

Interactive lesson



picture from personal photo

Did everyone have a nice Christmas?

<Let them respond>

Did you get to open some presents? <Let them respond>

After all the presents were open, what then? What did you do? <Let them respond>

Was the excitement of opening the gift what made it special? <Let them respond>

On Christmas Eve we talked about how as people get older, what they seem to want most for Christmas is the company of their loved ones. What makes Christmas special for most people is not so much the opening of gifts as the time spent enjoying them and enjoying one another.

God sent us the gift of Jesus. By accepting Him into our lives, we have essentially unwrapped the gift. How best can we now enjoy it? <Let them respond>

As we go forward in this new year, may you keep Christ as a special guest in your life, treasuring time spent developing your relationship with Him and sharing His love with others.

<Hymn "Angels We Have Heard on High" UMH #238>

Gospel lesson

Today's Gospel comes about a week after Jesus's birth. Mary would have washed in a purification ritual seven days after He was born, and on the eighth day male infants were due at the temple for circumcision. Since Bethlehem is a little less than six miles from Jerusalem, it would have been a two-to-three hour walk for the family to get there.



picture from <https://www.idisciple.org/post/Luke-2-22-40-the-presentation-of-jesus-at-the-temple>

Luke 2:22-40 (NRSV)

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),

²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking

forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed

³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be

revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

The word of God for the people of God

Message: Enjoying the Company



picture adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming-first-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Light of Salvation, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

that we may bask in the warmth of Your glory with better understanding of who we are and how best to love You. Amen.



Company's Coming



- ♥ November 29 – This Place is a Mess!
- ♥ December 6 – Clean-up Crew
- ♥ December 13 – Deck the Halls
- ♥ December 20 – Waiting on the Threshold
- ♥ December 24 – Welcoming the Guest
- ♥ **December 27 – Enjoying the Company**
- ♥ January 3 – Living the Celebration

After getting ready and welcoming the guest, now we are “Enjoying the Company.”

“There is an inevitable let down after Christmas. This is December 27, only two days after the day that most are still digesting. The other phenomenon that normally occurs at this time is that folks are starting to depart; families are returning home; people are going back to work. That may all be different now, even as we will still be recovering or enduring the pandemic. But there is still a shift in thinking, in focus, in direction in these Christmastide worship experiences.”

We have opened gifts, cleaned up the wrapping paper, had our Christmas dinners (such as they were during

this pandemic), and are getting back to our – well, I cannot say “normal,” so how about “previous”? – pandemic-modified schedules.



picture from <https://senselessramblingsofthemindless.com/2015/12/13/jesus-as-a-baby/>

But just as we do not rush away immediately after opening gifts, let us not be too quick to forget about this amazing present of God on earth. It comes from someone who knows us better than we know ourselves and who loves us deeper than we can comprehend. Any gift to us from that someone will be very useful, enjoyable, something we will always be glad to have.

I told my son about this sermon series and asked him what came to mind for parties he hosted once the guests arrived. He spoke about living in the moment, being present with people. He talked about how satisfying it is to see the results of his preparation efforts – a feeling that all the work he puts in is worth it when he looks around and sees everyone provided for and enjoying themselves

God prepared the party of life in Christ for us and wants us to enjoy it. Isaiah proclaimed about God’s people in today’s reading: “The nations shall see

your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you ... shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord.” The psalmist called for praising the Lord, “whose glory is above earth and heaven,” saying, “God has raised up a horn for his people.”



picture from <https://practitionerspath.wordpress.com/2016/05/07/fill-your-horn-with-oil-and-move-on/>

I looked up the significance of raising up a horn. While my first thought was of trumpets being raised to announce something great, the most commonly asserted interpretation was the lifting up of a horn of oil for the anointing of someone coming into power – and it matters that God, Creator of *everything*, was the one lifting it up.

Coming back to the party analogy, we can think of it as God hosting a birthday party for the Son of God, inviting the people of God to come celebrate too. The best gift we can bring is our love, sharing in the joy of our relationship with Him and helping others to do likewise.

Paul emphasized this relationship theme in his letter to the Galatians. We are not just guests at the party, we are adopted as family, children of God!



picture from family wedding photo

Most of us, if not all, have experienced having someone join our family – through birth, adoption, marriage. Hopefully getting accustomed to the new family member(s) was a happy process, building ties of love. After the initial “wow” factor wears off, they remain important to our family. Family events include the new person(s) as a matter of course.

In healthy families, family members are concerned about each other’s well-being; what one person does affects everyone in the family in some way. And we have been adopted into the family of God, the community of Christians.

In Judea at Jesus’s birth, new sons were welcomed into the Jewish community through the circumcision ritual at eight days old. People were going about their normal routines when Joseph and Mary brought the baby in.



picture from <https://www.gospelimages.com/paintings/47/simeon-and-anna>

But this child was not received with just the usual level of joy that all children were. Two elderly temple fixtures, Simeon and Anna, came forward, guided by the Holy Spirit to proclaim this baby as the long-awaited Messiah.

I wondered why the temple leaders did not take more note of this. Did they pooh-pooh what the two older people said, thinking they had lost their senses? Was Jesus not born into the “right” family by their reckoning? I mean, clearly Mary and Joseph were not going to raise Him to be a warrior.

Was the temple leadership too jaded to believe the fulfillment of the promise when He was right in front of them? Had they gotten too wrapped up in the laws and rituals – the preparations for the party – to “enjoy the company” of God in their lives?

In everything, when it came to a choice between following religious dogma or showing God’s love to people, Jesus chose God’s love every time. What does that tell us about the best way to “enjoy the company” of God in our lives?

May you move forward into the new year in joy, sharing God’s love with all in a continuing celebration of gift of Jesus to us.

Now let us respond with

*<Doxology>***The Apostles' Creed, Ecumenical Version**

UMH #882

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic** church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

***universal**<Prayer of Dedication and Pastoral Prayer>*

Let us pray:

God of hope and joy, the gifts we offer to you pale
when our minds try to grasp all we have been given in

this season: wholeness in our woundedness, hope in our despair, peace in our turmoil, forgiveness in our rebellion. Like Simeon, our eyes have seen your salvation, and you give us light in our darkness. Help us embrace your extravagant generosity as we give ourselves to others.

We also ask for Your help and wisdom as we raise up these concerns on our hearts today:

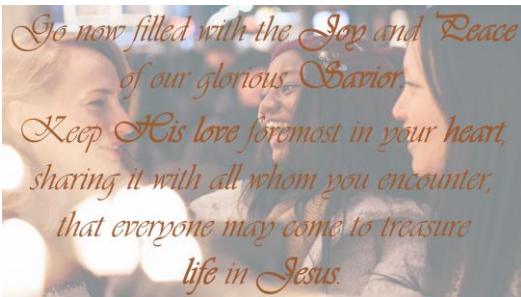
- Healing touch and comfort for all who are ailing.
 - Coronavirus victims - isolated; school; out-of-work; health care workers (especially: Marie Curri, Laura Davis, Nicole Marshall, Vince Marshall, Heidi Newton, Jennifer Tibbens-Scalzo) & those serving critical needs
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- Thanks for
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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Travelers
 - Family far off
- Social unrest - dismantle racism and reform problem systems

- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Help us to be fearless in talking about our faith as a normal part of daily living.
 - For the sake of this our local church, one part of Your great church, guide each one of us this week to invite someone to come know You better.
 - Help us to encourage one another toward faith in You and toward living together in true Christian community.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<The Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "The First Noel" UMH #245>

<Benediction>



background adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming/first-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-graphics>

Go now filled with the Joy and Peace
of our glorious Savior.
Keep His love foremost in your heart,
sharing it with all whom you encounter,
that everyone may come to treasure life in Jesus.