

Presentation in the Temple--Lk.

St. Mary of the Angels

Dec. 31, 2017

1. Our readings resound with joy:

Simeon:

Watchman--his Advent waiting ends with fulfillment in this Christ Child.

His reaction: Simeon sings a song for joy. We don't recognize it as a *song* as we read the gospel text, but it is one of several songs that Luke gives us as he tells the story of Christ's birth.

Anna:

Also long-waiting. A woman who suffering somehow never turned her bitter or cause her to blame God. She always stayed close to God through prayer. Now, she runs to give the good news of the child who fulfills her hopes.

2. Luke makes joy his theme from the beginning to the end of his gospel.

"There is more singing in the first two chapters of Luke than anywhere else in the New Testament except perhaps Revelation." (R. Maddox)

Mary after conceiving her child sings:

"My spirit rejoices in God my savior. My soul glorifies the Lord. / For the Mighty One has done great things for me--holy is his name.

On realizing that he and his wife would have a son, called John, Zechariah, the father, sings:

The tender mercy of our God shines on us and guides our feet in the paths of peace.

Elizabeth on meeting the pregnant Mary exclaims: "The baby in my womb leapt for joy [at the sound of your voice].

The angels present at the birth of Christ sing:

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will.

Simeon sings:

My eyes have seen the salvation prepared for all peoples.

These songs have the feeling in them that we find today in our own hymns that come out of many traditions. I think of an American hymn, "How Can I Keep from Singing". It comes out of the Quaker

tradition. The song captures some of what the biblical Simeon and Anna must have been feeling:

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging;
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
A fountain ever springing;
All things are mine since I am his--
How can I keep from singing?

Luke's gospel ends as it began with joyful singing.

Christ ascends into heaven: "They [his disciples] returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."

It may seem strange or, even, deluded to say that we should be singing for joy in a world notorious for dashing all hopes. Skeptics will say that we are kidding ourselves. "Pick up the papers," they say, "and see the troubles of the world all around you and right in front of you." People may say, "What's the matter with you. How can you be singing?" Yet, it was no different at the time Luke wrote his account of the Good News. He insists that joy is the basic characteristic of those who follow Jesus Christ. Pope Francis says the same in his letter entitled "On the Joy of the Gospel".

Why sing? Because this Child, who made Mary, the angels, and Simeon and Anna burst into song, contradicts the evil and darkness of the world.

Who can say that the brave people who have sung another song we know over the years in the face of so many threats and challenges are deluded in their steady faith?

We shall overcome, we shall overcome
We shall overcome some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome some day
The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us through,
The lord will see us through some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
The Lord will see us some day.
We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We'll walk hand in hand some day

We shall live in peace, we shall live in peace

We shall live in peace some day

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe

We shall live in peace some day.

In this Child Jesus, the hopes, prayers, and promises of such songs already have the guarantee of their victory.

When He laid down his life for us, He revealed that God's love overcomes death itself and that God has prepared a Kingdom for those who serve Him. The joy that moves all these singers is not a temporary emotion. They sing because their faith is anchored in the rock of Jesus. *He* is the reason our joy should run deeper than any suffering. *His light* penetrates the thickest darkness of sin; is stronger than the worst misfortune; and heals the deepest wounds. How can we keep from singing, when we belong to a loving God who through this Christ Child draws all things to Himself? As Jesus himself tells us in Luke's gospel: "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (10.20).

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