Luke 2:25-40

25 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. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 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, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” 33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 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, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” 36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 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. 39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

When people talk about having Christmas spirit, a lot of what is discussed goes back to Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. The well-known example of someone with no Christmas spirit is Ebenezer Scrooge. He’s not happy about Christmas and doesn’t want to celebrate it. He is selfish with his money both when it comes to those working for him and those in his community. In the story he is then visited by spirits or ghosts who teach him the true meaning of Christmas. As a result for many people, having Christmas spirit comes to mean being happy about celebrating the holiday and being kind to others, especially through charity or giving. Now of course there is nothing wrong with such emotions and actions at Christmas, but they do come up short when we consider the true meaning of Christmas. This morning as we look at the examples Simeon and Anna we will focus on the True Spirit of Christmas. First, it leads to a life in Christ and second, it leads to a confession of Christ.

Luke’s account begins by describing Simeon in verse 25: “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 is described first as righteous and devout. Those are two qualities that do not come naturally to any human being. Before God, human beings are only sinful and unfaithful. So such qualities are the result of faith. In Simeon’s case, he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Like believers throughout the Old Testament, he was looking ahead to the promised Savior. Such qualities in Simeon were the result of the Holy Spirit being upon him, creating and sustaining that faith. That faith would show itself as Simeon lived in Christ, righteous and devout.

Simeon took this promise of a Savior so seriously, he was looking forward to it so expectantly, that he had a special promise: “It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (v. 26). Luke does not reveal Simeon’s age.
at this point, nor do we know how long he had this promise. But it does show that Simeon only had one item on his bucket list—to see his Savior before he could die in peace.

Consider also Anna’s description in verses 36 & 37: “There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, 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.” She too was living a life in Christ. She had been married for seven years and seemingly a widow for at least sixty years. Instead of remarrying, she devoted her life to worship, never leaving the temple, but staying there night and day, fasting and praying. She is another example of the Holy Spirit’s work, a believer living out her faith and leading a life in Christ.

As we compare ourselves to Simeon and Anna, there are some obvious differences. None of us have received a promise that we will see Jesus come before we die. And in my short time here at St. John’s, I have yet to see anyone that never leaves the church, but is here day and night, worshiping, fasting and praying. But in comparison we can examine our lives to see if we are leading a life in Christ. Would we be described as righteous and devout, following God’s law in all our ways? Or do we only live that life when someone’s watching or when it’s convenient for us to do so? Are we looking ahead for our consolation on the Last Day and Christ’s return? Or do we forget about it as we focus on our day to day routines? Do we take every opportunity to worship and pray, whether at church or in our homes? Or do we feel that once a week or once a month is more than enough to lead a life in Christ? If we are honest in our evaluations, we can see many times where we fall short in living up to the standards that God has set for us.

This brings us to the true spirit and meaning of Christmas. It’s not just about happiness or love or giving. It’s about the consolation of Israel, the baby born in the manger. Jesus came to secure forgiveness for our sins—all the times that we fall short of God’s standards—so that now we do stand righteous and devout before God. Jesus also came to secure our eternal place in heaven—this is the ultimate consolation we are waiting for and directly affects every aspect of how we live our lives. We worship God at every opportunity because here at his house we find the strength through Word and Sacrament as the Holy Spirit is also upon us to help us lead a life in Christ. The true meaning of Christmas—our Savior—makes possible a true spirit of Christmas—living in repentance and forgiveness with an expectation of our Lord’s return.

For Simeon and Anna, the day had finally arrived. First, Anna in 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.” She knew who this child was. She gave thanks to God for what he had done. But it did not stop there—she told others about the child, that this was the Messiah they were waiting for who had come to redeem them.

Simeon also praised God in verse 28 and spoke the words that we call the Song of Simeon, a version of which we will sing later in our service. Simeon could now be dismissed in peace because his eyes had seen his salvation. He knew the significance of who this child would be—not only the Savior for Israel, but for all people, Gentiles included.

But Simeon’s confession did not end there. He continued in verses 34 & 35: “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.’” It was not all good news. Simeon was not afraid to confess the truth that some would reject this child and his
message of repentance. Mary would even face sadness as those who rejected her son would someday put him to death.

For many in this world they equate the spirit of Christmas with peace and harmony, often at all costs. We are to love people no matter what. But the true spirit of Christmas leads to a confession of who Christ is and what he came to do. It is a message of peace for those who acknowledge their sin and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. But for those reject repentance, who do not want the thoughts of their hearts revealed, as Simeon put it, there can be no peace and harmony with God. That puts the pressure on us to tone down our confession, to not talk to others about their sin so that we can preserve our peace and harmony with them. The world thinks that the ultimate act of love is to love people no matter who they are or what they do.

But in the true spirit of Christmas, our ultimate act of love is to confess Christ to others. We love them so much that we want to see them forever in heaven. And so we will risk their anger and hurt feelings and rejection to share with them the true message of peace. Only when they see their sin will they see their need for their Savior who is able to forgive that sin. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to bring peace—not a superficial peace on earth, but a true peace with God to be enjoyed in the eternity of heaven. In the Christmas spirit of giving, there is no better gift to others than a confession of Christ—who he is and what he has done.

Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* is well-known and well-loved for the story that it tells. And there is certainly nothing wrong with celebrating the joy of Christmas and showing that joy through giving and charity. But what is key is the spirit behind those emotions and actions. We are joyful because of the baby born in Bethlehem. That joy will show itself in a life lived for Christ, in thanks for what he has done. We give to others to show our love, most importantly giving them a clear confession of Christ so that they can join us someday in heaven. May the Lord instill in us this spirit of Christmas, not just for a holiday or season, but for every time of our lives. Amen.