

## **SUNDAY January 4, 2026 “Because of Bethlehem... Perhaps Today?”**

**Isaiah 63: 7-9 Luke 2:22-38 and Matthew 2:1-12**

This past week has seen some very different weather patterns emerge across Canada- snow squalls, rain, freezing rain, mild and then really quick changes to much colder temperatures and a lot of wind. New code alerts were put into place to help us to understand the severity of the storms- yellow, red, and orange -each indicating how bad the storms were and whether to stay off the roads and be at home! It was difficult for many people these last days because one could not travel by air or car due to storms and snow squalls. And so what is considered one of the busiest times on roads did not happen and people had to just stop. But one thing is certain- the sun did come out again! Just like Little Annie sings--“the sun will come out tomorrow.” And when the sun shines in January it is usually cold and bright and this is how we began 2026.

Imagine what would have happened if snow squalls or storms had been a part of the journey for Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem? Their journey was just over 80-90 miles depending upon which route they took. But they had no back-up plan or even a safe place to go to where they could stop. Yet they travelled to where they needed to register as a part of the family of David. But they weren't the only travellers at that time. Other descendants of David also had to make the trip. Then Mary delivered the baby in a stable. They had shepherd visitors and a few days to themselves. Mary and Joseph also knew that the baby had to be circumcised at 8 days old according to Jewish tradition. .

After about 40 days (6-8 weeks), the time of purification took place for the parents and this would also involve the baby being presented as holy to the lord. After 33 days a sacrifice is then offered to God. But on the occasion when Mary and Joseph are preparing to present Jesus we hear side stories about two people who have been waiting their whole lives for one special moment.

Simeon wakes up on this specific day and as he is a righteous and devout faithful person he attends to the temple quite regularly for prayer. The Holy Spirit is upon him, and he is looking forward to the consolation of Israel. He has been told that he would not die until he saw the Lord's messiah. So this day he wakes up and asks, ‘perhaps today?’ IS the day which I will see the one who will save HIS people? Perhaps today is the day? So Simeon gets ready and goes to the temple at the Spirit's urging.

At the temple, he sees a young couple with a baby; he asks the baby's name, and asks to hold him. He then praises God, “*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."*

Mary and Joseph are taken aback a little by what Simeon prays. And then when he speaks to Mary, he simply states Jesus' purpose- *"This child is destined for the falling and 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."*

Another person who lived, worshiped, fasted and prayed night and day at the temple was Anna. She was a prophet and an older widow. What had she prayed for? Was it similar to Simeon? Perhaps each day and night she prayed that she too would see the one who was to be born to save people. When she saw Mary and Joseph with the infant, she began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. After encountering both Anna and Simeon, and doing what was legally required Mary and Joseph left.

We must remember the story of Jesus' birth is not only about the young family and the shepherds. Prophecies and promises were being fulfilled and this was just the beginning. Mary and Joseph were just starting to realize who this baby really was!

We must also remember that once Mary had the baby, a bright star was spotted by observers in the East. These observers knew something had happened. Like the shepherds, they knew they had to see this thing which had happened and had been made known to them through the bright star above. So they began to travel and they headed into Jerusalem.

Upon arriving, they asked people in the city, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews?' which caused a stir in the streets amongst the people. King of the Jews? How did these people from away know about this? They saw a star in the sky and now wanted to worship Him. The star lead them to Jerusalem but it was the prophecy of Micah that they knew which lead them to Jesus. Then the star pointed them to the place right over where the child was. They had travelled far and their journey had taken much time. The child was now a little older and was not in a stable but a house. The star shone right where he was and when Mary and Joseph opened their doors, these wise men knelt before the child and praised God. They offered gifts- gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for his burial. They knelt in awe and respect. They believed in the God who placed the sign in the sky; they were instructed by the scriptures as to where to go and they were told by God to go home a different way in order to protect the Child. But do we see these things in our own lives today? Are there signs to watch for, is there instructions to go by and are we listening to the Spirit to guide our lives? The Wise men did- and this is one reason why they were respected. They looked for what God told them to go and see.

We too like to look and see things-- what's in the cookie jar, what is the weather going to be like tomorrow? Who is winning the hockey games? We also like to look for signs of what might happen in the future but do we really look to see and wonder about seeing Christ or when he will return?

On this first Sunday of 2026 what are you looking forward to in the coming year? Of what are you fearful? Simeon and Anna had lived their lives as faithful people and so their key purpose in life was looking for and waiting to see the One promised by God. Simeon was told you will see him before you die. Anna did not stop worshiping, praise and praying God until that day, Jesus was in the temple. It was 40 days after his birth-- Jesus was in the temple. And Simeon spots a young couple, turns to the child and asks the parents, May I hold him? The moment he waited for!- Now!

In 2026 there were many good moments- sad moments, moments of anger, frustration, laughter, joy, wonder and happy moments too. We do not know how the calendar will fill up with moments yet to come, yet for each of us as we reflect on the moment of Simeon's encounter with the Baby Jesus, Perhaps today what we really need is to encounter or experience Jesus in a new way for our future. What this might mean is that we will have a new attitude, new focus or renewed priority of not everything being about oneself and our issues, or our concerns or being above others-- that is putting our agenda first. But to be like Simeon- to glance at the baby Jesus and praise God. But we also know Jesus' story because we can remember what he did on the cross and as he left the empty tomb-- for you.

2026 has many international events and gatherings already planned- winter Olympics, FIFA football/soccer tournament as well as the Artemis II space mission. But what is primary for us is to understand the significance of Jesus' birth. Jesus came quietly in Bethlehem and slept in a manger. But when Christ returns and this could be any time Jesus will return with a shout, and all the nations will be gathered before him. All the angels will be present and he will be seated on the throne. And this will beginning a new heaven and a new earth where justice reigns. Because of Bethlehem people waited for the messiah; now we wait for Christ to come again. But in the meantime- we are called as Christ's faithful followers to do many tasks. These tasks include making disciples, and engaging God's word for us to put into action and being ready.

One of our loved Christmas hymns reads;

Lo, the days are hastening on By prophets seen of old.

When with the ever circling years Shall come the time foretold.

When peace shall over all the earth Its ancient splendors fling.

And the whole world give back the song Which now the angels sing!

Let us remember this that it is because of Bethlehem, we have faith and hope in Christ Jesus and that one day he will return, Perhaps today?

Let us pray

God of grace and love we praise you for your gift to us in Jesus born an infant in Bethlehem. Because of his humble birth we often forget that he is worthy to be praised. He gave his life so that we could live eternally with you. Help us to comprehend this as we begin this calendar year. Fill our hearts with hope and call us to seek forgiveness and love for one another. Hear our prayers we ask as we seek to follow your light. IN Jesus' name. Amen.