

# Generations

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church - Brunswick, ME

Sunday, December 31, 2017

Scripture: [Luke 2:22–40](#)

---

## Introduction to the Scripture

Merry Christmas! We've talked a lot about the various beginnings of the gospels in the lead up to Christmas... and we finally ended up on Christmas Eve with the actual story of a baby being born in a manger...

It's a challenge to us that we don't actually spend much time with this baby Jesus, thinking about what it meant for God to come dwell in us, in the form of a poor infant in a stable, surrounded by bewildered shepherds, fancy wise people from afar, animals, and most especially... please God, don't forget...bewildered parents of the baby.

I like that we have this scripture story, then: a story of these two good Jewish parents doing what you are "supposed to do." Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple for his dedication. I'm sure the gospel writer tell us about this so we will think they are good Jews, and good parents, but I also hope its to remind us that many of the traditions around life passages have become traditions for a reason... and it is good to go and receive a blessing, and dedicate yourself to a child, and a child to the world.

As they go, they meet two strangers... strangers who have been waiting for a long time... to share news, wisdom, and blessing with this child... and his parents.

## Sermon

Angels show up and always say the same thing... "Be not afraid."

The bad news for Mary and Joseph is that they kind of took off after Christmas.

I am not a parent, I should own this fully. But I hang out with enough people who *are* to know that there's a special fear and wonder that waits for the baby. No matter what mystical messengers might have been by in the growing and waiting time... something happens to parents right after.

*"Making the decision to have a child - it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body. " - Elizabeth Stone*

Yes, friends, angels say "be not afraid," but then, in the very small hours of the dark, when all hope seems lost, when all possibility of peace has fled, when there seems to be no rest or comfort to be found and the angels are humming quietly in the heavenly realms... then, **then**, friends... you need to get yourself a grandparent.

This Christmas story is meant to amaze us that God came to be so vulnerable as a tiny infant. But it's also meant to amaze us that simple folk like us, Mary and Joseph, could be responsible for caring for, nurturing, and raising up God, in this tiny, breakable, crying, messy, wondrous form of a child.

Get yourself a grandparent, relative or no, genealogical or theological... get you a grandparent. Jesus does.

Simeon and Anna are holders of wisdom who have come to share all that they are... even the last of their lives with this amazing child. They share the glory of what they see in Jesus, and the raw pain of what it means to be his parents... because that is not going to be an easy road, either... and most parents tell me it never is.

They are an essential part of this Jesus story... offering witness to the child, but also to the parents... who need that compassionate connection.

I have spent too long with people who talk about the fact that the church has older people in it as some sort of bug, and not a feature of the whole system. The honest reality is just that churches reflect a social fabric that is itself a little old: one in which generations lived much more entwined with each other, often even under the same roof. We have retained this, even as so much of the outside world has moved to grouping us, young and old, into generational boxes that we are discouraged from getting out of.

It is deeply in church as who we are, to be a place of generational meeting and sharing. All that in the face of a world that wants to separate us... When, really, we need each other...

Young people need caring adults who are not their parents, witnesses, and caring guides. <sup>[1]</sup>  
Elders get huge benefits from connection and companionship and meaning. <sup>[2]</sup>

I think there are at least three gifts that each generation receives from our time together:

1) Like Simeon and Anna, we can share in life passages and traditions that mark our lives, which can help us learn what is most valuable, and what may be just ripe for change or revitalization.

**Share your favorite Christmas Carol with someone of a different generation. And why...**

2) Like Simeon and Anna, and like Mary and Joseph, we can be amazed together... sharing the realization that there is still more to learn about this being alive business.

Our young people have a new task added to their experience in the confirmation program this year: a visit with an elder in the church.

The good news for them to discover is that learning and growth is not a generational activity, it is a life-long journey... and in an age in which so much of our identity is determined by what our career or profession ends up being, both young adults as they decide that path, and elders as they define their lives on the other side of the journey have very similar questions to ponder in deciding: *who am I?*

*There are some things that age and wisdom can give us, though.*

We can be reminded that though we might experience great challenge, others have been there before, and stand with us in the time of trial. There's a great new study out that shares if you want to be happy, think like an old person! <sup>[3]</sup>

And, one of the same gifts of awareness that experience provides: the chance to be alert to the newness in our lives as we encounter it.

### **What was the last thing you learned?**

3) Above all, Anna and Simeon, and all the generations of elders before and after them have offered blessings to the next generation. They've passed on what was meaningful about their own lives and tradition, laughed at those things that they can let go, they've learned new things, even discovering the messiah carried in his parents' arms... and they have offered the blessing of support, of caring, of knowing that it is scary, but also knowing of the incredible amazement

### **What blessing do you want to offer to another?**

Hold those blessings, knowing that each of you, with all your days that have been and all the days that are to come are a blessing of life to life, carriers of the divine in yourselves, and nurturer of the divine in those you meet. God's spirit is with us and in us, and it is to us to care for it and bless in the other, that it might grow strong and filled with wisdom.

From generation to generation God is God, and God is with us. Amen.

- 
1. [Caring Adults: Important for Positive Child Well-Being](#) ↩
  2. [Good Friends Might Be Your Best Brain Booster as You Age](#) ↩
  3. [Want to Be Happy? Think Like an Old Person](#) ↩