread.

... Even the most ordinary tasks can take on new meaning when we realize that Christ has come.... Giving praise and glory to God is not just for the Advent season, Christmas, or Sundays, but for all the actions of our daily living.

God continued to work in the daily, mundane happenings of Mary and Joseph's lives. God being a part of their lives did not end at the manger.

We may not have a Simeon or an Anna appear in the midst of the mundane routines of our daily living to touch us with the holy, the sacred. But part of the wonder of our earthly lives is that we never know how, when, or where God will break into our fragile lives through the words, example, kindness, and/or actions of loved ones, friends, or strangers, or through experiences of nature, music, art, literature or whatever.

The Bible tells us that Simeon was righteous and devout. Anna was in the Temple daily for worship and prayer. They remind me of African Christians who begin each and every day with worship and prayer, of those Catholics who attend Mass daily, and of the Rev. Dr. Theodore Hesburgh, former President of Notre Dame University who celebrated the Mass each day of his priesthood.

Simeon and Anna centered their lives on God, knowing God's word, prayer, and worship. Even as old as they were they had not given up hope, nor given up on prayer or the Temple. Their faithfulness, hopefully, can encourage us to be faithful in our daily prayer and devotional life, in our reading and study of the Bible, and in our worship attendance. They trusted in God to fulfill the divine promises to the people of Israel, to the world, and to them. There seems to be no thought of having their own time tables met; but rather a deep trust in the timing of God, in God fulfilling God's word. They exhibited an openness to the Holy Spirit, to seeking God's direction and guidance each and every day.

George Bass, in his book, *Here Comes the King*, writes of Simeon and Anna in this way: And Christ had a face, a human face! His is the face that holds all the pain and sadness of the world. His face is the face that is perfect in love and complete in compassion. And we can see his face in the faces of those he touched,.... That's how it is with Simeon; he saw the face of Jesus....Anna...saw the same face and recognized the revelation of God in the baby Jesus which satisfied her soul.

Again, from the heart and pen of Marj Carpenter:

...we need to spend some of our Christmas enthusiasm in taking the story of Jesus to all the world. The message needs to go out,... support that missionary or mission you meant to help, do it now. That's your voice in the world. Do this for the sake of the Christ child who grew up to be our Savior. We need to make the holiday season a time to strengthen our faith and to renew our commitment to worship and serve the Lord every day. One possible way we can do this is truly to listen to the words of the Christmas carols, making them prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God. Out of such heartfelt praise can come a faith that will last long after the Christmas music has faded and a love that can be kept in our hearts all year long.

Let us carry Christmas on with us into this next week and the New Year, making Christ the center of our daily living, that we might be open to the sacred impacting our mundane daily living. May we then, as did Simeon and Anna, confirm that the baby Jesus is the real thing, the One for Whom we have been waiting; yes, the Messiah come to earth, God with us.