

***“CHRISTMAS LETDOWN?”***

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE (2:22-40)  
AND PRESENTED AT ORLEAN UMC ON DECEMBER 28,  
2014----THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

**SO HERE WE ARE ON DECEMBER 28<sup>TH</sup> , THREE  
DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS..... THE TRUTH IS,  
FOR A VERY GREAT MANY PEOPLE, THERE’S A  
SENSE OF LETDOWN TODAY..... THAT’S THE  
TROUBLE WITH SPECIAL EVENTS — THE  
LETDOWN THAT SO OFTEN FOLLOWS..... WE  
SPEND SO MUCH TIME, ENERGY AND MONEY  
— BOTH AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A  
CONGREGATION — IN PREPARING FOR  
CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS DAY, THAT  
A LETDOWN IS ALMOST INEVITABLE.**

**WE ALL KNOW SOME SHOPPERS WHO BEGAN  
LOOKING FOR THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS  
PRESENTS AT THIS TIME LAST YEAR----- AND  
WE ALL ALSO KNOW OF SOME WHO HAD  
FINISHED THEIR CHRISTMAS SHOPPING BY  
OUR LAST LABOR DAY..... ON THE OTHER  
HAND-----WE ALL KNOW OF SOME WHO  
POURED A YEAR'S PSYCHIC ENERGY INTO  
TWO HOURS OF FRANTIC SHOPPING ON  
DECEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup> -----AND WHO WILL NEED  
MOST OF THE COMING YEAR TO RECOVER-----  
SO THAT THEY CAN DO IT AGAIN NEXT  
DECEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup>**

**SOME OF YOU SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS  
OVER SEVERAL WEEKS CREATING  
DELICACIES THAT YOU MAKE ONLY AT THIS  
SEASON, AND YOU HAVE SHARED YOUR  
KITCHEN ARTISTRY WITH WONDERFUL  
GENEROSITY.....EVEN IN A SMALL RURAL  
CHURCH SUCH AS OURS ----- SO MANY OF  
YOU HAVE INVESTED HOURS UPON HOURS IN  
DECORATING OUR SANCTUARY ----- IN  
PROVIDING POWERFUL AND MEANINGFUL  
MUSIC MINISTRY -----IN REACHING OUT TO  
OTHERS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR ----- A TIME  
THAT CAN BE SO DIFFICULT FOR SO MANY-----**

**YOU HAVE ALL IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER  
PARTICIPATED IN THE ADVENT AND  
CHRISTMAS SEASONS.....YOU HAVE BEEN  
WONDERFUL PARTS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST  
KNOWN AS ORLEAN UNITED METHODIST  
CHURCH AND YOU HAVE ALL WANTED  
EVERYTHING TO BE JUST RIGHT — FULL OF  
BEAUTY, SENTIMENT, WORSHIP AND  
INTEGRITY.**

**BUT NOW IT IS DECEMBER 28, THREE DAYS  
LATER..... AND SOME OF YOU, SURVEYING  
THE ATTENDANCE THIS MORNING, MAY BE  
MUTTERING,**

**“AND IT LOOKS LIKE THREE DAYS AFTER  
CHRISTMAS, TOO!”**

**IF YOU’RE FEELING A LETDOWN THIS  
MORNING, -----I HAVE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU.  
THERE’S NO REASON FOR A LETDOWN,  
BECAUSE CHRISTMAS DIDN’T END ON  
DECEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup> ----- TO THE CONTRARY---  
THAT WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.**

**TO MAKE MYSELF CLEAR, LET ME TAKE YOU  
BACK TO THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.....**

**LET ME NOTE, FIRST OF ALL, THAT THE FIRST  
CHRISTMAS WAS MARKED BY AN ALMOST  
UNBELIEVABLE PERIOD OF ANTICIPATION.....  
IF YOU AND I INVESTED OURSELVES IN  
EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL PREPARATION  
FOR THIS CHRISTMAS..... CONSIDER FOR A  
MOMENT THAT PEASANT GIRL NAMED *MARY*.  
SHE HAD NINE MONTHS TO THINK ABOUT THE  
ORIGINAL CHRISTMAS. THEY WERE MONTHS  
WHEN SHE HAD TO WONDER REPEATEDLY  
WHY GOD HAD CHOSEN HER..... MONTHS OF  
VERY REAL ANGUISH OVER WHAT THE  
PEOPLE IN HER VILLAGE WERE SAYING  
ABOUT HER, EVEN AS HER BODY GREW WITH  
EACH PASSING DAY.**

**MONTHS, TOO, WHEN MARY MUST HAVE  
MARVELED AT THE WAY HER FIANCÉ, JOSEPH,  
HAD SOMEHOW BECOME AN EXTRAORDINARY  
MAN OF FAITH.....**

**THEN THERE WAS AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY OF  
FOUR OR FIVE DAYS, MOST OF IT ON FOOT  
BUT OCCASIONALLY ON A DONKEY — NOT  
MUCH BETTER, REALLY! — ONLY TO FIND  
THAT THERE WAS NO PLACE TO STAY, EVEN  
AS BIRTH PANGS BEGAN TO SETTLE IN.**

**AND THEN THERE WAS CHRISTMAS, AND  
MARY HAD THE BABY IN HER ARMS.....  
SHEPHERDS CAME TO SEE THE BABY-----MY  
BUT THEY WERE A SCRUFFY LOT..... THEY  
SAID THEY HAD GOTTEN THE WORD FROM  
ANGELS AND MARY FOUND THIS EASY TO  
BELIEVE, BECAUSE IT WAS AN ANGEL WHO  
HAD BRIEFED HER NINE MONTHS EARLIER.**

**BESIDES, MARY HEARD ANGEL CHOIRS IN HER  
HEART, WITHOUT BENEFIT OF ANY VISIBLE  
COMPANY..... IT WAS CHRISTMAS — AND IN A  
PHRASE FROM OUR DAY, MARY MIGHT WELL  
HAVE SAID, “IT DOESN’T GET ANY BETTER  
THAN THIS.”**



**BUT SHE WAS WRONG..... CHRISTMAS WASN'T  
OVER..... IT HAD JUST BEGUN.**

**THE STORY CONTINUES WITH A CEREMONIAL  
EVENT, SOMETHING THAT FOR DEVOUT JEWS  
LIKE MARY AND JOSEPH WAS INSEPARABLE  
FROM A BIRTH ITSELF.**

**AT AN APPROPRIATE, APPOINTED TIME,  
PARENTS WERE TO PRESENT THEIR  
NEWBORN CHILD TO THE LORD IN WHAT WAS  
KNOWN AS A CEREMONY OF PURIFICATION.  
JOSEPH AND MARY CAME TO THE TEMPLE IN  
JERUSALEM ALONE; NO FAMILY WITH THEM.**

**FOR ONE THING, THEIR FAMILIES WERE  
SEVERAL DAYS' JOURNEY AWAY..... BUT I  
WONDER IF PERHAPS THEIR FAMILIES  
WEREN'T ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS TO  
CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF THIS CHILD WHO  
SEEMED, BY POPULAR GOSSIP, TO HAVE  
BEEN CONCEIVED BEFORE JOSEPH AND  
MARY WERE OFFICIALLY MARRIED.....**

**SO ON THIS DAY WHEN ONE NATURALLY  
WANTED OTHERS TO JOIN IN THE FESTIVITY, IT  
LOOKED AS IF INSTEAD IT WOULD BE A  
RATHER LONELY DAY: SACRED AND  
BEAUTIFUL TO MARY AND JOSEPH..... BUT  
LONELY, TOO.**

**AND MARY AND JOSEPH WERE POOR AS WELL.....PERHAPS VERY POOR. WE KNOW THIS BY THEIR CEREMONIAL PROVISIONS FOR THE DAY. THEIR RELIGIOUS LAW CALLED FOR PARENTS TO BRING A LAMB FOR SACRIFICE ON THIS DAY — BUT IF THEY WERE TOO POOR, THEY COULD BRING A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS. THIS IS WHAT MARY AND JOSEPH BROUGHT: THE POOR PEOPLE’S OFFERING.**

**WHICH IS TO SAY: FOR MARY AND JOSEPH, THE FIRST CHRISTMAS WAS A BARGAIN-COUNTER AFFAIR.**

**SOME OF US CAN REMEMBER CHRISTMASES  
WHEN WE WERE POOR — ESPECIALLY THOSE  
OF US WHO CAN REMEMBER CHRISTMAS  
BEFORE THERE WERE CREDIT CARDS! -----WE  
MAY TALK SENTIMENTALLY ABOUT IT NOW,  
ABOUT HOW WE MADE DO WITH LITTLE AND  
ENJOYED IT..... BUT NOT MANY OF US WANT  
TO RETURN TO A POVERTY CELEBRATION.**

**SO THERE THEY WERE, A VILLAGE PEASANT  
FAMILY IN THE BIG CITY, QUITE ALONE,  
NOTICEABLY POOR.....**

**AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THE CEREMONY WENT  
OFF WITHOUT A HITCH.**

THEN, OUT OF NOWHERE, A FAMILY  
APPEARED TO JOIN THEM..... JOSEPH AND  
MARY HAD NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE, AND  
THERE WAS NO CLAIM TO BLOOD  
CONNECTION, BUT THEY WERE FAMILY, NO  
DOUBT ABOUT IT, THE KIND OF FAMILY THAT  
WOULD MARK THEIR CHILD'S LIFE FROM  
THERE TO ETERNITY — THE FAMILY OF FAITH.

FIRST IT WAS AN OLDER MAN. WE DON'T  
KNOW HOW OLD HE WAS, BUT WE KNOW THAT  
GOD HAD PROMISED HIM THAT HE WOULD  
LIVE TO SEE THIS DAY,

**SO WE ASSUME EITHER THAT HE WAS VERY  
OLD OR THAT HE HAD SOME ILLNESS THAT  
MADE DEATH SEEM THREATENING. THE BIBLE  
TELLS US THAT HIS NAME WAS SIMEON.**

**HE CAME UP TO JOSEPH AND MARY AS IF  
THEY WERE HIS FAMILY, AND TOOK THE BABY  
FROM THEM AS IF HE HAD THE RIGHT TO DO  
SO..... THEN HE BEGAN TO PRAISE GOD. I  
MEAN, *REALLY PRAISING GOD!***

**HOLDING THE BABY, HE SAID, “MASTER, NOW YOU ARE DISMISSING YOUR SERVANT IN PEACE, ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD; FOR MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION, WHICH YOU HAVE PREPARED IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL PEOPLES, A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE GENTILES AND FOR GLORY TO YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL.”**

**NOW IN CASE YOU DIDN'T GET IT, SIMEON WAS ANNOUNCING FIRST OF ALL THAT HE WAS READY TO DIE NOW THAT HE HAD SEEN THIS BABY; AND FURTHERMORE, THAT THIS BABY'S BIRTH WAS A WORLD-CLASS EVENT.**

**IT WAS SOMETHING THAT WOULD BRING  
GLORY TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL, WHICH  
HADN'T HAD MUCH GLORY FOR AT LEAST 600  
YEARS..... AND THAT WOULD BRING LIGHT TO  
THE GENTILES — WHICH MEANT ALL THE  
REST OF THE WORLD..... *OBVIOUSLY, THIS  
WAS SOMETHING VERY BIG; MUCH BIGGER,  
WHEN YOU THINK OF IT, THAN THE VISIT BY  
THE SHEPHERDS.***

**I WOULDN'T BLAME MARY IF AT THIS MOMENT  
SHE THOUGHT TO HERSELF: I WISH ALL THE  
FOLKS BACK IN NAZARETH COULD HEAR THIS!**



**SIMEON HAD HARDLY FINISHED HIS SPEECH  
WHEN AN ELDERLY WOMAN — 84, TO BE  
EXACT — WHO HAD BEEN A WIDOW SINCE  
SHE WAS IN HER EARLY 20S, CAME UP TO  
EXTEND HER CONGRATULATIONS..... AND  
SHE DID SO IN A FASHION JUST AS  
REMARKABLE AS WHAT SIMEON HAD  
DONE..... THE WOMAN'S NAME WAS ANNA.  
SHE WAS A WOMAN OF GREAT FAITH, WHO  
SPENT ALL HER TIME IN THE TEMPLE,  
WORSHIPING GOD WITH FASTING AND  
PRAYER..... SHE WAS SO MOVED BY THE  
SIGHT OF THIS CHILD THAT SHE INSISTED ON  
TELLING EVERYONE ABOUT THE UNIQUE  
SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS BABY.**

**IT WAS QUITE A DAY FOR MARY AND JOSEPH.**

**IT WAS A KIND OF EXCLAMATION POINT ON  
WHAT HAD HAPPENED SEVERAL WEEKS  
EARLIER WHEN JESUS WAS BORN..... ON THE  
NIGHT WHEN JESUS WAS BORN, MARY AND  
JOSEPH MIGHT RIGHTLY HAVE SAID, “NOW  
WHAT? IS THIS ALL THERE IS?”**

**BUT AT THIS EVENT IN JERUSALEM, THE  
SPIRIT OF GOD WAS ANNOUNCING THAT WHAT  
HAD HAPPENED IN BETHLEHEM WAS ONLY  
THE BEGINNING;**

**IT WAS GOING TO SPREAD AROUND THE  
WHOLE WORLD AND GO ON AND ON, BEYOND  
ANYTHING ANYBODY COULD IMAGINE.....**

**WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT BETHLEHEM WAS  
NOT SIMPLY THE BIRTH OF A BABY — NOT  
EVEN A MIRACLE BABY — BUT THE BIRTH OF  
A NEW AGE, THE BIRTH OF THE KINGDOM OF  
HEAVEN, COME UPON THE EARTH.**

**EVEN SO, ON THIS THIRD DAY AFTER  
CHRISTMAS, IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, 2014,  
CHRISTMAS ISN'T OVER.....**

**IN OUR CELEBRATION A FEW DAYS AGO WE  
HAD A CHANCE FOR OUR LORD'S BIRTH TO BE  
REBORN IN ALL OUR HEARTS. THE  
CHRISTMAS SERVICES REMINDED US OF HOW  
MUCH GOD LOVES OUR WORLD — AND HOW  
MUCH GOD LOVES EACH OF US! — AND THAT  
GOD'S KINGDOM IS STILL COMING, BECAUSE  
GOD HASN'T GIVEN UP ON OUR WORLD.**

**NOW.....JUST MAYBE YOU MIGHT  
WONDER HOW I KNOW ALL THIS..... I  
KNOW IT BECAUSE SIMEON AND ANNA ARE  
HERE THIS MORNING.**

**IT'S NOW THREE DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS,  
AND THE FAITHFUL ONES, THE ONES WHO  
HAVE WAITED FOR OUR LORD, ARE RIGHT  
HERE, GLAD ONCE AGAIN TO BE WORSHIPING  
THE CHRIST CHILD, THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM  
AND THE LORD OF CALVARY.**

**ANNA MAY BE FOUR OR FIVE OR SIX OR 10  
YEARS OLD AND WIGGLING IN HER SEAT OR  
85 AND WEARY, AND SIMEON MAY BE FOUR  
OR FIVE OR SIX OR 9 AND GETTING RESTLESS,  
OR 90 AND GETTING RATHER SLEEPY:**

**BUT I WOULD KNOW YOU *ANYWHERE*, SIMEON  
AND ANNA..... AND I'M NOT SURPRISED TO  
SEE YOU IN CHURCH, THREE DAYS AFTER  
CHRISTMAS..... THERE'S NO CHRISTMAS  
LETDOWN FOR YOU!**

---