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Sermon 27 Dec 2020: What is Your Doxology?

- Good morning church. Throughout the Advent season, we've explored the way that Luke and Matthew and even John describe the Christmas story. But as we've found, Matthew and Luke tell the specific historical story of the birth of Christ beginning with the Angel and the Virgin – of how in the first chapter of Luke, Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, visits Mary and tells her that she is favoured by God, blessed among women and that she's going to have a baby that will be the saviour of the world. And unlike the shepherds who were terrified when confronted with Gabriel, Mary wasn't afraid, but instead, she questioned the logistics of how that could be. And then in week two Pastor Steve walked us through John the Baptist's role as the last of the prophets who announce the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the light of the world and the description in Mark's gospel of the way that John the Baptist "appeared" in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and proclaiming that somebody's coming—that "one more powerful than I is coming after me," one about whom John says that he is not even worthy to untie his sandals-- one who would baptize not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. And in week three we looked at how, in his 2nd chapter, Luke describes how Gabriel appears to the shepherds, the night shift slaves and how yet again, the word of God is revealed to the simple and lowly rather than the powerful and influential.
- And now we've left advent behind and we are on day 3 of the Christmas season.
- So let's take a look at what's going on in our scripture today – Jesus is now eight days old and in accordance with tradition, his parents have brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and there they meet Simeon and Anna. And Simeon and Anna are deeply affected by their interaction with Mary and the young Jesus – this interaction leads them to say certain things and to do certain things. And what I'd like for us to look at today is how

we can learn from Anna and Simeon but also how we can learn from Mary what it means to praise God with both our words and our lives.

- One word that describes praising God is Doxology – and we’re going to see that the lives of Mary and Simeon and Anna are doxological in character, they give Glory to God – but let’s talk about the word Doxology. It comes from the Greek doxo, which means “glory” and logia, which means “saying” – A dox ology is an expression of praise to God. You find that ending “ology” on lots of words – and it really just means talking about some subject. Like Theology is talking about or studying God or Geology is talking about or the study of the earth, psychology is talking about or study of the mind. Biology, epidemiology, anthropology - all those ologies and they’re really just talking about some subject. So dox ology is talking about glory – glorifying God and we can do that not only with our words but with our actions, our lives.
- You have probably noticed that at the end of most of our services we sing a hymn called the Doxology
- Praise God from whom all blessings flow
- Praise him all creatures here below
- These words were written in 1674 by Anglican Bishop Thomas Ken as the final verse of two hymns, "Awake, my soul, and with the sun" and "Glory to thee, my God, this night," and they were intended for morning and evening worship at Winchester College.
- Bishop Ken, like a lot of Anglican ministers, during the 1600s and 1700s, John Wesley was another one of them, was passionately interested in time management and time improvement. What that meant, in simple terms was that he was concerned to make the most of his time. He, like many others, including John Wesley, knew that he had been given a finite lifetime to accomplish certain things that God called them to do and it was their responsibility to use that resource, that gift that they’d been given, wisely and not waste it.

- So Bishop Ken made a specific effort to avoid slothfulness and to use his time and energy efficiently. And of course, John Wesley would take this same method ology and from it would arise Methodism.
- Now this didn't mean, for Bishop Ken, that he worked all the time so that he got burnt out – it meant getting enough rest and taking care of himself so that he could present himself to God as a living sacrifice, so that every minute of every day was lived to the glory of God, that is, doxologically. And so this song of praise that reflected the manner in which Bishop Ken carefully spent his days, and which literally contained the doxology that we sing at the end of our services was his personal doxology, his lived out song of praise.
- And rest was important for Bishop Ken – It's now commonly thought that we should get 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep - but, this concept of getting 8 hours of sleep is a relatively new idea – previously, a period of wakefulness in the middle of the night was much more common. In the 17th century, for example, the practice of having “two sleeps” was common but it was beginning to dwindle in popularity and practice, and it seems that Bishop Ken was a pioneer of a new trend of getting a ‘single sleep’ each night and so he would rise on waking, whatever the time of night! English historian, Agnes Strickland, writing in 1866, says ‘So devoted was Ken to the improvement of his time, that he never made but one sleep, always rising from his bed when he awoke, even if it happened as early as three o'clock in the morning.’
- And so it's easy to see how he could write the words to the song, *Awake my soul and with the sun*, the first stanza of which says:
 - Awake, my soul, and with the sun
your daily stage of duty run;
shake off your sleep, and joyful rise
to make your morning sacrifice.
- And the fourth stanza says:

- Give praise to God, who safely kept
and well refreshed me while I slept:
grant, Lord, that when from death I wake
I may of endless life partake.
- And the final stanza goes like this:
- Praise God from whom all blessings flow
- Praise him all creatures here below
- Praise him above ye heavenly hosts
- Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen
- And so the hymn we know as the Doxology is actually the last verse of a longer song all about how we ought to get up, glorifying God in the morning and use every minute of every day to His glory.
- This same sentiment is simplified and echoed in a song we probably all know from childhood “Rise and Shine and Give God the Glory”
- Now, what does that have to do with our scripture today?
- Well, let’s return to the situation described by Luke in chapter 2.
- In verse 21, Jesus’ parents enter the temple, where there was a man named Simeon – a man who, Luke tells us was righteous and devout and that some scholars believe was the presiding priest at the temple. Luke tells us that Simeon was looking forward to the consolation of Israel – the word used here for consolation is paraklésis which also means Comfort, and is the root word of paraclete, one who comes alongside, a word used in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit. Paraclete, or more specifically, paraklétos is the word used in John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.

- We're further told that the Holy Spirit has promised Simeon that he would live long enough to see the Messiah, and that the Holy Spirit guided him to the temple that day and that when Simeon sees Jesus, he takes him in his arms and praises God.
- 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."
- Simeon's doxology, his lived out song of praise was one of servant-hood and faithful expectation.
- Luke then tells us about another person in the temple that day, a prophet named Anna. You may remember that Anna was the star of one of our Big Faith Bible studies last year. And during that study we discussed how prophets served as an amplifier, speaking the word of God to the people who needed to hear them. And as Pastor Steve has pointed out in the past, prophets aren't merely fortune tellers or future predictors. Prophets told of situations that would happen if, for example, people didn't turn to God and away from evil. Luke tells us that Anna was a prophet. Luke also tells us that Anna never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting & praying.
- Anna had been waiting her whole life for the messiah and unlike Simeon, who declared he could finally die in peace now that he had seen the coming of the glory of the Lord, her life was beginning! Anna had been waiting, praying and fasting for this moment when the messiah would be made known – the beginning of the redemption of Jerusalem. The beginning of the kingdom of God and when she saw his face for the first time, she started telling everyone in the temple about it. She was the first person within the temple in Jerusalem to proclaim that the messiah has arrived.

- Now there's an interesting word study here. If we look at verse 38, we find an odd phrase in English. Vs 38 reads 'and at that moment, she came and began to praise God and speak'. That phrase 'at that moment she 'came' seems odd in English. What do you mean, she came? she's already there. The word used for 'came' here, more literally means 'appeared'. And it's the same word used to describe the angel who appears to the shepherds and proclaims the good news of Jesus birth. So here, Luke is making a connection between the angel who appears to those shepherds in the fields outside the temple and Anna, appearing to those within the temple. We can assume, then, that those within the temple, like the shepherds, will go out and spread the good news, so that it emanates from the very inner confines of the temple out into all the world.
- Anna's doxology, her song of praise, was one of revelation of the messiah's arrival and she shared it with everyone in the temple – a place she never left – this temple was her whole world, her community – Anna shared her doxology with her entire community, bringing good tidings of great joy.
- The third character in this story that I'd like for us to consider is Mary. A few weeks ago we looked at how God chose Mary, a virgin, a nobody, a poor peasant girl from Nazareth to be the mother of the Saviour of the world.
- Yes, Mary knew it would be difficult. She knew she'd be ridiculed for being pregnant and unwed. She knew the social and physical strain that would come for a poor pregnant girl in ancient Palestine. She was familiar with the day to day duties of being a wife in a fishing community – cleaning, slicing, preparing meals, the strain her back would endure as she carried water from the well, the swelling of her feet as she planted and gathered the harvest during the late stages of pregnancy, the exhaustion of gathering, thrashing and winnowing the grain before kneading it for the evening meal. She knew that she would suffer – Simeon told her in the temple that "This child is destined for the falling and the

rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

- Mary knew that things would be difficult. She knew that she would endure the pain and sorrow that being the mother of the Saviour of the world would bring – and yet – her song of praise, her doxology was
- “My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
- I think sometimes we forget how very important Mary was not just in carrying the developing Jesus before his birth, but in helping him to develop as he grew during childhood and into adulthood. In verse 40, Luke reminds us “Now the Child continued to grow and to become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the favour of God was upon Him.”
- As Jesus grew, in the household with his parents, he increased in wisdom, and surely Mary was a big part of that. Jesus’ life doesn’t begin at the point where John the Baptist baptises him. Jesus didn’t just appear – he had to develop mentally and physically. Jesus has to grow up and God chose this home for him to grow up in and God chose Mary as the maternal figure in that home.
- And so Mary’s doxology was one of praise in the midst of uncertainty, faced with almost unthinkable responsibility – praise regardless of difficulty – praise no matter the cost.
- This morning we’ve explored the doxologies of Bishop Ken, of Simeon, Anna and of Mary. And my question for you is this - What is your doxology today? In this finite span of time we’re given – this gift of life – how do you spend your time? How do you offer up a sacrifice

of praise? How do you ensure that every minute of every day, all you do and all you say, all that you are and ever will be is offered up to the glory of God?

- We can't do it alone, but leaning on Jesus, relying on God's help and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, we can each and every day, rise and shine and give God the glory.