

**RE-DISCOVER CHRISTMAS:
FINDING HOPE IN OUR UNCERTAINTIES**

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Luke 2:22-35

Good morning and welcome to the season of advent. This season is definitely one of my favorite seasons in the church year. Lasting only four Sundays before Christmas – it always seems to go so fast. I absolutely love all the decorations – the color – the lights that brighten up our increasingly dark days. And most importantly, I love the message that Advent brings.

Advent comes from a Latin word meaning “coming or arrival” – and it links the past, present, and future comings of Christ. We look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus. We rejoice in the present of our living Lord, active in our lives today. And then we look forward with eager anticipation to the second coming of Jesus – when He will return in victory and makes all things right.

Advent is that season where we are waiting and preparing our hearts for His coming. And over these next four Sundays, I am inviting you to “Rediscover Christmas” – to experience once again Jesus’ coming into your life and filling you with the gifts He brings.

Somehow in the midst of the stress and strain of our lives we lose sight of those gifts. We’ve all experienced the craziness and uncertainty of the pandemic, economic and political unrest – hatred, division, and racism. And in our own personal lives, we’ve known times of broken relationships, deaths of loved ones, health concerns and worries about our future. Oh, how much we are all needing to hear once again of God’s redeeming love – and rediscover how God gives us:

Hope for our uncertainties

Peace in our struggles

Joy in our discouragements

Love in our differences.

Today we rediscover the hope of Christmas even in the midst of uncertainty.

And we begin by hearing about some hope-filled people who lived during the time Jesus was born. The Israelites had been living in a long season of struggle and uncertainty. They had been living under the authority of the Roman Empire – where corruption and conquest, brutality, and oppression. It had been a long time since they had heard the promise of the coming of the Messiah from the prophets. In fact, it was 700 years since they had heard the promise of Isaiah, which declared: “that a virgin shall conceive and give birth to a Son and they shall name Him Immanuel, “A son has been born for us – and his name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” They were waiting for the Messiah to come – and they kept asking, “How long oh God?” They were a people living in darkness and uncertainty. Were there even embers of hope still alive?

As we read in our Scripture for today from Luke’s Gospel – the answer is “yes.”

Turn with me to the Gospel of Luke and let's look together at the Christmas story, found in the 2nd chapter. As that chapter begins, we hear how Jesus was born in Bethlehem. We hear how the angels sang and the shepherds worship. And then the story continues with two characters who welcome the baby Jesus in the Temple and rejoice that their waiting and hope had been fulfilled.

Let's begin reading at verse 22:

²⁵ At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So, when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

*²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.*

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared for all people.

*³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!"*

³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

³⁶ Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸ She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰ There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

Simeon and Anna were sparks of hope in Israel. They had faithfully believed and waited and hoped – expecting that God would do what He had promised.

They both had lived long lives and had experienced hardship and pain in their own lives. But they both remained faithfully devoted to God, inspired, and fueled the hope that God was at work – even though they couldn't see it. Even as the years passed and they grew older, they still held on to hope – and set their focus on God – taking one step at a time as they faithfully waited.

And then they rejoiced and celebrated when finally, their eyes beheld Jesus. "This is what He said He would do. The Messiah is here!" That gave hope to all who heard, including Mary and Joseph who were still amazed at all that had been said about their newborn Son.

Simeon and Anna can teach us several things about hope and its power that we can rediscover and apply to our lives.

First, we need to Hold on and praying expectantly (like Simeon and Anna) – believe that God will hear you and will answer your prayers. Hebrews 10:23 – “Hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promises.”

The word “hope’s” literal translation is “to bind together like a cord.” It gives a sense that you feel when you are holding onto a rope and someone else is also holding firmly to the other end. – Think of it like a strong hope holding us fast to God. It is active – holding onto – clinging to God – anchored in hope.

Isaiah 40:31 – those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not grow faint.”

Next, we need to fix our eyes on God who is our source and supplier of our hope. Simeon and Anna kept their eyes on God and listened for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Stay in God’s Word and recall God’s promises

Read Romans 15:4: - *“everything that was written in the past was Written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide – we might have hope!”*

For every fear and anxiety – counter it with a promise and a hope – at least 1 if not 3 or 5

The more you fill yourself up with God’s promises the more hopeful you will be and the less anxious you will be

Romans 15:13 tells us *“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

God’s supply of hope is abundant – we can be confident that we are never alone even in our loneliest or darkest moments. He is the anchor we can cling to in the fiercest storms of life, and He will get us through. He is our light in the darkness and the fuel that keeps us going. We are in this together and nothing can ever separate us from His love. Our future is secure in Him.

And then - take a step toward hope – and share it with others. Simeon and Anna praised God and let others know the good news of the coming of the Messiah. Hope is contagious – and can lift others up. Hebrews 10:23 says we are called to encourage one another – build one another up and motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

This empowering of hope reminds me of a great story from the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you remember hearing about Captain Tom? In all the doom and gloom of the pandemic, Captain Tom took a step to share hope with people in England – and ended up becoming a national hero and inspiration to all.

Tom, now Captain Sir Tom Moore, since he was knighted by the Queen of England, is the 100-year-old man who singlehandedly raised \$40 million for the British health care system by walking 100 laps around his garden. That's right, 100 laps for 100 years. What started as a challenge from his son-in-law to get people to donate \$1 per every lap he walked around his garden. The challenge went viral when his daughter posted the campaign on an online charity site. The news spread quickly, and suddenly this World War II veteran, became a social media sensation. He reported to reporters that the "first step was the hardest, but after that he got into the swing of it and kept on going." So, Tom took that first step, gripping his walker and wearing his navy-blue blazer decorated with his military medals – and walked 100 laps.

As Captain Sir Tom turned to complete his final lap, the total stood at more than £12m. It would eventually surpass £30m. An honor guard from his old regiment saluted an extraordinary achievement.

His cover of You'll Never Walk Alone, a duet with Michael Ball, raised even more - hitting the top of the charts in time for Captain Sir Tom's hundredth birthday and making him the oldest person ever to score a number one single in the UK.

Video "When You Walk through the Storm" - https://youtu.be/LcouA_oWsnU

Hope inspires us. Hope emboldens us. Hope builds upon hope and keeps us going, no matter what.

What is your next step of hope today? What is your next step of hope in this Advent season? As Captain Tom Moore said: *"We will get through it in the end, but it might take time, but at the end of the day we shall all be OK again... the sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away"*

Walk on – walk on – with hope in your heart – and You'll never walk alone.
What is your next step of hope today? What one step of hope can you take today?
Hold on to hope. Hold on to what Christ wants to speak into you – to fan into flame so that you can experience light in the midst of the darkness.

Reach out to His hand – call out to Him

PRAYER AND INVITATION

RESOURCES

This sermon was inspired by resources from Outreach Ministries, "ReDiscover Christmas".
www.outreach.com