

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

December 27, 1998

Scripture: *Luke 2:25-35*

Sermon: *What Will You Do*

With The Christmas Story?

This morning I wanted you to hear the forgotten voice of Christmas. You know about the wise men and you know about the shepherds. Few of us know about Simeon. Simeon was a man who was going to greet Jesus when he was dedicated at the temple. Interestingly enough, we know nothing of what the shepherds said or of what the wise men said, but what Simeon said we know, because he gave us one of the most beautiful and majestic prophecies in the Bible. This is found in Luke 2:25. *“Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went to the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child, Jesus, to do for him what the custom of the Law had required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God and said...”* Before we read this prophecy, let me tell you that it was the custom of the Jewish people that when a son reached the age of eight days, he was taken and dedicated to God. The parents would bring an offering, which was used for the poor, and since Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem just six miles away from the temple, they decided they would take him to the temple and dedicate him. They walked into the temple, and all of a sudden this older man came rushing up, took the baby out of Mary’s arms and lifted him up, and this is what he said: *“Sovereign God, as you had promised, now you can let your servant die in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have*

prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’ The child’s mother and father marveled at what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, ‘This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in Israel, and to be a sign spoken against, so that the thoughts of peoples shall be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own heart also.’” This is one of the most remarkable statements ever said about Jesus, and I want us on this day to hear again this forgotten voice of Christmas.

Mary and Joseph had been on a year-long wondrous venture with God. You remember that it started when angels appeared to them separately and asked them if they would join in partnership with God in bringing the Messiah into the world. I am sure they thought nothing would top this, but little did they know. When Mary learned that she was pregnant she decided to go visit a favorite aunt. When she arrived there she found an angel had already been to talk with her aunt, and she learned that this aunt, whose biological clock had long since ticked out, was going to have a baby as well. One of my favorite mental visual-memories is of a young teenager named Mary and an older woman by the name of Elizabeth sitting there recognizing that they both were getting ready to deliver miracle children. I am sure when Mary walked home and talked to Joseph she said, “You cannot believe what has happened. This is bigger than we thought.” I am sure that Mary and Joseph wanted to have their baby in their home with family and friends, but you remember an edict came that said people had to go back to their ancestral home for census taking. For Mary and Joseph that was about seventy-five miles away, and I need to remind you that is donkey-miles, sandal-miles. When they got there, there was not any place for them to stay, and you recall they had to go out into a stable. I have often thought that Mary would have said to Joseph, “You know, something is wrong here. We are getting ready to have the Messiah, the angels have come, and here we are out in a stable all by ourselves, and, Joseph, if the baby comes tonight, there is nobody here to help. You are going to have to be the

midwife, you are going to cut the umbilical cord.” And that night, sure enough, the baby did come. Just as they were wondering about all of God’s plans for their lives, all of a sudden these men showed up. They said, “We are shepherds who tend the sheep around Bethlehem,” and I am sure Joseph must have said, “How did you know this was happening? How did you know where we were?” They said, “We were out tending our sheep and the whole sky was lit up with angels, and they began to praise God. and they told us where you were.” I am sure that when the shepherds left, Mary and Joseph must have said, “This thing is bigger than we thought.” In our chronology, we have wise men coming the same night, but, as you know, that could not have happened. They could not have gotten from Persia to Bethlehem overnight. There were no overnight express to get them there. They probably came a couple of years later; but still, when they came, I am sure Joseph asked them the same question, “How did you know? And how did you know where we were?” They said, “Did you know that in the sky there is a new heavenly body that actually moves? We followed it, and we came to worship the new king.” After they left Mary and Joseph were bound to have said to each other, “This is bigger than we thought.” Then they took the child to be dedicated at the temple, and as soon as they walked in this older man walked over to Mary and grabbed the baby up, held his hands in the sky, and uttered this remarkable prophecy—I think one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible--about Jesus. I am sure that Mary and Joseph sat and said, “This is bigger than we thought.”

If you are ever going to understand what happened this past week, I think that as you walk along with Mary and Joseph you are going to have to come to the same conclusion. This is more wonderful than we ever thought. *God’s program and God’s plan is greater than we can imagine.* If you just go tuck the baby in a manger back in some Christmas stocking and put him aside until next Christmas, then you have missed the whole story. Understanding how wonderful this Christ is is a growing development. In the book of Ephesians 2 there is a remarkable statement that talks about how Christ has saved us,

and then it says *“...that in the ages to come, He might show us the exceeding greatness of His power towards us.”* Listen to what that means. That means that when you come to Christ, every day you begin to learn more about Him, and Christ becomes greater and grander than you ever imagined. All throughout your discipleship walk with Him, Christ becomes greater than you imagined. When you die, it is not over. It is going to take an eternity for you to understand how great and grand Jesus is. What the Christmas story is about is how God took Mary and Joseph and said to them, “He is more wonderful than you first imagined.” You will understand this story when He becomes more wonderful and grand to you.

Now Simeon took the little baby in his arms, and he said three things about him that I want you to walk out of this building with. I hope you will remember them, because if you remember them they will haunt you the rest of your life.

The first thing he said about this little baby--and he was the first one to say it--was *this baby is for everybody.* He is a light to the Gentiles, He is a glory to the Jews, He is for everybody; and for the first time the message was said, “This child is of global- circling significance.” He is a person who has been born for everybody around the world; “red and yellow, black and white, they are all precious in God’s sight.” As little children you learned it: *“...for God so loved the world that He gave His own son.”* Someone has said that Jesus is not just for the Orientals, Jesus is not just for the Occidentals, Jesus is for the whole world. He is for everybody; and we can never stop until everybody in the world knows about Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you a Christmas story about how it works. People in our church are always so kind about Christmas. They bring to the staff just plates full of goodies. I can tell you none are left. Well, let’s say I walk out of the office and you come rushing in and you have one of

these big plates and you say, “Oh, pastor, I am so glad to see you. I wanted to bring this for the staff and I am in a hurry. Will you take it inside?” I say, “I sure will.” But then I say, “Inside what?” I decide that what I will do is just take it home. The lady who brought the big plate sees Maurice and she says, “Maurice, how did you like what I brought?” He says, “I didn’t hear about anything you brought.” Later, she asks me about it. “The tray? Yes, I have it right here.” “The people in the office didn’t know about it.” I say, “No, I decided to keep it for myself.”

God said, “I have come to bring my child for everybody. I give him to you so that you can pass the word of Him on to everybody.” If you and I just keep him to ourselves, and sing our hymns to Him, but don’t recognize that He has been given to us so that He can be passed on to everybody, then we don’t understand what Simeon said. “*He has come for them all.*” The problem is not that Jesus is not adequate for everybody; His problem has always been with the smallness of us. We have always wanted to maintain Him for ourselves, and never wanted to stretch ourselves until we see people everywhere and want to share with them the message of Christ. Part of our problem is we can’t see people. We get in such a hurry and we just never see people.

Years ago when I was pastor in Memphis a group did a survey in the city. They said, “There are a lot of Hispanics in the area, and we would like to start a church for Spanish-speaking people.” They came to our church and said, “We would like for you to do that.” I always will remember that we were in the deacon room, with all the deacons there, and deacon after deacon said, “There aren’t any Spanish people in Memphis. We have been living here all of our lives. I don’t know where you got this information, but there is nobody here who speaks Spanish.” The man promoting the Spanish-speaking church persisted. He said, “Well, we will pay to let a Spanish-speaking person come and be a pastor and we will advertise, and we will

just see.” The first Sunday fifty people showed up. Nobody had ever seen them.

Do you know who lives a block from you? How many little kids have you run over because you never got down to see them? A person may live in an apartment complex, an older person living all by himself. Did you know that two miles from here one hundred and fifty families live in a trailer park? Our problem is that we never recognize He is for everybody. We come together in a crowd like this and we say we are doing pretty good. No, we are not. One of the challenges that needs to be always before a church and always before believers is: if He is for everybody and if He has given us the opportunity to share with him, how are we doing? When I pick up my paper and see news of wars, disaster, hurt, and need, I realize that you and I have to be haunted by Simeon’s question. He is for everybody. This past fall we finished one of our seminars, one on determining the talent and the gift that God has given you and how can you utilize them in Christian service. Twenty-eight people went through that seminar, and after the seminar the twenty-eight met with staff ministers who tried to help them determine what God has given them and how they can utilize them. I want to tell you it has been remarkable. It has been remarkable to talk with some of the twenty-eight and to hear what the other ministers are telling me about what God has laid in their hearts, of what they feel that they can do. You are going to see all kinds of things that are going to happen because God is calling out people who say, “We have to do more than we have ever done before.” One of the things we are going to do this year is try to help every person go through a class like that and determine that God has given him an ability, a talent, and a gift, and we have to let everybody know about Christ.

A man in Seoul, South Korea, walked by one day and he noticed digging going on in a big construction area. He said he saw the deepest hole he’d ever seen. Finally, he stopped his car and asked a construction man why are were digging so deep a hole. He said, “Because they are getting ready to build so high, and the only way you can build high is to dig deep.” If we are going to build high, if we are

going to dream God’s dreams after Him, then you and I are going to have to dig deep in our own commitment and in our own faith, to say, “Dear God, we are going to make sure this Christ is known for all.”

The *second thing* he said about this little child: *He is necessary for everybody.* He not only provided for everybody, He is necessary for everybody. He said, “*Listen, He is for the rising and the falling of many.*” He is for the rising. What that means is that Christ is the one who reaches down and pull us up individually, and He is the one who is pulling the world up. Let me ask you why, in 1998, when a war takes place there are people standing around and saying, “We ought not to go to war.” It might be for political reasons, but would anybody have said anything like that 2,000 years ago? No. Did anybody care that on the side of the road there were little children who were dying, did anybody raise a voice and say, “We need to care for these orphan children.”? Did anybody say slavery is wrong? Anybody say women ought not to be treated like as second class people? Anybody say there are mentally ill among us and we ought to care for them? Why, in one half of the world, do people keep saying things like that now? I want to tell you why. It is because for 2000 years the hand of God has been raising voices and civilizations up. The reason we have orphanages and hospitals around the world where we care for little children, the sick, and the aged is because of the caring hand of Jesus. There are books you can get out of your library that will show you that in Western civilization every good, caring organization has been raised because of somebody whose life has been touched by Jesus Christ. They have been part of raising the civilization of Christ. *Christ is for the rising of the world.*

Christ is also for the falling. Without Him, I don’t care what you have, ultimately you have the capacity to destroy yourself. You can’t improve a person just by giving him a good set of clothes, a good car, an education; in his heart he has to know about Christ, because without Him there is a falling of mankind. He is a necessity for everybody. I want to tell you the Christmas story is nice, but I want to

remind you that Jesus is an absolute necessity for your life.

Notice the *last thing* he said about Him. Christ has provided for everybody, He is a necessity for everybody, then he gave a strange statement. He said *Christ is the standard for everybody for when you look at Jesus it reveals what kind of person you are.* A man was standing in the Louvre, he was looking at the *Mona Lisa*. A guard was standing by him. The man looked for a moment and said to the guard, “I don’t think there is much to that picture.” The guard said, “Sir, that picture is not on trial. You are.” What you think about Jesus doesn’t change Jesus at all, but it says an awful lot about you. If you say, “I don’t want anything to do with him,” you have just said an awful lot about yourself. It may be what you said about yourself is, “I want to hold on to my little world, my little thoughts, my little things, more than I want to give them up to God.” When you make fun of the whole business, really what you are talking about is not Him; you are revealing a cynical spirit in yourself. Pilate, they said, judged Jesus. No. Jesus judged Pilate. What Pilate said about Jesus did that make any difference. None at all. All it did was tell us about Pilate. However you respond to Jesus will tell what kind of person you are.

The silent voice of Christmas is Simeon. What he tried to tell us was that He is for everybody. He is absolutely necessary for everybody. If you want to know what kind of person you are, tell me what you think about Jesus, and we can tell you pretty quickly. Maybe today what will happen to you is what happened to Mary and Joseph: the little baby kept getting bigger and bigger and the plan of God kept getting more wondrous; and they began to understand that this thing was getting beyond their control. Maybe today is beyond your control. Maybe God has been so working in your life it is time for you just to come and say, “Lord, I want to kneel before You.”

