

**Sermon Title:** "When The Waiting Is Over"  
**Scriptures:** Psalm 148:1-13, Luke 2:25-40  
**Location:** Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church  
**Date:** December 31, 2017, First Sunday after Christmas Day  
**Preacher:** Grace Boyer

There is so much activity leading up to Christmas Day. Whether it is decorating, or getting gifts; cleaning the house if you are having house guests; grocery shopping and cooking; making travel plans if you are going somewhere else; or just trying to figure out a way to make it feel like Christmas whatever your circumstances.

Then there is deciding how to share Christmas with various parts of the family. My husband and my all-time record was three cities and three Christmas meals in one day! But however you arrange it, whether going from home to home, or spending a quiet Christmas alone, there is a lot of hoopla leading up to the day itself.

And even in the Church, we spend four weeks preparing, waiting for Christmas by hearing the stories in the Old and New Testaments leading up to the birth of Jesus. And there are special events like the Hanging of the Greens, Christmas parties, Cookies and Carols, Christmas Pageants, Wassail, Candlelight services, special music. There is so much activity and anticipation building up to the day itself.

And then the day is over. Done. Yes, the leftover food lingers for a while to nibble on, and family members may stay over a few more days, and you may use the weeks afterwards to touch base with other relatives. And the decorations may stay up until there is time to deal with them, which may be July. But after all that prep work and anticipation, Christmas day is over. What do you do when it's over? Besides cleaning up or collapsing! As people of faith, what do we do when the waiting is over?

In our passage from Luke today, there were two people who had been waiting a long time for the birth of Jesus. Simeon was a righteous devout man, of unknown age representing the best of the OT faithful men of Israel. And Anna was a devout older woman, from the northwest mountain area of the tribe of Asher representing the strong faithful women of the OT. Anna had been widowed at a young age and then lived until age 84 in the temple, or some translations say she had lived 84 years in the temple, making her much older. Either way she was a rarity in a time when people rarely made it past their 40's.

These two people, Simeon and Anna, had been praying and preparing and waiting a long time for the promised Savior of Israel to arrive. And the Holy Spirit told them the day had come. And they showed up on the scene as Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus arrived in the temple. And they showed up praising God. The actual Greek word used there means "to Eulogize." To eulogize God, naming and retelling the stories of God's goodness with thanksgiving and praise.

So what do we do when the waiting is over? One of the things we can do is take the example of Simeon and Anna and take time to praise and thank the Lord. To take a moment to stop in these two weeks of the Christmas season leading up to Epiphany, and just reflect and give thanks.

This Christmas season my husband has been handwriting small notes that say “breathe” and putting them in various places where we can see them. On his computer, in the bathroom, in the car. Reminders to stop, breathe, take stock of the moment, give thanks and praise for life at that moment. That’s what these two weeks after Christmas can be. A pause to praise.

Praising God, this theme we heard throughout the Psalm 148 that we read responsively. All the universe, all creatures great and small, praising the Lord.

Praise the Lord, not so much for our current circumstances, which come and go and change and sometimes are wonderful and the next minute you are riding in an ambulance and the other shoe has dropped, but praising God just for who God is and what God had done that we so often take for granted.

We have no idea what Simeon and Anna’s daily lives were like, or what they had endured. Anna, as a widow, would have been one of the most vulnerable of her society. But whatever their circumstances on that day, they came to the temple thanking and praising God for God’s faithfulness, steadfastness and love.

We praise God for the message of Christmas itself, that in the midst of our everyday messy normal life, God chooses to come and live with us, to move into our neighborhood (as the Message paraphrase writes). To take on flesh and blood and hurt and hardship, all the vulnerabilities of life in order to show the height, depth, length, and breadth of God’s love through the tangible person of Jesus Christ. What do we do when Christmas is over? We take a moment to step back in wonder, breathe, and let the message of the incarnation sink in and give thanks and praise.

The other people in our passage today who had been waiting for the birth of Jesus were Mary and Joseph. They had been waiting 9 months not the decades that Simeon and Anna had. But waiting and preparing as new parents do. After Jesus is born, Mary and Joseph take careful attention to following all the laws of the Torah in regard to babies, meticulously going down the religious checklist of what needed to be done in the temple to make sure Jesus was raised as a good, faithful Jewish baby.

In the verses we skipped over between Christmas Eve and this morning, Mary and Joseph followed the religious law by having Jesus named and circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. And then after 40 days they came to the temple to give the purification offering of two turtledoves/pigeons, the offering that the poor would give who could not afford to give the full offering of a lamb and a dove. And at that same time they came to recognize their first born child in God’s presence, all according to the religious law, done at the right time and place. That is the context of their coming to the temple today and meeting Simeon and Anna.

The last verse of the passage from Luke was, “When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.” “The child grew.” In that word, “grew”, is wrapped up the next twelve years of life for Jesus in Luke. Those fundamentally life shaping years of growth. In those short words, in that economy of phrase, was wrapped up all the daily work of raising a child that Mary and Joseph did: changing diapers, washing skinned knees, helping with

homework...we miss out on all the parent child dynamics and lessons as Jesus grew. But Jesus did grow, and Mary and Joseph did as well, as all parents do along with their children, shaping, changing, learning, adjusting, praying hoping, abiding. And so, one of the other things we do after the waiting is over is grow like Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

A month ago I heard an Advent lesson given by John Roger's from his book, "The Birth of God: Recovering the Mystery of Christmas". He used the familiar words of Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." But John Rogers went further. He said, looking at each of us individually, unto YOU a child is born. Unto YOU a child is given. A baby has been placed in your arms this Christmas. What are you going to do with it? With Mary and Joseph will you feed, bath, clothe, love, comfort, read to, brush hair, cut nails, hold night vigils over fevers and sing lullabies to the growing Christ child? Yes, the metaphor breaks down, but hang with me. It is in the very act of the daily routine caring for a child that love abounds and deepens and lives are blessed with wonder. So at Christmas do we simply watch the Christ child born and then turn away from the manger, or do we help him grow in our lives? A baby has been placed in each of our arms this Christmas.

And it's not just personal. Not just you or me, but unto US, unto US as a church on the campus of Warren Wilson College, unto us a child is born and placed into our arms this Christmas season. As a church community will we nurture Christ in our midst in this particular day and age?

Those of you have been here a long time have watched babies grow into young people, watched college students at Warren Wilson mature over their four years (or five), watched young adults marry, have children and grandchildren of their own, and maybe gone through it yourself. Watched as people stretch through challenges and life events. You know how love grows deeper daily in the ordinary acts of growing. Do we offer the same opportunity for God with us?

I guess my question is, Do we leave Jesus harmless in the manger, a nice sweet Christmas story, or do we let him grow up in our midst to change our lives? Jesus whose first grown up sermon in Luke 4 was to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor (the year all financial debts are forgiven)..... a message as relevant for the church to nurture and share today in the world as ever. Do we live as if Christmas day was all there was, or do we dig deeper in to the raising of the Christ child, to live and grow into the incarnational Christmas faith that Steve spoke of last week?

So what do we do when the waiting is over? As we approach this New Year? We breathe. We praise. We grow. As exciting as all the activity leading up to Christmas can be, it is after Christmas where the rubber meets the road of discipleship, learning by daily experience what God's love looks like.

When the waiting is over, we get to the work of daily faithful living, and raising the Christ child in our hearts. Because when the hoopla is over, that is when the real adventure of life and faith begins.