Luke 2:21-32; 2 Corinthians 1:20 *The Waiting Room: The Wait is Over*

***Cubs Win! Cubs Win!***Mabel Ball was born in Chicago in 1908. That was the year the Chicago Cubs won their final World Series of the 20th Century.

In 2016, the Cubs were in the World Series again. Mabel Ball was 108 years old. She had listened to Cubs games on the radio most of her life. But, of course, she never experienced the joy of a World Series win.

As the World Series started, the Chicago Tribune interviewed her. Several local TV stations had her on as well. She was the perfect embodiment of baseball futility: the 108-year-old fan of a team that had not won in 108 years.

The World Series did not get off to good start for the Cubs. They lost 3 of the first 4 games in a best of seven series. Plus, the Cleveland Indians had homefield advantage. But the Cubs rallied to win games 5 and 6. Game 7 was played on Nov. 2.

It was an epic game. It went to extra-innings. There was 17-minute rain delay between the 9th and the 10th innings. The Cubs scored 2 runs in the top of the 10th to take the lead, but gave up a run and had a runner on with two outs in the bottom of the inning. Then there was a slow ground ball to third **and this happened…**

That’s a picture of Mabel Bell holding the newspaper on Nov. 3, 2016. That’s what it looks like after you wait 108 years for your favorite team to win the World Series.

5 days later, Mabel Bell died. "The cruel irony, the almost unbelievable irony, is that the person who waits and waits and waits, after it happens, says, 'I've done what I've got to do, and I'm out of here,'" her son Rich, 75, of Oak Park, said. "It ain't funny, but it's funny."

Mabel Bell’s story wasn’t the only story to emerge of life-long Cubs fans feeling like they could finally die happy. Prior to the World Series, a popular saying among fans of the Northside’s “Lovable Losers” was: “Just once in my lifetime…” After the win**, this fan’s poster summed up** the feeling of many: “Now I can die in peace.”

Now, I’m enough of a sports fan to get it. People who go to Hope Church regularly know that my allegiance to the athletics program at the University of Northern Iowa runs pretty deep. I realize that a National Championship in basketball is not too likely, but there is a reasonable chance that the Panthers could win an FCS football championship before I die. I’d like to see it happen.

But I am also objective enough to realize this kind of devotion to a sports team might be a little extreme. Just because your favorite team wins a championship, to literally say: “That’s it, I’m good, I can die now” seems a tad over-dramatic. I know that I don’t always act like it, but there are bigger things than sports.

And while that phrase: “Now I can die in peace” is fairly common in response to teams breaking long championship droughts, what few people realize is that it is actually a phrase from the Bible. And it was said about something far more important than the World Series.

***Life’s Waiting Room***Our sermon series leading up to Christmas this year has been called **“The Waiting Room.”** We’ve been talking about how a big part of Christmas is the anticipation, the waiting. In a sense, we all become like little kids around Christmas time, we can’t hardly wait. So for the last month, we’ve had this picture of the stable as a waiting room.

And we thought this was a good image because--with apologies to those of you who work in places that have waiting rooms—nobody likes being in a waiting room. Think about it, we sit in a waiting room while we wait for the report on a loved one who is undergoing emergency surgery. Or, we sit in a waiting room while we wait for the report on whether we are going to need surgery. Or, we sit in a waiting room while we wait to find out whether our car is going to make it or not. Or we sit in a waiting room while we wait to find out that, no, our check book isn’t going to make it. It doesn’t matter how nicely decorated the waiting room is, it’s a place nobody really wants to be.

We’ve been relating that to being in life’s waiting room. All of us have experiences where we are hoping for things to change. We have things where we are looking for improvement, things we are praying about, situations we are hoping will get better. And we’ve been looking at the Bible for guidance in the waiting. If you find yourself in life’s waiting room right now, and you’re struggling with the waiting, I’d like to encourage you to go to our church website and take a look at some of those sermons for some help and some hope.

But now, today, it’s Christmas Eve, and the wait is over. Today, we celebrate the birth of Jesus that the whole Old Testament has been leading up to. Today, I want you to see that **Jesus is the answer to life’s waiting.** Whatever it is that you are waiting for, I want you to see that Jesus is God’s answer. Whether we realize it or not, Jesus is the one we have been waiting for.

***Simeon***The Bible story I want to look at with you today is part of the Christmas story, but it’s not one we read that often. It’s the part of Luke 2 that starts right after passage we are most familiar with, the part that comes right after the shepherds. It’s the story of Simeon, the man who said: “Now I can die in peace.”

We’ll pick up the story at **Luke 2:21:**

**21**On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. **22**When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23**(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), **24**and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

There are few details to point out here. Most of us know that after the shepherds, Jesus was visited by the Wise Men from the East. And then, shortly after the Wise Men left, King Herod put out a decree to kill all the babies in Bethlehem and Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus fled to Egypt. Usually, we imagine these things happening in quick succession. Like there was a line outside the stable door—first the shepherds come in, then the Wise Men, then Joseph is throwing things in a bag and they are sneaking away for Egypt, all in one night.

But actually, Matthew, who tells us about the Wise Men, gives us clues that their visit occurred several months, if not a full year, after Jesus was born. Which raises a question: what was the Holy Family doing in Bethlehem that whole time? Why didn’t they go back to Nazareth?

These verses give us some idea. The Law said that the first-born boy should be consecrated to the Lord. That usually involved a sacrifice, at the Temple if possible. Since Bethlehem is just 6 miles from Jerusalem, it made sense that Mary and Joseph would wait there for the 40 days of purification to pass and then bring Jesus to the Temple.

It’s also noteworthy that the normal sacrifice would be a lamb, but the law made provision that those who could not afford a lamb could offer a pair of doves or a pair of pigeons. So we know that Jesus was not born into a wealthy family. Most likely, Joseph and Mary were what would be considered—today—lower middle class. **Verse 25:**

**25**Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26**It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

This is the only time Simeon appears in the Bible. We don’t know a lot about him, but we are given some interesting details. He was a “righteous” man. That means others considered him upright and honorable. He was a “devout” man. That means he was faithful in his religious practice. And the Holy Spirit was on him. Significantly, prior to Pentecost, the Bible says Simeon was filled with the Spirit.

And then, this detail: “He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.” Simeon was waiting. He was a man who recognized that there was something wrong. He was a man who longed for things to get better.

This phrase, “the consolation of Israel” means Simeon was waiting for the Messiah. Some scholars believe Simeon was apart of a group known as the “Quiet in the Land.” Rather then get involved in political intrigue or violent action, this was a group of people who were praying for God to change Israel’s fortunes by sending a promised deliverer—the one promised in the Old testament and known as the Anointed One, the Messiah, or the Christ.

And somehow, the Holy Spirit has revealed to Simeon that he will not die until he sees this person. We don’t know how this happened: if it was just a conviction Simeon had in his head; or if the Holy Spirit made this promise to him through another person; or if he saw a sign of some sort. We don’t know. But Simeon was certain that he would live to see the arrival of the Messiah.

Imagine being Simeon. We don’t know how old he is, but most people imagine that he was quite old. In his lifetime Israel has been conquered and occupied. They are under the rule of foreigners who care nothing about God. And all of his life, he’s been longing and praying for things to change. And he is waiting. He is in life’s waiting room…

We don’t even know if Simeon knew what to look for. Was he looking for an adult man, someone who would arrive on the scene with obvious strength and charisma? Or was he looking for a teen-ager, or a boy, or a baby?

I can imagine him going to the temple courts, day after day, and having a sort of internal dialogue with the Holy Spirit: “Is this the one?” “Is it that man over there?” “Is it that bright-eyed little boy?” Day after day, and the answer keeps coming back: “No, that’s not the one. Not that one either. Keep watching. Keep waiting.”

Until, one day, the answer changes. **Verse 27:**

**27**Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28**Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

Simeon is there when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to be consecrated, and he just knows. We don’t know how he knows, but he knows. The Bible doesn’t say anything about angels breaking through the heavens or stars shining down or doves descending at this point, but Simeon knows. This is the One. This is the One he has been waiting for.

He takes the child in his arms, and this is the song he sings. **Verses 29-32:**

**29**“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
    you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
**30**For my eyes have seen your salvation,
**31**    which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
**32**a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
    and the glory of your people Israel.

Simeon says: “I can die now.” “Now I can die happy.” I’ve seen what I’ve been waiting for. So much better than a World Series win, Simeon has met the Messiah.

This song is known as the “Nunc dimittis.” That’s Latin for “now dismiss.” The word “dismiss” is a military word. It’s the kind of word you would use for a soldier who has stood watch all through the night; and now, as the sun is coming up over the eastern horizon, he knows his work is done. He can check in with his commanding officer and be dismissed. His watch has come to an end.

That’s how Simeon feels once he takes Jesus in His arms. The long wait is over, the years of anticipation have been fulfilled. He won’t live to see the Lord grow up. He won’t witness any of the great miracles. He won’t be there when Jesus walks on water or feeds 5,000. Simeon will be long gone when Jesus stands before Pilate. He won’t be around for the crucifixion or the resurrection. But it doesn’t matter that he won’t see the end because Simeon has seen the beginning, and that is enough.

Jesus is the answer to Simeon’s waiting. And He’s the answer to your waiting as well.

***5 Things About Jesus***There are 5 things that Simeon says about Jesus in his song, and I’d like to look at each of them briefly.

First, **Jesus is the answer to God’s promises**. Simeon had been promised that he would see the Lord’s anointed, now he has. God keeps His promises. God is faithful. And Jesus is the proof of that.

There’s a song that we’ve just started singing here at Hope called “Yes and Amen.” If you don’t know it, I’d encourage you to find it on YouTube. “Yes and Amen” by a group called Housefires. It has a line that goes: “Faithful, you are/all your promises are Yes and Amen.” It’s based on a verse from **2 Corinthians 1:20** that says:

**20**For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

If you ever wonder if God is going to keep His promises to you; if you ever wonder if God is going to come through for your good, all you need to do is look back to Christmas. Jesus is God’s “Yes” to all of God’s promises. He promised the Messiah, and He delivered in Jesus.

It’s God’s faithfulness in the past that assures us of His continued faithfulness in the future.

Have you ever interviewed anybody for a job? Have you ever been interviewed for a job? What are the questions about? They are always questions about how you have performed in previous work environments, right? Why? Because past performance is the best predictor of future outcomes; and when you look at God’s past performance in Jesus you see nothing but promises kept. John Piper writes this:

Every sinner who comes to God in Christ, with all his needs, finds God coming to him in Christ, with all his promises. When a sinful person meets the holy God *in Christ* what he hears is Yes. God, do you love me? Yes. Will you forgive me? Yes. Will you accept me? Yes. Will you help me change? Yes. Will you give me power to serve you? Yes. Will you keep me? Yes. Will you show me your glory? Yes.

All the promises of God—all the blessings of God in the heavenly places—are Yes in Christ Jesus. Jesus is God’s decisive Yes to all who believe. (*Future Grace,* p. 105-106)

All of God’s promises are Yes and Amen in Jesus.

Second, **Jesus brings peace**. Back to Simeon’s song, he says: “now dismiss you servant in peace.”

The Biblical word for peace is “shalom.” It’s a word that has to do with wholeness, perfection. Shalom comes when things are the way they should be, when everything is in order. The thing about our world, because of sin, is that there isn’t a whole lot of peace. Things are out of order.

And that’s especially true when you find yourself in a place of waiting. When you are waiting for things to change, you find things are disordered. Waiting makes us anxious. Waiting is worrisome. Waiting is not peaceful.

But Jesus brings peace. For Simeon, seeing the Christ-child with his own eyes put things back in order. He could truly die in peace.

And the same is true for you. Jesus can bring order to your disordered world. Jesus can bring calm to your tumultuous soul. If you find yourself worried and anxious over things you cannot control, turn to Jesus and find peace.

Third, **Jesus is for all people.** Simeon says that this child represents salvation that has been “prepared in the sight of all people.” He talks about how Jesus is light for revelation to the Gentiles. As a member of a group of people that had long claimed the exclusive nature of their relationship with God, Simeon is one of the first to recognize that Jesus has come not just for Jews, but for everyone.

Simeon’s words explode narrow claims on Jesus. He came for the whole world: rich and poor, young and old, black and white, Jew and Gentile, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, healthy and handicapped. All people are included in his coming. He didn’t come for a small group. He came for the whole wide world. “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight.”

That means there is hope for you at Christmastime. If you are lonely this year, Simeon meant to include you. If your family has rejected you, Simeon meant to include you. If you feel forgotten, depressed, discouraged, and down on your luck, be of good cheer, Christmas is for you! Whatever feelings of isolation or rejection you might have, know that you are included in the “all people” of this verse. Jesus came for me. Jesus came for you. Jesus came for everyone.

Fourth, **Jesus is glorious.** Jesus came as light of revelation to the Gentiles, but He also came for His own people, Israel. The word that really stands out to me in that last line is the word glory. Because, rightfully, glory is a word that can only be applied to God.

The Old Testament antecedent for the word “glory” is *shekinah.* Shekinah is the word that described the cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt. It’s the shekinah cloud—the glory cloud--that filled the tabernacle in the desert and later the temple in Jerusalem. In other words, glory is a word that describes the presence of God.

And now, that same word is being used to describe Jesus. One of the things that Simeon is recognizing here is that this child in his arms is the presence of God on earth. This child, this special child, is the glory of Israel. This is God Himself come down to live among His people.

The gospel of John puts it like this, **John 1:14**:

**14**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This means that if you have a relationship with Jesus, you have a relationship with God. The way to know God is through Jesus.

Then, fifth, **Jesus is salvation**. I saved verse 30 for last, it’s the most important thing to know about Jesus. He is the answer to God’s promises. He brings peace. He is for all people. And He is glorious.

But most of all: Jesus is salvation. He is God’s rescue mission for us. Jesus is how God is going to redeem us from our sins and make a path for us back to Him.

After Simeon’s song ends, he has one more thing to say. **Verses 33-35:**

**33**The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. **34**Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35**so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

This is obviously a foreshadowing of the end of Jesus’ life. The Holy Spirit has prompted Simeon to predict the heartbreak Mary will experience when she stands at the foot of a cross and watches her eldest son die.

It would not be right to talk about Christmas without also talking about the Crucifixion, for the two are inevitably linked. Jesus came to earth, ultimately, to die. His mission of mercy at the manger was not fully complete until He suffered the sacrifice of Golgotha. The way He secures our salvation is by taking our sin to His own grave.

***What is Jesus to You?***Did you notice how Simeon put it? Because of Jesus, the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Underline that in your mind. With Jesus there is no neutrality. No one can ever come face to face with Jesus Christ and remain the same.

Every time you see Jesus, you will either be drawn closer to him or you will move farther away. That’s what Simeon means when he says that Jesus will cause the rising of many and the falling of many. You either go higher spiritually when you meet Jesus; or you turn around and go the other way. It’s either up or down, heaven or hell.

What is Jesus to you this Christmas Eve?

He’s life or death.

He’s joy or sorrow.

He’s guilt or forgiveness.

He’s salvation or condemnation.

He’s everlasting life or everlasting punishment.

Let me press the question home. What is Jesus to you? Not who is he, but what is he to you? Is he life or is he death to you today?

When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he said, “Lord, I’m ready to go home now. I can die in peace.” But no one is ready to die until they have seen Jesus Christ with the eyes of faith. You’re not ready to die until you have seen him and known him and trusted him as your Savior.

Jesus is the answer to all of life’s waiting. Do you know Him?

He’s the Yes and Amen to all of God’s promises. Do you know Him?

He’s the source of peace. Do you know Him?

He came for all people. Do you know Him?

He is the glorious presence of God. Do you know Him?

He is salvation from all your sins? Do you know Him?

He’s the one Simeon was waiting for. The one the prophets were waiting for. He’s the one you’ve been waiting for. Do you know Him?