

It is the final weekend of the year. A time when news agencies are writing editorials capturing the highlights of the past year. The top ten lists, the highs and the lows of the past year. And, in light of this being the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century; there will be all kinds of writings around the best and worst of the past ten years.

For many, this is a time when we ponder the past year's happenings in our lives. We review the highlights and the setbacks. The peaks and the valleys. The joys and the sadness of a year passed far too quickly for many. Thanks to the news media, we will- like the editorialists, take inventory of the past decade. We'll take moments to picture the newsworthy happenings in our own lives. We'll also take stock of the events held close to our hearts. Perhaps the things we've kept close, rarely shared, and know only to our most intimate relationships.

For all these possibilities of remembering, and the many more I've not suggested; this time of year is ripe for recalling the past. However, this time of year also presents us with a time to open wide our thinking, and to breathe possibilities into the ponderings we do as a new year and a new decade begins.

Thirty-seven years ago, on December 21st; my sister's son was born in St. Louis. I was living in Ohio. This being my parents' first grandchild; my mother broke every "mothering" rule and left her husband and sons at Christmastime and flew to St. Louis, to meet her grandson, and be with my sister. It was a time of great joy for our family. And, it was a time for non-traditional family Christmas. Our matriarch had left us to fend for ourselves!

I took time, after his birth, to sit and write a letter to my new nephew. I felt compelled to write this letter as a note of welcoming to our family. I wasn't sure what I wanted to say, but I had this image of this being read on the day he was baptized. And, then, at the "right" time, my sister would give this letter to my nephew. Perhaps on his high school graduation day? Maybe she'd save it and give it to him as he was preparing for his marriage? Or, would she save it for the day of his own first child's baptism? I actually do not know if, and or when, she chose to give him the letter? All of that matters not.

What made it so important for me to write, was my need to express my hopes and desires for the world into which he would grow, and the possibilities that could and would present themselves to him. And, so before putting pen to paper; I pondered all the possibilities of how his world might unfold. I offered him a snapshot, if you will, of the world as it played out in 1982. Looking back at

what I remember of 1982 (& with the help of GOOGLE!); so many world and life events are ongoing. Only language and locations, plus the means by which they came into existence are renamed for today's world.

Major fighting was going on in the world of 1982. Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands as Britain and other world allies joined forces to restore peace. The United States sent troops to Beirut. A synagogue in Rome was the scene of gun violence. Natural disasters around the world took their tolls on land and life. A Miami judge freed 1,900 Haitian refugees who'd been detained. Unemployment was at an all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial average was also at an all-time high! Airlines around the globe were dealing with unexplained crashes. And, it was also a time when terrorist groups chose hijacking airplanes as a means to get the world's attention. The anti-nuclear movement saw its fair share of global protests. Barney Clark received the first successful artificial heart transplant. The reporting of tampering of TYLENOL bottles causes the redesign of on the shelf medicines around the world. Haley's Comet returned to the skies after its last sighting in 1912! HIV/AIDS is now acknowledged by the Center for Disease Control. Here in the United States, the government struggled with its issues in the HOUSE, the SENATE, and with the president. Ronald Regan approved a COMPROMISED Federal budget. The selective service draft was reinstated. And, the Equal Rights Amendment expires 3 states short of ratification.

Diana and Prince Charles welcome their first-born son, William- heir to the throne. Princess Grace of Monaco, the former actress Grace Kelly, dies in an auto accident. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial opens in Washington, D.C. John Dean publishes the novel, "All the President's Men" revealing William Mark Felt Sr. as the infamous DEEP THROAT! The highest grossing film in 1982 was E.T. – The Extraterrestrial. The Commodore 64 home computer becomes the best-selling personal computer. And, the first computer virus is reported!

Pondering my nephew's birth; I had no inkling that the world would become what it has for me- and him, in 2019. However, I did have a sense of where my writing would go in this letter.

I prayed that he would live to see a world not marred by violence, but a planet where peace prevailed, and all worked for a common good. I wished for him the awareness of a family whose love and support guided him through every day of his life. In times of great joy, in moments of hesitation, along the paths of doubt

and questioning. I prayed that he would understand a familial presence where the love that binds us exists always, and all ways. Not only when we were together, but whenever he called upon that love.

I prayed that he would grow in wisdom and awareness of all that is around him. That he'd understand that he is a minor player in this big world. I hoped for a sense of awe around his placement in this Universe. To know that he does matter, but there's even more that matters in our world. I wished for him that sense of wonder and curiosity for all things new. I hoped he would find a means to understand and respect mystery. To know that he does not always have to have the answers. And to rest peacefully in the not knowing. I prayed that he would grow up with a sense of faith. Not a religious affiliation, but a belief in knowing that something greater than him would be enough to satisfy his yearning. To be enough for those dark moments of doubt. To be an answer to the questions that seem unanswerable. Faith that would lead him to believe in himself, and that within him he has the potential to create the answers.

I wish I could tell you that all I'd written 37 years ago has lived itself out into a truth so revelatory that his very life exudes proof of prayers answered. But, I can't. He lives now in a world I could never have imagined, a pace of change and new that happens in a breath. A pace of life where you truly must fight for quiet and space. I do not fear for his well-being. I do pray, however, that the words of my prayer written long ago may have found a place to root, and that in living out his years, he may know hints of those yearnings I prayed for him at his birth.

The text from Luke's gospel begins with the unwritten understanding of the law requiring a Jewish woman, to go to the temple and offer sacrifice for her purity. There was a post-partum purification period for women. If she gave birth to a son, a woman was considered contagiously unclean for the first 7 days. A time in which she was forbidden to touch ANYTHING! The remainder of that time of uncleanliness, called a blood purification; she was no longer thought to be contagious, but the woman could not touch anything holy, nor enter a sacred space. The only exception came on the 8th day when she was allowed to witness her son's circumcision. According to this law, **“ . . . the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, . . .”** Being good Jews, there was never going to be any question around what they would do when the time was right.

Simeon appears and offers a special revelation and prayer. He's been given insight by God's Holy Spirit. The consolation of Israel in the text is thought to refer to Isaiah's prophecy: **Isaiah 40**

¹ Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

³ A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

God's Holy Spirit had "rested" on him. That same spirit had revealed to Simeon, he would not die until he'd seen the Lord's Messiah. A new, anointed king of the Kingdom of God. And so, even in his blindness and guided by God's Holy Spirit; Simeon "knew", and in his knowing released his Spirit-filled petition to God.

Anna, a widow, was persistent in her prayer and fasting! According to the text, in that moment of hearing, God's Spirit awoke in her. She **"began to praise God and speak about the child- to all who were looking of the redemption of Jerusalem."**

Quite the cast of characters!

Back to Joseph and Mary for a moment. Imagine, if you will, some element of surprise on their part? In light of all that had happened a month or so earlier; here they stood watching an old man hold their child and proclaim him to be **"destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, . . . a sign that will be opposed . . ."** How could this old man know? Had he been in Bethlehem? Had he seen the sheep herders, heard the angels? Did he know of those men traveling from far off lands? What kind of blessing prayer ends with a curse? Why a sword piercing the soul of this child's mother? Perhaps it was the surprise of such words, or the fear of concealing all that had happened in Bethlehem? Was it not already a reality that this young woman had herself experienced God's Holy Spirit? Would we not believe that in his taking Mary as his wife; Joseph, too, understood that something greater than he moved that choice?

God's Holy Spirit moves like we experience a gust or a gentle breeze. Like breathing itself. In fact, the Hebrew word, **ruach** is often used to describe God's

Holy Spirit, the breath of God. How easily that breath moves over and through us. This breath moved them as a family when the rage of Herod would force this family out of their home and fleeing for safety. Full of wonder, Joseph and Mary watched as their child was lifted up and revealed.

Simeon, in some ways, is the bearer of God's word. He reminds those in his presence of God's promise to save them. And, this child, in Simeon's heart of hearts was the promised one for Israel. A man of great faith, no doubt? Yet, it was Simeon's encounter with God's Holy Spirit, and his faith in what had been revealed, that led him on a path believing he'd one day behold the Lord's Messiah. Luke never gives us a timeline. All we know is that he was promised **“. . . he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.”** Imagine what he pondered, for all the time he had between the message from God's Holy Spirit and the holding of Jesus. How would he know that this truly was the one he'd been promised to live to see? What would he say at that moment? How could he speak to Jesus' parents knowing what potential lay in this child's future? So much more to ponder. How could there not be? Imagine what it must have felt like to hold onto that promise, and without giving up, believe that you would surely live to see its fruition?

Anna deserves a little more attention. There's irony her lineage. She is the daughter of Phanuel, whose name means FACE OF GOD. Some might write off her years of living as a widow, or the fact that **“She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.”** But how can we ignore that, at the moment of hearing Simeon's prayer, and seeing Jesus; the daughter of the one whose names means Face of God begins **“to . . . praise God and to speak about the child- . . .”** Anna's proclamation begins, in Luke's gospel, a framework which will become a common telling in the gospels. She is the first mentioned, who when encountering Jesus, and hear the message, and see the miracles- will go out into the communities, so that others might know of this good news.

I have just returned from the Pacific Northwest. I was out to celebrate a family wedding in Yakima, WA. This wedding last weekend was the third wedding I have been involved with in the past four months. Each bride is someone I have known because of my family connection. And each bride I have had different interactions with throughout her lifetime. In this culture of family scatterings, we relate differently according to depth of connectedness we feel. These

weddings remind me of that. And, they place this song in my head. The one from Fiddler on the Roof: Sunrise, Sunset. Each bride is a piece of my history. Each wedding awakening memories. Each memory getting lost in the swiftness of time.

The family member who wed in September, I have a relationship that has grown as she's moved into her young adulthood. However, I did not have much of an in-person presence during her youth. The wedding in Yakima was different. I have twenty years of history with this young woman. I lived near her when she was just starting elementary school and have watched her life unfold into this moment. I knew a lot more of her dreams and hopes as she grew up. That knowledge gave me insight and gave me permission to set my mind pondering as I drove to her wedding last weekend. I knew that Saturday evening; I was witnessing the collective hopes and dreams of the many loved ones gathered in that room.

The wedding I attended in Chicago, held the deepest family connection and my greatest ponderings. I have known this bride since I held her days after she came home from the hospital. I lived in the same community as she. I taught at the same school she attended. And, I knew her parents long before she arrived on this earth. Her story was always being told and her future anticipated. When I moved away, I would receive updates. When something significant happened, I would be on the "call" list to tell. For this young woman, I was always a presence in her life, and she in mine. On her wedding day, I had a head full of things I was pondering around her future! Unlike Simeon, I did not stand in public and proclaim and predict her future. However, I did feel God's Holy Spirit wash over me in the feelings of knowing that what I was feeling must be right for this moment in time.

And so here we are, at a moment in time. A new year approaching. A new decade coming. Be open to what the new year offers you. Welcome the promise, that you do hold onto as potential for good news. Don't wait until you feel you've lived long enough to recognize this gift. Don't stop pondering what will be. Our present culture fools us into believing that dreams are only for the young. We are the hopes and dreams, the predictions and projections of what we will grow up to be. Recognize that in yourself, and like the prophetess Anna, go out and share this good news.