

Text: Luke 2:36-40. First Sunday after Christmas. **December 28, 2014.**

You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Amen.

Well, Christmas is over. The trees are by the curb. The garbage cans are full of boxes and wrapping paper and maybe even the first toy to get abused. The stuff is out of the stores. Return season is on. Soon all you'll see is fitness stuff for New Year's resolutions. What about all the hype? Where did Christmas go? How can it be over so soon? Maybe Christmas isn't over, just yet. Maybe, Christmas is just beginning? Beginning? It's December 28. Christmas is over. That depends on your perspective. When your focus at Christmas is the miracle that God became a man, God became a man, Christmas is just beginning. When you look in that manger and see not just a baby, but a boy who is perfectly obedient to his parents, in your place, Christmas is just beginning. When you ponder the mystery that the Almighty got stronger, the Creator got bigger, the mystery is just beginning. Christmas is just beginning. Christmas is just beginning.

Christmas was just beginning for Anna. What a cool woman here in the Bible. She only gets three verses, and she's overshadowed by Simeon and his much more popular song, but look at what we know about Anna. Her name means gracious. Cool name. Her father was Phanuel, which means face of God. Think of the connection. God was gracious to Anna, the gracious one, and allowed Anna to see God's Son face to face, just like her father's name. Anna was a prophetess, meaning she spoke God's Word. Here she focused her attention on the child Jesus, whose miracles were just beginning. She was faithful to her husband, before and after their marriage. We could learn something from that. Then lived as a widow until age 84.

But here's the really cool thing. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Never left the temple. Now it's possible that she lived at the temple. The temple had side rooms for storage that may also have served as living quarters for a widow like Anna. Maybe she literally never left the temple. Maybe she was just at the temple so much it seemed like she never left. An acceptable translation would be that she was not often departing from the temple. What would we call someone like this? A temple groupie? A temple junkie? She was just always there, fasting, worshipping, praying. You couldn't get rid of her.

What a wonderful model! And how that puts us to shame. I know it's not fair to guilt you for all the people who aren't here when you are here. But isn't there still a part of Anna that puts you to shame? Puts me to shame. Kind of glad there's no Sunday School so you can get home and make kickoff? Kind of happy all these special services are over because it was getting tough coming twice a week? That lazy, sinful, selfish, watch watcher is alive in each one of us, that sinful guy who just wants to pack away Jesus with Christmas and is glad it's all over.

But look again. Christmas is just beginning. The miracles are just starting. Anna spoke about this child, this child, this Jesus! This child will not stay a child. He will grow up, living every day perfect in your place. This child will stretch out his arms on a cross and pay for every lazy, selfish, sinful thought you ever had. This child will pay the price to free us, not silver or gold, come on, you are worth way more to God than that. This child will pay his holy precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death.

That's what Anna talked about. She spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. You see, Christmas is not so much for those who are looking back, but for those who are looking forward. Christmas is about looking forward to the precious price our Savior paid. Christmas is about looking forward to the empty grave. Christmas is about looking forward to that child wrapping you in his loving arms and keeping you there forever, forever, in heaven. Christmas is for those who are looking forward, not in a physical location like Jerusalem, but in the deep, spiritual place of your heart. Christmas is about those who are looking forward to finally being set free, set free, from all our sins and all their effects. Christmas is about looking forward because Christmas is just beginning.

Christmas is just beginning. That's the truth God revealed to Anna. Christmas is just beginning. That's the word she had the privilege to share. She kept talking about the child. She talked to everyone who was happy to hear it and probably some who were not so happy. Right, so now Pastor is going to tell you to talk about Jesus to your friends. And shame on you for missing the golden opportunity of Christmas. No! There's no shame. After Christmas might be a better opportunity. After all that Christmas is supposed to offer, what do you get without Jesus? A dead tree on the street, a few extra pounds that get harder to lose and a credit card bill it will take all year or longer to pay. Now is your opportunity to talk about Jesus, to say, "Christmas is just beginning." Now is your chance to show that Christmas isn't just a feel good day for a short time. Christmas is a miracle for all time, for an eternal time. There's no shame here. Jesus died for that. There's no guilt here. Jesus paid for that. Christmas isn't over. Christmas is just beginning.

Christmas was just beginning for Anna. Christmas was just beginning for Mary and Joseph. They did everything required by the law. Everything. Wow! Have you read Leviticus lately? There were a lot of laws. And they were very specific. And it was hard to keep them all. Yet, by God's grace and under God's hand, they did. Now, Mary and Joseph weren't some high and holy types showing off

with all the laws they kept. Mary and Joseph were God's instruments to make sure that Jesus did everything required by the Law. Everything. A child who does not keep the law is not our Savior. A child who goes on to sin is no help to us. Let me say that again. A child who does not keep the law is not our Savior. A child who goes on to sin is no help to us.

That's why Jesus is different. He did keep the law. He did not go on to sin. He fulfilled everything in the law. Everything. That perfect life, and that alone, makes his death on the cross the perfect sacrifice for sinful people, like us. Without a perfect life that fulfilled everything required by the law, Jesus' death on the cross is no better than the thieves dying next to him, or the thousands of criminals who were also crucified. This little phrase, "they did everything required by the law of the Lord," means so much. It means that Jesus is our perfect Savior. It means that Jesus is our perfect Substitute.

Down to every last detail. Nazareth. It was not much of a town. Seriously, maybe a few dozen people. Go there today and it's not much more. In the eyes of the world. But in the eyes of God, Nazareth was a very significant place. Nazareth was God's chosen location for his Son to be raised. Just as our Savior had to be born in Bethlehem because God promised, so he had to come from Nazareth because God said so.

It's really this contrast that made Nazareth the perfect place. In the eyes of the world, Nazareth was a nothing. Even one of the men who became one of Jesus' closest followers at first scoffed at the idea of the Savior coming from Nazareth. The religious elite said this guy from Nazareth can't be anybody. But in the eyes of God? Chooses the weak, the lowly, the despised, places like Nazareth. In the eyes of the world, Jesus himself didn't look like much. No wealth. No majesty. No place to lay his head. Not much of a teacher. A few fishermen, a zealot and a tax collector follow him around? I'd stay away from that guy. But in the eyes of God? His Son, our Savior, with every follower so precious in his eyes, he would die for you, and die for you he did.

In the eyes of the world, Christmas is over, but in God's eyes, in your eyes, Christmas is just beginning. This miracle, God became a man, sorry I have to repeat that, God became a man, this miracle is just the beginning. This man will feed thousands with five bread slices and two small sardines. He will heal the sick, and raise the dead, including himself, oh, and by the way, you and me, too. The miracles are just beginning. Christmas is just beginning.

The mystery is just beginning. The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom. Just in case I didn't have you at God became a man, now I should really have your attention. He grew? How does the creator of the universe grow? How does the one who stretched out the skies and put the stars in the heavens, how does he grow? He became strong. How does the Almighty become strong? Isn't he already Almighty? Isn't that the definition of almighty, to be all strong? How does he become strong? I don't know. I can't tell you. How is the all-knowing, filled with wisdom? Why does the perfect Son of God need any grace, favor, kindness? You see, the mystery of Christmas isn't over. The mystery is just beginning.

Don't throw away Christmas with the tree and the presents. Stop and think. Be like Anna and speak about this child. Be like Mary and ponder all these things in your heart. The mystery is wonderful and it's just beginning. The miracles are amazing and they are just beginning. Christmas is just beginning. Amen.