

January 1, 2012  
Luke 2: 21-40  
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME  
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## Threshold of Time

were many more church folk. I know

### SCRIPTURE READING

Today, we continue with the Christmas story in the gospel of Luke. The angels in this part of the story are angels "without wings." These angels, these messengers, are wise elders in the community. It is often the very young and the very old we are most sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit right in front of our faces.

### SERMON

On New Year's Day we intentionally recognize the passage of time. We look back over the accomplishments and the heartaches of the previous year and we set our intentions for the year to come. January was named after the Roman god Janus, who was depicted as having two faces, one looking back and one looking forward.

One of the ways families and congregations note the passage of time is in saying goodbye to those who have died and at the same time welcoming newborns into our midst.

When our daughter Lauren was born members of the congregation Ron was serving made a big sign, "It's a girl," and put it on the front lawn of the sanctuary. This was in the days before you could know ahead of time. Three months later we gathered in that sanctuary to celebrate her baptism. There were a number of our family there, but there

some of those folk still hold Lauren in their prayers.

Every culture has rituals by which they recognize and celebrate the birth of children. With the arrival of a child, each family, each community is on the threshold of a new time in their lives.

Today's gospel story depicts a new threshold of time for the whole creation with the birth of Jesus. It describes three rituals that were part of Jesus' community's recognition of his birth - circumcision, dedication and purification. By the time Luke is writing this story, the temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, so it is with great nostalgia that he writes about the memory of Jesus' parents taking him to that great temple for his dedication.

The angels, the messengers, in this part of the Christmas stories have no wings, no special lights. They are simply two wise elders deeply rooted in the spiritual practices and religious traditions of their people. Their bodies may be breaking down, but their spirits are shining bright. They have acute sensitivity to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their midst. In the flesh of a young child they sense the presence of God and hope for the future.

Isn't that often true for us today. There is nothing like a child of the newest generation to bring smiles to old faces and hope to fading hearts.

Meister Eckhart,  
14<sup>th</sup> century mystic wrote,

If I were alone in a desert and feeling afraid, I would want a child to be with me. For then my fear would disappear and I would be made strong. This is what life in itself can do because it is so noble, so full of pleasure and so powerful.

In the time of Jesus,  
Caesar, sitting on his throne in royal splendor,  
proclaimed himself as 'savior' of the world.

By contrast,  
the angels Simeon and Anna,  
bring a word from God,  
proclaiming that  
this child, Jesus,  
whose parents offer only two turtledoves,  
the offering designated for the poor,

this child living on the fringe,  
this child is  
God's salvation,  
a light to the Gentiles,  
glory to the people Israel,  
the redemption of Jerusalem.

I suspect these angels were  
fear-ful and awe-struck,  
trembling with the message  
that had come to them.

They know all too well in their very bones  
that life is not easy, that the way ahead  
for this child will involve bearing burdens  
– heavy burdens. And yet their hearts  
are full of the promises of God, promises  
of hope, peace, love and joy.

Gifts of the Spirit that Jesus indeed  
embodied in his life and ministry.  
Gifts of the Spirit that held Jesus in  
the crucifixion and raised him in the  
resurrection.

Gifts of the Spirit that Christ offers to all  
those who gather at the table, seeking  
the presence of God and participation in  
the community of God's people.

Come,  
let us cross the threshold of this time.