**SERMON 12-29-2019**

**LUKE 2:22-40**

The outstanding characteristics of the great New England preacher Phillips Brooks

          were poise and unshakable calmness.

People who met him were amazed at how patient, steady,

          and well-balanced he was.

Nothing seem to disturb or upset him.

His close friends, however, knew that at times he suffered moments

          of frustration and irritability.

One day a friend saw him pacing the floor like a caged tiger.

          "What is the trouble Dr. Brooks?" asked the friend.

The Pastor stopped his pacing, and looked at his friend.

Then with a sigh of frustration he answered:

“The trouble is I am in a hurry.                   But God isn't.”

We often seem to be in a great hurry.

We humans are not very good at waiting.

Waiting is hard, and most of us are not very happy when we have to wait.

We have been doing a lot of waiting this time of year.

Waiting at checkout lines.

Waiting to find a closer parking spot.

Waiting for Christmas bonuses.

Waiting for company to arrive.

Waiting for things we have ordered on line to be delivered.

And the young ones were hardly able to wait for Christmas to arrive.

But now, Christmas of 2019 is quickly fading.

The radio stations, which have been playing Christmas music since early

          November, have switched to their normal tunes.

The paper for all of those brightly wrapped gifts has found its way into the trash.

Batteries have been installed in those items labeled, "batteries not included."

Most of the items marked "some assembly required," have been assembled.

Our attention has turned to New Year's celebrations

          and thoughts about what the New Year might hold.

Now we will have to wait to discover what 2020 has in store for us.

Mary and Joseph were faced with a similar situation.

The shepherds had to get back to their flocks.

The angels had other angelic duties to carry out.

There were religious rituals to be observed,

          a flight to Egypt,

          and a long trip home to Nazareth.

The warm glow of that magnificent night when Jesus was born was cooling.

They would have long times of waiting to see what Jesus would do.

 It seems as if the waiting never stops.

When we were young we had to wait until we were old enough to have a bicycle,

          a learner's permit to drive a car, graduation, college acceptances.

As we got older, we waited for a promotion, a bonus check,

          or the results of medical tests.

Farmers wait for the rains to come, and crops to ripen.

Pregnant mothers and worried fathers wait for the birth of their child.

And, like Pastor Phillips Brooks, we all wait for God to answer our prayers,

          and act in our lives.

God wants us to expect his actions in our lives.

Yet He knows how impatient we are, and how difficult the waiting is for us.

Simeon and Anna had a bit more patience than most of us.

In their time the moral and spiritual life in Israel was at a very low point.

There were hundreds of people in the temple courts, buying sacrifices;

          bowing down before incense laden altars;

          going through the motions of worship.

But because their hearts were not focused on God,

          their worship was only a superficial ritual.

The people of Palestine were burdened with a heavy toll

          of civic and religious taxes.

They had drifted away from God,

          and life had become difficult, full of fear and anxiety.

Yet Anna and Simeon refused to give up hope.

In spite of everything, they did not doubt God, but trusted in his promises.

Simeon was a devout believer in God.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit

          that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

And so he was waiting.

We don't know how long he had been waiting.

But being human, Simeon was probably becoming a bit impatient.

After all, he was no longer young, and perhaps death seemed to be approaching

          faster than the arrival of the Messiah.

He had been living and waiting expectantly.

And he didn't stop anticipating the arrival of the promised Savior.

And then suddenly, with no warning,

          the wonderful day he had been waiting for, arrived.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

Then the parents arrived carrying baby Jesus, the promised Messiah.

Simeon knew God's promise had been fulfilled.

The waiting was over.              The Savior had arrived.

Simeon took him in his arms, and thanked and praised God.

In some way he knew this child was not only for the glory of God's people Israel.

He was also destined to be a light for the Gentiles throughout the world.

Mary and Joseph were amazed, and astonished, and perplexed, by Simeon's words.

Simeon told the parents:

          This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,

          and to be a sign which will be spoken against,

          the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

          And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

 An unusual prophecy, difficult for the new parents to fully understand.

The prophet Anna was also in the temple.

She was very old.

She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God.

She spoke about the child to everyone who were looking forward

          to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon and Anna never lost faith in the promises of God.

It is good when we can follow their example:

          Trusting in God even when the waiting is so very long.

We do not know what lies ahead in the coming year.

News from around the world sounds very alarming at times.

But we can remember:

          God always keeps his promises, no matter how long the waiting becomes.

At that first Christmas, 2000 years ago a light came into our troubled world,

          and all the darkness of sin and sadness have never been able to put it out.

We may feel as if the waiting will never end.

But when the set time had fully come,

          God sent his Son,

                    born of a woman,

                              born under the law,

                                        to redeem those under the law.

The baby Jesus grew and became strong;

          he was filled with wisdom,

                    and the grace of God was upon him.

God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,

          so we are no longer slaves,

                    but God's children,

                              loved, cherished, and forgiven.

           Forever.

 AMEN