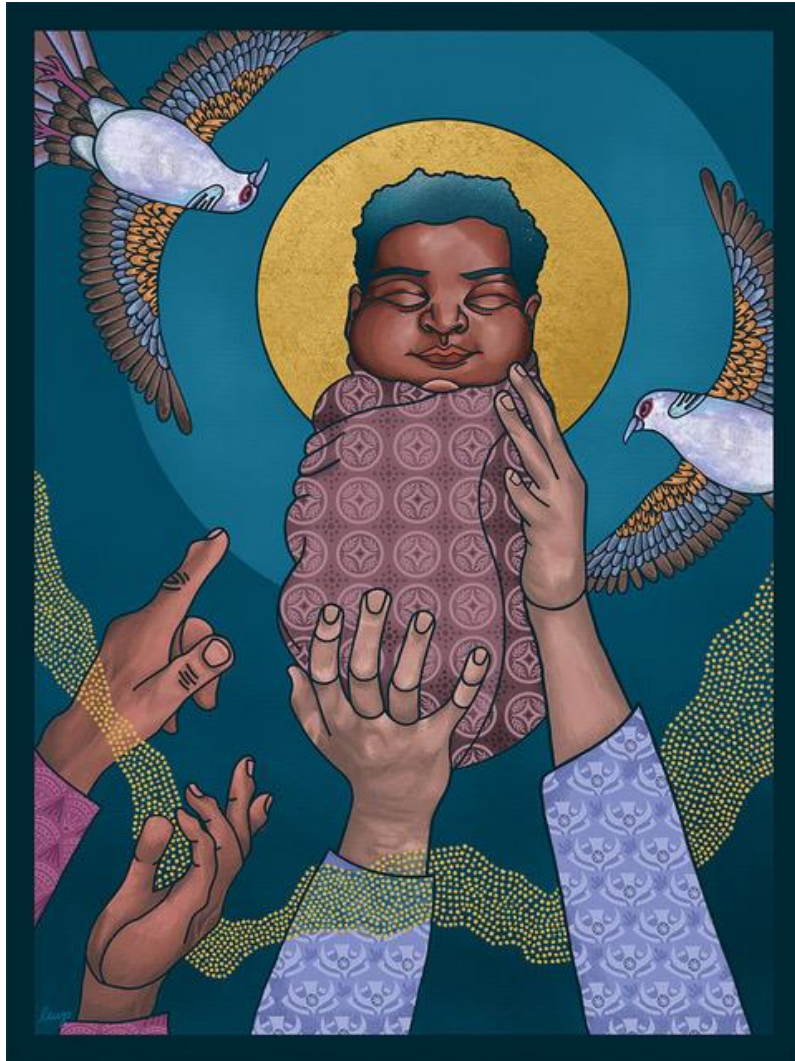


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# St. Paul's Episcopal Church Piney Parish

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*The First Sunday After Christmas*

December 27, 2020

## CALL TO WORSHIP

*Officiant* Here on the heels of Christmas,

*People* **We speak of love.**

We speak of joy.

**We speak of candle light and fireside.**

We speak of dreams being fulfilled.

**We speak of “glorias” and angel choruses.**

We speak the words, “Do not be afraid.”

**Here on the heels of Christmas, we are called to speak, for the world needs a light.**

A light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

**Let us worship and listen. Then, let us speak. Amen.**

Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

**Glory to God for ever and ever.**

**Let us pray. Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## HYMN OF PRAISE

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

Hark! The herald angels sing glory to the newborn King!  
 Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!  
 Joyful, all he nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;  
 With the angelic host proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem!  
 Hark! the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King!

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Officiant* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

**Let us pray. Holy and eternal God, your Son Jesus Christ has taught us to learn from the simple trust of children; give us pure hearts and steadfast faith to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## OLD TESTAMENT READING

*Isaiah 63:7-9*

I will recount the Lord’s faithful acts;

I will sing the Lord’s praises,  
 because of all the Lord did for us,  
 for God’s great favor toward the house of Israel.

God treated them compassionately  
 and with deep affection.

God said, “Truly, they are my people,  
 children who won’t do what is wrong.”

God became their savior.



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Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

## REFLECT

1. Notice the characters in this story. For each character, imagine what emotions they might be feeling. Which character(s) do you relate to most—Mary, Joseph, Simeon, or Anna?
2. The text says that Simeon was "moved by the Spirit" (v. 27). Have you ever felt "moved by the Spirit?" What does that look like for you?
3. Both Anna and Simeon publicly display their faith, telling all who will listen about Jesus and their dreams for Jerusalem's future. What things do you speak up about? What are things you have remained silent about? What prevents you from speaking?
4. Who in your life has been an Anna and Simeon for you? What did they speak about, and how did their profession change you?
5. Finally, focus on the "now what"? What is your takeaway from the story? What are you charged to do, think, or feel?

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION—REFLECTIVE PRAYER

To practice speaking aloud our dreams for this world, we invite you to write four things on Post-It Notes, following these prompts:

1. Anna and Simeon begin speaking by praising God. Write something that you are grateful for—a piece of good news worthy of praise.
2. Anna and Simeon have dreams for a better world. Write a dream you have for the world that we need to speak about.

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3. Anna and Simeon speak and are heard, but not all people are listened to with the same equality in our world. Think of one person or group of people that are speaking, but are not being heard. May this be a reminder that we can use our voices for and alongside others.
  4. In the face of old age and weariness, Anna and Simeon made joy their resistance. What is your dream and/or prayer for yourself?

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Laurie Jaffe

Holy Dreamer,

When they saw Jesus, Anna and Simeon spoke your praise. In this time, we now lift our own prayers of gratitude and praise: *Speak your prayers aloud, or type them into the chat.*

Holy Dreamer,

Anna and Simeon had dreams for a better world. We, too, have these dreams—and we won't keep silent about them. We now offer our dreams to you: *Speak your prayers aloud, or type them into the chat.*

Holy Dreamer,

When Anna and Simeon speak, their voices are heard and what they say is received with reverence. Yet, we live in a world where not all voices are heard—instead, many are silenced. We now lift our prayers for those whose voices are silenced or muted: *Speak your prayers aloud, or type them into the chat.*

Holy Dreamer,

When faced with the principalities and powers of oppression, Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, and Simeon, made joy their resistance. We ask that you would give us the joy of your salvation that we might be harbingers of peace. *Speak your prayers aloud, or type them into the chat.*

**Holy God, we lift all these prayers, written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken, to you. Hold them with care. Give them life. Breathe your grace into them and make all things new. Amen.**

## A TIME FOR CONFESSION

Officiant

Family of God, I invite you to a time of confession by first hearing this story by pastor and write Sarah Are.

*When I was in seventh grade, my youth pastor asked the group the question, "Where have you seen God today?"*

*Thinking that this must be a trick question, I began mentally racing through my day, trying to imagine what he could possibly mean.*

*Where had I seen God today? We had spent the day on a hiking trail!*

*All I had seen were people and nature. As my panic settled into my gut and I was unable to answer the question, one of my peers began speaking.*

*She spoke of the beauty of the sunrise and how the gift of another day felt holy.*

*Then another friend spoke of the little girl we passed on the trail who had given her a wildflower—  
an act of random kindness to a complete stranger.*

*Another peer mentioned David, who had helped pick Josh up when he slipped in the mud, showing only genuine concern.*

*And on and on they went, until I began to see that God was everywhere,  
and it was not enough to keep it inside.*

*Seeing God in your midst is one thing. Speaking it out loud for all to hear, that's entirely different.*

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*The world needs this good news. We are not called to be silent.*

So family of faith, please repeat after me our prayer of confession:

**God of today and tomorrow, we know that your fingerprints are all over this world. And we know that those who dream cannot keep silent. So, many times though, we choose the easy way, the quick way, the path of least resistance. Have mercy on us, Lord, and forgive. Give us eyes to see you. Give us courage to trust you. And give us lips to speak of you in our midst. Gratefully we pray. Amen.**

## **ABSOLUTION**

## **BIRTHDAY AND ANNIVERSARY BLESSINGS**

### **PRAYER FOR A BIRTHDAY**

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servants *she/he/they* begin another year. Grant that *she/he/they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his/her/their* trust in your goodness all the days of *his/her/their* life(ves); through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **PRAYER FOR ANNIVERSARY**

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **CLOSING HYMN**

*Once in royal David's city*

Once in royal David's city stood a  
lowly cattle shed, where a mother laid her  
baby in a manger for his bed: Mary  
was the mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child.

And our eyes at last shall see him, through his  
own redeeming love; for that child who seemed so  
helpless is our Lord in heaven above; and he  
leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

## **THE BLESSING**

## **THE DISMISSAL**

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### Questions for Reflection

Consider what it means to be a child of God by adoption. What does it mean to you to think of yourself as a brother or sister of Jesus, who is the Son of God?

### Household Prayer: Morning

In you, O God, I will greatly rejoice: in speaking, I will greatly rejoice; in silence, I will greatly rejoice; in travels, I will greatly rejoice; in resting, I will greatly rejoice; in working, I will greatly rejoice; in leisure, I will greatly rejoice; in duties, I will greatly rejoice; in freedom, I will greatly rejoice. O God, my whole being exults in you, and my life shall evermore declare your praise, my light, my love, my joy. Amen.

### Household Prayer: Evening

Lord, let your servant sleep in peace this night and fulfill your gracious word. Reveal to me the salvation that you have prepared for all people. With Jesus Christ, help me be a light to the nations and a sign of your glorious promise to Israel. Amen.

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### PERMISSIONS

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