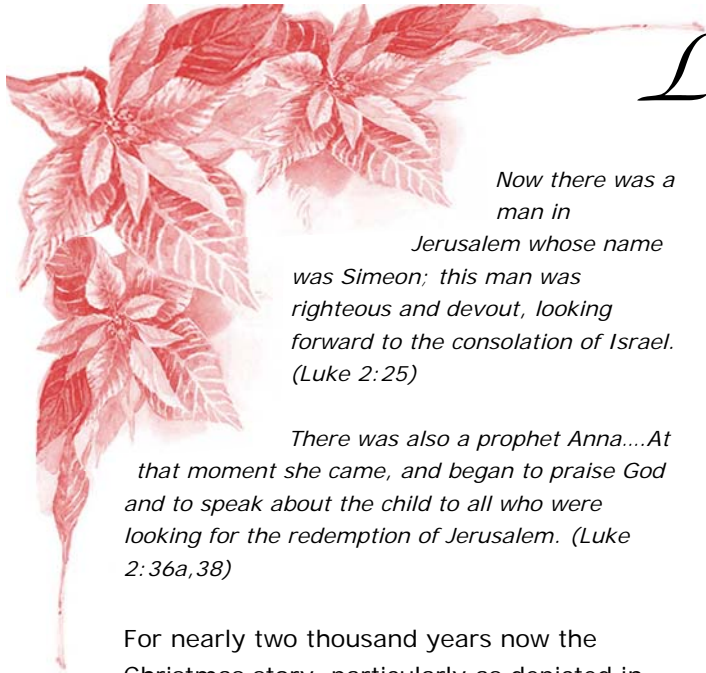


Stewardship

in Motion

December 2007

Looking for Christmas



Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel. (Luke 2:25)

There was also a prophet Anna....At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36a,38)

For nearly two thousand years now the Christmas story, particularly as depicted in the Gospel of Luke, has inspired the hearts of countless millions. Artists have painted it, singers have sung it, actors have dramatized it, priests have proclaimed it. But no more poignant scene could be imagined than Luke's twin portrayals of age meeting infancy in the temple at Jerusalem.

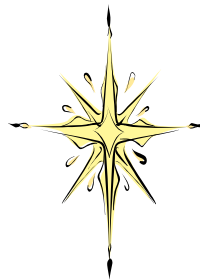
The implication of Luke's account is that the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple aroused no one's curiosity that day. Apparently, the priests were too busy administering the daily affairs of the temple to take much notice of the poor Jewish couple and their seemingly insignificant child – no one that is except for two aged saints of God who saw in this child the fulfillment of their dreams and the culmination of their hopes. Holding the child in his arms, Simeon declares: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30). Simeon discovered a magnificent truth that day. To see Jesus Christ is to see the salvation of God. Simeon and Anna saw something in the child that no one else did, precisely because they had

expectant hearts – they were "looking" for the consolation of Israel. We can miss the whole meaning of Christmas if, like the temple priests, we become so preoccupied with all our busy preparations that we fail to see what is staring us in the face. That is why we need Advent – to prepare ourselves to look, to prepare ourselves to see. Advent is like putting on glasses.

Once Advent has done its work, once we have seen what Simeon and Anna saw, what will we do? Will we continue to look God's salvation in the face? Will we linger in the temple, never finding our way back out? Or will we turn our eyes to a world desperately searching for illumination? The truth is, we can only stare so long. Ultimately, we must look away from the sun to bask in its light■

Rejoice

We are blest to be generous!



We have been greatly blest; therefore, we are to be generous! We are a people who have richly received, therefore we gratefully give. God has entrusted us with much, therefore, we shall be faithful stewards of all that he has entrusted to us.

With the Spirit of thanksgiving fresh in our minds, and the joy of Advent and the feast of the Incarnation just up ahead, we give to God our gifts with rejoicing■

Reading the Bible

The advent of a New Year is a time when many of us make New Year's Resolutions. A worthy resolution to make this year would be to resolve to read the Bible more often. Reading the Bible is not something many Catholics grew up with. Perhaps this was a carry over from attitudes in history when reading the Bible was discouraged, even outlawed by the church.

The Council of Trent (1545-1564) placed the Bible on its list of prohibited books, and forbade any person to read the Bible without a license from a Roman Catholic bishop or inquisitor. As recently as the early 19th century, Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) said, "It is evidence from experience, that the holy Scriptures, when circulated in the vulgar tongue, have, through the temerity of men, produced more harm than benefit." In other words, he thought that for the average person to read the Bible produced more harm than benefit.

But in more recent times, thinking and teaching concerning reading the Bible have changed. Pope St. Pius X (1903-1914) said, "Nothing would please us more than to see our beloved children form the habit of reading the Gospels - not merely from time to time, but every day." Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) re-enforced this idea by repeating St. Jerome's statement, "Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." He expressed his desire that, "... all the children of the Church, especially clerics, to reverence the Holy Scriptures, to read it piously and meditate on it constantly." Today the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides a helpful website that suggests daily readings from the Old and New Testament and Psalms at www.catholic.org/clife/dailyreading.

A Child's Point of View



Two little girls were looking at a picture of the Virgin Mary holding Baby Jesus. "That's Mary," said the older girl, "and that's her baby Jesus in her arms." "Where's Jesus' dad then?" asked her little sister.

"Oh he is the one taking the picture," replied her sister.

Last winter, we went outside to build a snowman. After giving him his nose, eyes, and mouth, we went inside to get him a scarf, mittens, and hat. No sooner had I placed the hat on the snowman's head, my youngest son, James (three-and-a-half), looked at me and said, "When is he going to come alive?"

[Can you tell Frosty was a big hit in our house!"]



The Bible is Unique

When the writer of Ecclesiastes said, "Of the making of books there is no end," he made an observation that is truer today than in ancient times. Some books are set aside, never to be read. Some attain a brief vogue. Others move through the centuries, stimulating thought, widening our understanding, interpreting enigmas, stirring to action. Among them all, the Bible is preeminent and unique.

The Bible is unique in its diverse unity. In this one book is a library of history, biography, poetry, romance, oratory, parables, and letters, bound together by the question of humankind for God and the revelation of God to humanity.

The Bible is unique in its influence. In it are rooted both the Jewish and Christian religions. Great movements in history have resulted from study of the Scriptures. Theodore Roosevelt said, "The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and oppressed," adding "To every man who faces life with real desire to do his part in everything, I appeal for a study of the Bible." When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," he was indicating the power of the Biblical gospel to transform individuals.

The Bible is unique in its preservation and transmission. Across the centuries, scholars have devoted themselves to translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek into thousands of other languages, even giving their lives to that cause, so that on every continent, people can read the sacred writings.

Above all, the Bible is the supreme book because its central person is Jesus Christ.

