

CHRISTMAS GIFTS TO JESUS: SIMEON & ANNA – Luke 2:25-38

What would you say is the fundamental difference between Jesus & Santa Clause?

- § Disregard the obvious facts that Santa Claus is a fictional character and that Jesus is the single most important person ever to have walked the face of the earth.
- § One came from heaven to small town named Bethlehem, then on to a cross in a major city named Jerusalem, followed by his ascension to a place called paradise, and is coming back one day to establish his everlasting kingdom called heaven.
- § The other one comes from the North Pole in a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer. This one makes an appearance only once a year on the night of Christmas Eve and promises toys.
- § The other one has promised to be with us every day of our lives for as long as we live and promises joys.
- § Matthew 28:20 (NLT) - *Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*
- § Both of them have songs written about them, but it may be in the lyrics of those songs that the clearest difference between Santa and Jesus is revealed.

Here is what they say about Santa Claus:

You better watch out, you better not cry
 You better not pout, I'm telling you why
 Santa Clause is coming to town.

He's making a list, he's checking it twice.
 He's going to find out who's naughty and nice.
 Santa Clause is coming to town.

He sees you when you're sleeping.
 He knows when you're awake
 He knows when you've been bad or good
 So be good for goodness sake!

Now listen to what they say about Jesus Christ:

Joy to the World – Favorite Hymns of Praise # 88 – third stanza

- § Santa Claus keeps tracks of who has been naughty or nice and who has been good or bad. They he gives gifts to only the good and nice. In the Gospel according to Santa Claus, good children will find some toy or other treat

under their tree or in their stocking on Christmas morning. The bad ones get, well, a lump of coal!

- § Jesus on the other had gives out grace and mercy and joy to the naughty and nice. He comes into the picture where the curse of sin has taken over. He doesn't keep a naught or nice list, he looks for both and wants to bring grace to each.
- § The problem with the Santa Claus approach to Christmas is that it says that Christmas is primarily about gifts and toys and presents. That the most important list you can make this year is not who should you share Christ with, but who will be on your Christmas list. Who will you send a card to or who will you buy presents for.
- § Most of the retail stores across the country open for business at 6 AM on the day after Thanksgiving; it is because they know that people will be willing to line up and shop that early in the morning to buy gifts for people on their lists. There are usually long lines at Wal-Mart or any other store the night after Thanksgiving! Most retailers are counting on this. They earn 40\$ of their annual profit during the Christmas season. One thing we learn from Santa Claus is that Christmas is about shopping and gifts.
- § It seems that every year the kind of gifts that we are urged to buy get bigger and more expensive too, Once upon a time you might have seen a commercial urging you to buy a sweater, or appliance, or jewelry. Today you see commercials for Cadillacs, or Lexus, or a \$5,000 fur coat.
- § Until a couple of centuries ago, in countries where it was observed, Christmas was a noncommercial holiday and gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day. In fact, most Christmas gifts were generally limited to feeding the poor or special gifts for pastors, teachers, or missionaries.
- § During the 1800's, Christmas in America was primarily for feasting, going to church, and giving to the poor and needy. Giving small gifts to children was occasionally included in the celebration, but it was considered of secondary importance.
- § It wasn't until the prosperity of the 1950's that expensive gifts, giving more than one gift per person, giving gifts to adults as well as to children, and a month long shopping season became prevalent.
- § People start dropping hints or raising the questions about what they want for Christmas before the leaves have fallen from the trees. Some stores start decorating for the Christmas season as soon as the Halloween candy is off the shelves. In other words, they skip advertising Thanksgiving (the day to say thank you to God) so that they can make money on Christmas.
- § Today, the hurry and scurry of shopping, spending, and worrying is typical of November and December for most American Christians. We follow the

doctrines of Santa Claus, while Christmas should be a time of close fellowship, family togetherness, and sharing in the needs of others. Christmas should not be a holiday where we can anticipate anxiety and stress and bills and disappointments.

What Are You Waiting For?

Let me ask you some questions. What are you waiting for this Christmas? Are you longing for anything? What are you expecting to receive? Are you looking forward to anything special this Christmas?

In the Gospel of Luke, we come across two characters who make their appearance in the final acts of the Christmas drama. One is a man named Simeon; the other is a woman named Anna. They don't appear in any nativity scenes or in many Christmas cards, but they are significant players in the first Christmas pageant. Both of these individuals were waiting for something -- actually, they were waiting for someone.

Read Luke 2:25-2:38

To describe the kind of anticipation that these two have, Luke uses a certain phrase that identifies them as waiting with expectation for the coming of the Messiah, or Savior. They were "alert to His appearance, and ready to welcome Him." We see this phrase in Luke 2:25 where we read that "He was waiting..." Simeon was waiting for the Messiah! Again, in 2:38 the same phrase is used to describe a woman named Anna who was, "...looking forward to..." the Messiah.

Why were they waiting with so much anticipation for Christmas? Why were Simeon and Anna, who were well up in age waiting, not with anxiety, but with hope? They knew what Christmas should bring. They had rejected the Santa Claus mentality that Christmas is about material things and realized that Christmas was about Jesus.

Simeon teaches us something important:

1. When it comes to Christmas, we should be waiting For Comfort!

When we're introduced to Simeon in Luke 2:25, the Bible describes him in this way: "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 upon Him." Simeon was righteous before people, and he was devout in His relationship with God.

Things weren't going real well for the nation of Israel. They hadn't heard from God for many years and were under Roman rule. In fact, for 400 years God has been silent to His people. He had not spoken through a prophet for quite some time and the people were getting restless. They had lost their political independence and were living in fear of the capable, crafty, and cruel King Herod, and many were wondering if the Messiah would ever come.

When the text says that Simeon was waiting for the "consolation of Israel", He was hoping and waiting for the peace of His people. It was like he was waiting for the medicine that would cure their sickness and disease. He was waiting for the Messiah.

Verse 26 shows us that Simeon had good reason for his hope and anticipation: "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ." In other words, the Holy Spirit had been quiet for 400 years, but now He has broken the silence through Simeon! Simeon had received a direct revelation from God about Jesus.

Simeon's expectation focused on the comfort that Christ would bring. Among Jews of Simeon's day one of the popular titles of Messiah was Comforter. They were longing for the Messiah to come and bring His comfort to them.

The desire to be comforted is not just a Jewish need. It is a universal human need. We all struggle with loneliness, emptiness, insecurity, even desperation. In fact, the Christmas season is one of the major crisis times of the year for depression and suicide.

The Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to go to the temple courts at just the right time on just the right day that Joseph and Mary were bringing their infant to the Temple. There were thousands of people every day in the Temple, and the Holy Spirit led Simeon directly to Jesus. It was like, He was saying, "Simeon, I don't want you to miss this." When Simeon looked at the baby Jesus, now about 6 weeks old, he knew that God's promise had been kept. Here was Immanuel, "God With Us," to make everything right, to provide significance by His presence, and to eliminate rejection, fear, and loneliness.

Verse 28 of Luke 2 says that Simeon reached down and took Jesus out of Mary's arms and began to praise God. Let me pause here to make a comment. Parents, how would you feel if some old man came up to you, took your infant in his arms and started singing out loud? I'm sure this was a bit unsettling for Joseph and

Mary. But Simeon didn't look all that dangerous. As he broke out into praise, he acknowledged that God had not only fulfilled the individual promise to him, but also the promises of the prophets to send the Anointed One to comfort both Jews and Gentiles.

In verse 30, Simeon calls out – “My eyes have seen your salvation!” Simeon's whole life was complete, because of Christmas. Simeon understood that comfort had come not just for the Jew, but for everyone when he declared, “You have prepared your salvation in the sight of ALL people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Comfort wasn't just for the Jew, it was for everyone!

Every thing he had ever hoped for was in this baby. The same is true for you. Every thing you could possibly hope for is not in Santa, or gifts, or even your family. It is in Jesus. He is the one who bring comfort, because your deepest needs are answered in Him.

Can any of you identify with Simeon? Some of you may be really hurting right now. You feel lonely, empty, afraid, and maxed out. Do you need some comfort? Do you need a fresh sense of God's presence? If so, you can find what you're looking for in Jesus this Christmas. You can look forward to the celebration of Jesus' birth as the time of comfort. He came to comfort us!

The first thing I wanted you to see in today's Scripture is:

When you think of Christmas, it should be a time of COMFORT!

The second is:

When you think of Christmas, it should be a time of FORGIVENESS!

The other Christmas character waiting with anticipation was Anna. After her husband had died, she had dedicated herself to fasting and praying in the temple. In fact, the Bible says that she never left the temple - but worshipped day and night. She could have beaten anyone at a Bible Reading Marathon because she was always at church!

She was looking forward to the same person as Simeon was, but with a different orientation. Instead of looking for comfort, Anna was looking for forgiveness. Take a look at verse 38: “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.”

The Jewish people had seen the Messiah through out their Scriptures, the Old Testament. They were waiting for the day of forgiveness, just as Anna was. They were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Anna saw the baby, she knew who He was. He was the one foretold in the Old Testament. Jesus was the one she read about. You see, Jesus is in the Old Testament.

READ POEM: “Jesus Is...”

The word redemption is related to the idea of captivity. The Old Testament Passover and the release of Israel from Egyptian slavery stood in Anna’s day as the ultimate redemption and the symbol of God’s power to release captives. Ultimately, Passover pointed ahead to that day when God would provide deliverance from the slavery of sin.

When Anna saw Jesus, she saw deliverance. She may not have known about the cross that was coming, but she knew that because of Jesus the slavery of sin was over! You see, part of Christmas is remembering the cross. Jesus bore the pain of the cross for a reason: to pay for sin. Jesus faced the cross so that the curse that was on us could be paid for (Galatians 3:13). This is called “redemption.” He died for our sins (and even “because of our sins”) willingly (Titus 2:14). It was my sin (and yours) that led Jesus to the cross, but it wasn’t nails or even God the Father that held Him there. It was His love for us. It is through the grace of his sacrifice that sin can be paid for (Ephesians 1:7). We can be healed from our sin only by Jesus wounds (1 Peter 2:24).

Anna understood this when she saw the baby, and was filled with awe! When Anna saw Jesus, she gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who were waiting for redemption. Here, at last, was the One who would save His people from their sins.

Friends, when Jesus came, He provided the very thing Anna was waiting for -- God’s forgiveness. Let me ask you a question. What are you waiting for this Christmas? Are you under a huge burden that is weighing you down. Jesus can free you! Are you plagued with guilt this Christmas because of something you’ve done or the way you’ve been living? Do you feel like you’re trapped in a pattern of sin that you can’t break out of? If you need forgiveness, Jesus can give it to you this Christmas season. In fact, I can think of no better time than Christmas to find forgiveness in Jesus.

You see,

- 1. When you think of Christmas, it should be a time of COMFORT!**
- 2. When you think of Christmas, it should be a time of FORGIVENESS!**

Simeon and Anna could celebrate Christmas with Comfort and Forgiveness because they understood the difference Jesus could make. They didn't have Santa back then, but they would have rejected his message. They knew that the gifts of God were not just for the good people and the religious, but for everyone. They knew that Christmas is a wonderful gift that God has given and a blessing that we each can receive, if we open our hearts and accept it by faith.

Each of us need to be like Simeon and Anna and really look to the real meaning of Christmas. Stop and ask yourself: are you too caught up in the busyness and stress of the season? Have you been running around because of the Holidays, or are you taking the time to make Christmas a "holy" day? Has Christmas become too predictable, too familiar? Have you heard the Christmas story so much that it no longer astonishes you?

I'm struck by what Simeon told Mary in verse 34. It must have taken her breath away. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will spoken against..."

That's not really a joyful Christmas greeting, is it? Simeon is not saying, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year." Rather, he pauses, clears his throat and tells her that Christmas will never be merry and the New Year will never be happy until people get moving and surrender their lives to Christ.

Here's the truth. Christmas splits people into 2 camps. Since Jesus has entered the world, He has divided the human race. Jesus will cause the falling and rising of many. Because of who Jesus is and what He came to do, He forces people to make a decision about Him. The Bible uses powerful imagery - Jesus is either a rock that you build your life upon (that's the sense of rising) or he's the rock that you stumble over (that's the meaning of falling). On the cusp of this Christmas, Jesus is calling each of us to a moral decision - based upon our willingness to move and respond, we will either rise or fall.

You can't stay neutral about Jesus. You are either for Him or against Him. You're moving closer to Him, or further away. You either have the Son or you don't.

Take a look at verse 27: “Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.” Now drop down to verse 38: “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God...”

Both Simeon and Anna had to respond to the Christmas message of comfort and forgiveness. When the Holy Spirit prompted them to move, they didn't sit still. I wonder what would have happened if they had not responded? Actually, every one of the Christmas characters responded to the Spirit's leading:

- § Mary gave her whole life to God when she said to the angel, “May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 2:38)
- § Joseph decided to follow the Lord when he woke up from his dream and “...did what the angel of the Lord had commanded and took Mary home as his wife.” (Matthew 1:24)
- § The Shepherds heard from the Lord and said, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened...” (Luke 2:15)
- § And, the wise men saw the star and moved out of their comfort zone to find the King of Christmas.

Friends, when God prompts you to do something, then you need to do it. It might mean salvation for some of you. It might mean full surrender for others of you. Or, maybe the Spirit wants you to be more involved in serving people. Do you sense Him asking you to do something today? Don't procrastinate when God prompts you to do something – you may miss out on a miracle this Christmas.

No matter what else you may receive for Christmas this year, God has already offered the greatest gift that has ever been given.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

When you accept the gift of Jesus, you are reclaiming the true meaning of Christmas!

Pray

To Us a Child of Hope – Hymnal, a Worship Book # 189