

Praise That is Already Happening

“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,” (Psalm 148:1-2). Psalm 148 begins with a bold declaration. Praise is already happening. Angels are praising God. The heavens are praising God. Creation itself is caught up in a great, on-going chorus of worship.

As the psalm continues, the circle of praise and worship widens. Sun and moon. Lightning and hail. Mountains and fruit trees. Wild animals and all cattle. And finally, people – young and old alike. “Young men and women, old men and children,” (verse 12).

Praise, according to Scripture, is generational. It moves through time, through bodies, through voices, and even through creation itself. Long before we ever spoke our first word of praise, God was already being praised. And long after our voices fade, other voices will continue to praise Him.

With that sweeping vision of praise in mind, we turn to Luke 2:22-40, to a story that is quiet, humble, and easy to miss. Yet here, in the temple courts, generational praise comes into sharp focus around a poor family, an infant Child, and two faithful elders who were paying attention. **Read Luke 2:22-40.**

Faithful Obedience in Ordinary Time

Luke tells us, “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,” (Luke 2:22). This wasn’t some extraordinary moment. Everyone did this in those days. It was routine obedience. Joseph and Mary were doing what faithful Jewish parents were expected to do. They’re not going, trying to draw attention to themselves. They’re simply living their faith out in ordinary time.

Luke then adds a detail that might seem small, but is deeply revealing, “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,’” (verse 24). The book of Leviticus (chapter 12) tells us that the preferred purification offering after childbirth was a lamb. But the Law also made provision for those who could not afford a lamb. The poor could bring two birds instead.

Luke wants us to notice something important here. Joseph and Mary were poor. In their arms, they carried the Savior of the world. They were raising the Child through whom God would redeem the whole creation. Yet they couldn’t afford the traditional offering. That must have been humbling.

There are moments in life when doing the right thing exposes our limitations. Faithfulness does not always feel triumphant. Sometimes it feels small, quiet, even uncomfortable. Yet there is a difference between embarrassment and humility. Embarrassment is about shame. Humility is about trust.

Scripture reminds us that faithfulness doesn't need to be loud to matter. Joseph and Mary are not ashamed. They are obedient. Their offering may be small, but it is faithful. And faithfulness is always acceptable to God.

A Turning Point

This moment in the temple also marks a turning point. The birth announcements are over. The angels have gone. The shepherds have returned to their fields. Life is moving forward. The presentation of Jesus in the temple becomes a "before and after" moment.

We recognize this rhythm in our own lives. As the Christmas season ends, we move from celebration back into ordinary days. Decorations come down. Boxes are packed away. Closets are cleaned out.

Historically, the days after Christmas became known as *Boxing Day* in lands previously colonized by Great Britain. It's a time when gifts were shared with those in need. Even today, many people donate gently used items, making room for something new. Spiritually, the question for us becomes, "What is new now?"

What changes because Christ has come? How does our relationship with God move forward after we have once again welcomed Jesus? Joseph and Mary step into the future carrying a Child – and a calling. Their humble obedience marks the beginning of something greater than they can yet dream or imagine. God's kingdom begins to grow through people who are present and paying attention, in ordinary time.

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far from the Tree

You've probably heard the old saying before, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," in reference to kids and their parents. Kids often reveal their parents, through habits, words, attitudes, and values. In the Gospels, Jesus' entire life is marked by humility and self-giving love. Later, the apostles and early church theologians would describe this as *kenosis* – self-emptying obedience to God's will.

Jesus learned how to be human somewhere. Luke gives us a glimpse of that in our Gospel lesson. In a household where worship was faithful even when resources were scarce. In a family where obedience mattered more than appearances. In a life shaped by trust rather than privilege.

Mary and Joseph don't praise God with extravagance. They praise Him with faithfulness. That kind of praise leaves a mark. Generational praise is taught as much by example as by words. It's modeled in daily life.

Too Old (Not) to Hear

Luke introduces us to Simeon:

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. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 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, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the Glory of Your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about Him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too,” (Luke 2:25-35).

Then Luke introduces us to Anna:

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem,” (verses 36-38).

In a culture that often assumes new things belong to the young, Luke shows us something different. We should honor people who have prayed and waited for a long time. God entrusted recognition and proclamation to the aged. It took seasoned eyes to see what God was doing. It took long-practiced hope to recognize fulfillment when it arrived. Simeon and Anna had waited long enough to know that God keeps His promises – always!

Anna teaches us something important. She teaches us that we can recognize God’s love even when it’s quiet. Psalm 148 reminds us that praise belongs to every age. Luke shows us what that looks like in real life, with two, real-life examples. The new era of salvation begins not with energetic youth, but with faithful elders who were still listening.

This invites us to ask hard questions about the Church, and particularly about New Hope. Do older adults have meaningful roles filled with dignity and influence? I think they do – if they’re willing to take them. Do younger people? Are we truly a community shaped by all generations? Luke’s answer for these questions is clear – God’s work requires every age.

In 2011, following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, more than 200 retired engineers volunteered to help stabilize the situation. Why did they do that? Because they knew their age allowed them to take risks that the younger people should not have to take. Their wisdom brought clarity. Their years brought courage. In the Gospel reading today, Simeon and Anna do the same. Their age doesn’t hold them back. It positions them to speak when it matters the most.

If You See Something, Say Something

When Simeon sees Jesus, “he took Him in his arms and praised God,” (verse 28). When Anna sees Jesus, “she gave thanks to God and spoke about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem,” (verse 38). Clarity leads to proclamation. Seeing rightly leads to speaking boldly. When we see something sacred, we should tell others like Anna did.

This isn’t about being arrogant or making ourselves out to be more important than we are. It’s faithfulness. When God’s salvation becomes clear, silence is no longer an option. We’re called to share the Good News!

How compelling must an insight be for us to speak? To speak to strangers? To praise God publicly? Simeon and Anna remind us that when we truly see what God is doing, praise overflows. They also remind us that God’s salvation isn’t meant to be hoarded. It’s meant to be shared!

Generational Praise Beyond Words

Psalm 148 also reminds us that praise isn’t limited to speech. Trees praise God by being trees. Mountains praise God by standing firm. The whole creation glorifies God simply by existing as God intended.

Not everyone praises best with words. Some praise through art, service, movement, or prayer. What would it look like for the Church to make room for wordless praise? For things like gardens, murals, labyrinths, or acts of beauty that declare God’s glory without speaking? Generational praise honors many voices and many expressions.

As Luke tells this story, the salvation of the world doesn’t arrive with fireworks and a big, fancy parade. It arrives as a Child carried by poor parents, recognized by elders who had learned how to wait. Praise does not end with angels and shepherds. It settles into human hands and human lives.

Late theologian Howard Thurman gives words to that kind of praise when he writes:

I will light candles this Christmas,
Candles of joy despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens;
Candles of love to inspire all my living.
Candles that will burn all the year long.¹

That is generational praise. It is praise that refuses to disappear when the season changes. It is praise carried by those who have waited a long time, and by those just beginning life. It is praise that does not shout, but shines.

¹ Howard Thurman, “I Will Light Candles This Christmas,” *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*, 4th Ed., (Friends United Press: Richmond, IN, 2011), page 24.

Simeon lights a candle when he takes Jesus in his arms and says, “My eyes have seen Your salvation.” Anna lights a candle when she tells anyone who will listen that redemption has come. Mary and Joseph light a candle through humble obedience, trusting God with what little they have.

And now – the candle is handed to us. Praise is already happening. The song is already in progress. Our calling is not – it’s never been – to start it, but to carry it forward. From one generation to the next, until all creation is filled with the song – the Light of Christ.

Prayer: Gracious God, We join the praise of all creation and every generation. Teach us humility like Mary and Joseph, wisdom like Simeon, and boldness like Anna. Help us see Your salvation clearly and proclaim Your goodness faithfully, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.