

Good evening. My name is Mason King. If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Luke 2. If you don't have one, there should be one in the seat back in front of you. We'll be in Luke 2 tonight. I'm one of the other two pastors here on staff. I've been on staff for three years. I spent my first two years in Dallas working over there, and then the Lord opened a door to come over to Fort Worth. My wife and I were really excited, because I'm a hometown boy. It's fun to get to preach in the town I grew up in and minister here.

The year 2013 has been a busy year for us. My wife and I came and took the new job in February. Then we moved, and then we had a baby, and I graduated from seminary. Then the campus started, and we caught up when the campus started. Actually, we've just been trying to catch our breaths since it opened. Advent was a season I was waiting on. It was something I was really excited about, because I love this season. I was really excited to get to preach the fifth weekend of Advent to close out the season, and the year, really.

As I began to think about this season of Advent and why I enjoy it so much, I began to realize it helps me exercise anticipation. I mean, if we're honest, there are no real true surprises in your daily routine anymore. Your phone does everything you want it to on time, and if not, you reboot it or you get a new one. Think about this. You're not really organizing your schedule about when your show comes on at night. You're either setting your DVR or you're watching it on Hulu. So most stuff is pretty predictable for you.

When we get to Advent, it's just a great exercise to go, "Okay, I'm going to grow myself in anticipation, in thinking of the coming of God in Christ." I've been reading the narratives over the last month and have really enjoyed seeing the detail which God the Father puts together for the coming of the Son. You think about the angels appearing, about the shepherds listening and hearing of the coming of the Son of God. The stars are shining and pointing to where the Christ child is. You think about Mary and Joseph. We're going to pick it up in Luke 2. If you have your Bible, great. Luke 2:22. I'll read it for us.

"And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.'

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'"

It has been quite a year for Joseph and Mary, hasn't it? If you're Mary, you're just going about your daily routine, and an angel shows up and calls you by name. That's enough to just go, "That's the highlight of the year. An angel calling me by name." Then he says, "Blessed are you because you've found favor with God. By the way, you're going to be pregnant. The Holy Spirit is going to do that. And that child in your womb is going to sit on King David's throne. He's never going to quit ruling."

If you're Joseph, you hear about your betrothed being pregnant. You fall asleep eventually that night, and an angel pops up in your dream and goes, "Hey, you. Divorce? Off the table. It's not going to happen. Quit thinking about it. That baby in her womb? The Holy Spirit did that, and you're going to be a dad. You're going to be a father to this Son who's going to save his people from their sins."

Nine months later, they're making the 80-mile trek back home, up and down, on foot, on the back of a donkey, trying to get to Bethlehem. They get into town, and no one would take them in. So Joseph and Mary end up in a cave of a stable in the darkness of night. Every year my wife and I try to go to a concert during Advent. It's a tour called "Behold the Lamb of God." It's a guy named Andrew Peterson. He has been doing it for about 14 years with his friends. There's an album by that title. I highly recommend it. Go buy it tonight. It's worth your time.

We go as much as we can, because it's kind of the highlight for me in getting ready for Christmas. For an hour you sit and listen to a lyrical retelling of God's work in redemption, of the foretelling of Jesus, of the coming of Christ, and of his coming again. So by the end of this concert, every time, I'm just wrecked. I

mean, I am wiping tears from my cheeks. My heart is so full. The best I can describe it is longing and anticipation.

This year it was different for me. Being a new father, it was different for me listening to stories of Mary and Joseph and Christ coming into the world. As I thought of Mary and Joseph in this little dark cave, Mary giving birth for the first time, no midwife, no nurse, no medicine, no sterile room, next to farm animals, sitting on straw with Joseph next to her...

Think about what a rock Joseph had to be as he held Mary's hand and wiped her hair from her face, both of them praying they'd make it through the night and their son would be okay. They made it, and the boy was okay. Those quick and shrill newborn cries were met with sighs and relief and kisses and love and exhaustion. Then here they are a week later in the temple to bring the boy before the Lord and obey God's law.

They walk in with the boy, and this man comes up and takes the baby out of their hands and lifts him up and starts talking to God. He says, "**Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.**" Joseph and Mary stand there speechless. It has been quite a week.

Then this man Simeon turns to Mary, still holding baby Jesus, and says, "**Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.**" To put it another way, "This boy will expose the hearts of those who pretend to be holy and those who fear they'll never be holy enough. He will show us all our need for salvation. He himself will be that salvation, and you, mother, will suffer because he will suffer. It will be like a sword piercing your own soul."

How would that sit with you, as a new parent? Simeon was a man of God, a holy man. The Holy Spirit had told him, as we read in Luke, that he was going to live until he saw the Lord's Christ. Now the majority of Israel thought the Lord's Christ was going to be a strong king coming in power to rule. Simeon was one of the quiet ones of Israel. He was in the temple where God's presence dwelt, and he was waiting on God to fulfill his promise.

You can hear his words. His words are layered with excitement and joy and warning and relief, because his vigil is over. His course has been run. I've been thinking through this passage. Honestly, when you read it, it's something you read and go, "Huh" and turn the page. "I don't know what to do with that. I don't know how to apply that well. That's kind of neat."

I was thinking through it, and I knew that God ordained all of them to meet up in the temple. The four of them come together, and the promises are confirmed once again. This is no ordinary boy. To borrow from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, God's secret rescue plan has taken on human flesh. If you think about it, this is the apex of Simeon's life.

All of his days are leading up to this moment. "I've seen the Lord's Christ. I can die a happy man. You fulfilled your word to me." But I couldn't get away from thinking about all of the days leading up to this one and what he had been doing all of those days. He had been eagerly anticipating God fulfilling his promise to redeem Israel.

The last week in our home has been pretty busy. How about you guys? I think some people are so busy and worn out they're just not here tonight. I walked into this month kind of worried that this week would creep up on me, that we would get to Christmas Day and be like, "Oh gosh, it's here!" I kind of live under this false idealism that every Christmas I'll just walk into that week full of the Spirit, at peace, just excited. Everything is bought and wrapped. The house is clean. We're ready. We're just going to roll through with no problems.

At the end of this week, Thursday night... We were in town all week, so that was easy for us. I talked to some of you who were in four different homes in one day in a different city. But at the end of all of the wrapping and the unwrapping, the cleaning and the packing the car and the unpacking the car and the dealing with the baby and getting home and putting the baby down and cleaning the dishes and eating dinner, we went in and sat on the floor of our living room. Not even on the couch, just on the floor, just spent. We just put a pillow behind us and sat there talking, just smiling, just worn out.

Maybe that was you this week. Maybe this week was harder than you'd like to really share. There are some people when it comes to the holidays... The holidays can remind you of who's not there who was there last year, and a day with family can bring more tension than relief. A place that should be celebration is just heavier. Maybe you were alone.

Mulling over this passage this weekend, closing out 2013 and heading into another year, I couldn't help but think of *our* vigil, the one *we* hold, our waiting on God to fulfill his promise to restore and redeem completely, for Jesus to appear and for us to see him, to see him in his glorified body with the marks of his sacrifice, of his love for us, of his devotion to the Father.

I couldn't help thinking of my own weariness in waiting for him to come, my tiredness in the midst of celebrating Christmas, the dullness I feel at times towards the truth of the incarnation, and how over the

last year I've just proved time and again, just giving evidence of my need for a Savior, as I've chosen what I think is right over what God says is right. I couldn't help thinking of my need for a renewed anticipation, a renewed hope, and a vision of who Jesus is. I tell you, I'm so thankful that he's patient with me, that he's patient with us. Second Peter, chapter 3:

"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you [ought we] to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation..." Be diligent to be found without spot or blemish. Here's the apostle Paul in Romans 8. **"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.**

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Be diligent to be found without spot or blemish. Our bodies will be redeemed. Wait for it with patience. The Lord speaks to our waiting in Mark 13.

"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a

man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

Be diligent to be found without spot or blemish. Our bodies will be redeemed. Wait for it with patience. Stay awake. Or to put it another way, be sober-minded. That's a tall order for every day, isn't it? Does anybody struggle with being diligent? Hey, if there's a time during the year to confess your struggle with diligence it's this week. Just think about the list you're about to dust off from last year. You're about to look at that and go, "Yep, I got one of those. That's good. Awesome."

Hey, did anybody else get a new pair of running shoes as motivation? That was one of the Christmas presents I asked for. How diligent are you against your sin? How about your pet sins, the ones you think you're entitled to as long as they don't get out of control, the ones you try and manage? Don't be fooled. Don't buy into that. You can't manage something that's there to deaden your heart to the things of God. It will always seek the increase. It will always want the ultimate. Don't give up on diligence against fighting sin.

How about patience? Are you good about delaying gratification? Any hands? How is your attitude when you don't get what you want right when you want it? Anybody? Since you're staring at me, I'll share me. I was in the grocery store this week. We were out running errands, and my wife said, "Hey, you take our daughter, just get this butternut squash..." Who knew how big a butternut squash was? They're about the same size. So daughter, squash. I'm holding them both. She said, "I'm going to run down the way. I'll be back."

So I get in line. There are like nine lanes and three checkers. That's always how it is. I get in there, and the lady in front of me... I'm just holding the wiggling baby and the still squash. The lady in front of me has been very diligent. Like extreme couponing. She is ready for this trip to the grocery store. So it's just lined out. I'm behind her, and I'm really proud of her because she has her envelope with the cash, and I can't knock that, because I've tried and failed on that one.

She's there, and I notice she has put a bar down between her stuff. I'm thinking, "You're doing two transactions." So I began to pick up the squash and set it down. My baby is squirming. I'm just boring a hole in this lady's head, like, "You need to show me mercy and let me go. I have the baby. I have one thing. You have 90 things. I should get to go."

You know what? My daughter was fine. I was being the child. It was my pride, my impatience, my entitlement that thought, "Obviously you should recognize how great I am, because I have a baby and she's cute. You should let me go, because she's about to get not cute, and it's going to go badly. So let's do it."

We talk a whole lot around here about how impatience really just shows that you think the world revolves around you, that you are the king of your kingdom. What happens to you if you don't get what you want right when you want it? How do you respond when people won't do what you want them to do? When someone gets your order wrong, when someone cuts you off in traffic, or when someone does something you think is going to embarrass you, are you a model of patience?

Then, being sober-minded. I'd say that's the opposite of living in fantasy. To stay awake. A fantasy is an escape from life, even just for a little moment. It might show up during work. You daydream at work. Or during your drive home. I'll tell you what it is. It's those little thoughts of, "I wonder what life would have been like if I'd done this, or if *that* was my job, or if I made as much money as *this* person, or if I'd married *that* person instead of *this* one, or if I had kids, or if my kids acted like *those* kids, or if I had *this*?"

That might seem really innocent because it's just for 10 minutes on the freeway or it's while you're checking your email at work. The thing is what that's doing is pulling you out of the reality God has put you in intentionally. That's toxic. There are people who pursue fantasy in such a way that they would up and abandon their families to chase a mythical reality because they can't handle the one they're in. They're thinking, "This isn't working for me. There's something I should go to."

I'm willing to bet most of us are not going to break like that. We're just going to take bite-size chunks of fantasy every day, believing the lie that, "It's okay; it's just a little bit." Don't be fooled. It's just taking a little bit of poison at a time, thinking, "I don't want what God has provided for me. If I'd done something else it would have been better."

You and I will enter into daily life, and we'll do one of two things. We'll either depend upon God to help us steward what he has given us, or we'll depend upon someone or something else. We'll put the weight of our reality on that person or that thing, and that will deaden us to the character of, the beauty of, and the knowledge of the things of God and God himself.

Hear me on this. The call of the believer in Christ is not to just be dedicated, patient, and sober-minded. That's pretty lame. Like if I say, "Hey, what does it mean to be a Christian? These three things," you're like, "I'm out. You want me to come, sing at church, sit through a guy talk for 40 minutes, and then go and just know I'm going to be dedicated, patient, and sober-minded. There are better things I could be doing."

I grew up in church, and when I got out of the youth group (I was around 18 years old), I was just dangerous enough and immature enough to have a really firm grasp of what I knew wouldn't make God mad and what I thought I could do to make him love me. Now 13 years later, it's really scary how quickly I can go right back to that, how quickly my heart can turn right from depending and trusting to earning. Anybody else?

It wasn't until the Lord did a grace to me to help me see that his love was for me... Not like general me, like, "Hey, me in the room," but *me*, Mason, with all of my insecurities, my anxieties, my worries, my fears, and my baggage. *Me*. He's truly good. I could respond to that and know that the call of the believer is to love Jesus more than life itself. As a result, your life points to Jesus. Why would we do that? How would we do that? First Peter 1:

"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [...]"

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Why would we love him more than life itself? Because he's more real than anything we've called life up to this point, and he's coming.

This is where I've been with Simeon all month: in his waiting. The text shows him as a devout man, faithful and sober-minded. Bright hope, eager anticipation. It's 13 verses, so I get his whole life is not wrapped up in those 13 verses, but what it says about him is important. In looking at what it says about him, I kind of want to be like him, but my heart is often weary in the waiting.

I know what Revelation 21 says, that God promises he's going to send Jesus back, and we're going to be in a redeemed and restored world, and we won't need the sun as we know it anymore because the beauty of God is going to shine so brightly. My heart is weary in the waiting, and my anticipation of that promise being fulfilled turns to preoccupation with today. What about you?

In my weariness, I want to share a couple of ways I wrestle. Maybe you could identify with some of these. There are seasons of my life I fear I've fallen asleep in my love with Christ, that I'm not good enough. I'll compare myself to other people and think, "Well, God must love them more than me. They're holier than I am."

Or I'll think about years where I was really close with him. I can just say, "Man, the Lord and I were like this. I just had sweet time with him every day, and it wasn't rushed, and it was good. I was walking in the Spirit." I'll think, "He must have really loved me then." If that's you, if you wrestle with comparing yourself with other people or even yourself on a different day, or if you think God's love for you fluctuates, hear me really clearly. God's standard of love for you is his Son. It's Jesus. That's a pretty high standard.

The fact he would invite you in because of Christ to be one of his children should give you solid and unshakable identity. Then there are days I want him to come and redeem, I want him to come and restore things, but if I'm honest, I really just want him to come so I'll be comfortable. I want to be out of pain. I don't want anymore phone calls about friends with cancer. I don't want to get dressed up to go to any more funerals. I want to get dressed up to go to the wedding feast and have one awesome party.

In this I wrestle, because I fail to want him for who he is. I tell you, at that moment I really just want him for what he's going to bring. I don't think that's all bad. He's bringing that for a reason, right? He's restoring those things so we can know and enjoy those things, but it's not our ultimate hope, to be free of those things. He is the object of our hope.

Then there are days I'm just really cynical, and my hope gets affected by that. I tend to manage expectations so I don't get disappointed. Anybody else? You just guard yourself all the time. You're never too excited so you don't get too sad. My heart has been wounded enough that I'm really quick to defend it. The thing is that this cynicism weakens my prayers.

If I don't trust that God's goodness toward me is true, if I don't really trust that God loves me like he says he does and his character is as good as it is, then why am I going to go to him with my worries? Why am I going to go to him when I'm having a bad day or when I'm wrestling with something or when there's suffering and tragedy in my life? What am I going to do with that?

Why would I trust him with my hope if I don't trust that he's good? See, cynicism weakens hope, and it's the opposite of anticipation. We're often too dedicated to ourselves to be diligent, unless the new season of your show comes out on Netflix. Then you're going to cruise right through it, right? It's amazing how self-discipline pops in with that.

We're often too selfish to be patient. We doubt that God's promises are true for us, because we want them now. I want to be done with this sin *now*. I don't want to struggle anymore with this. I want to be made new *now*. We begin to doubt the character of God, because he's not on our timeline. We need help with a good confession that we can't give ourselves. We need help outside of us. For that we read from the book of Hebrews. Chapter 4:

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Chapter 9: "...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." Chapter 10:

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

Jesus knows our weaknesses because he became like us. Simeon held him as a baby, and that baby is now with the Father, doing things on our behalf that we could never do. Because of this, our call to stay awake becomes a vigil of love. Though we have not seen him, we love him. Our diligence becomes the fruit of our gratitude for being rescued and for what we know is promised to come. Our patience is fueled by our humility before God, embracing his wisdom and his provision and his timing. Our weariness gives way to anticipation.

Can you remember as a child on Christmas morning being so excited, waking up way too early? You just want to go see if Santa ate your cookies. You're listening for some cough or somebody to roll over in bed in your parents' room so you can bust through the door and be like, "I think it's time for Santa." I have vivid memories of my sister and me peeking through the curtains, seeing the living room, the tree, and the presents, and then thinking, "Okay, are they up yet? Can we go get our parents? Let's go in there."

The thing is that we lose that with age, don't we? We think we're too smart to be fooled or surprised, and everything we've anticipated hasn't really panned out. Every gadget, toy, relationship, or person we've put weight on can't bear up under that weight. But that's really on us, because we fail to put that weight in the right place. The childlike joy of opening presents deepens as we await the unwrapping of God's redeeming work in Jesus. Cynicism gives way to wonder. Weariness rests in God's character. Though we have not seen him yet, we love him.

So for the believer in the room tonight, are you weary in the waiting? Have you embraced a defeated tiredness, doubting God's goodness toward you? Not the person next to you. *You*. Do you need to repent of a lack of diligence, a lack of patience, a lack of sober-mindedness? Do you need to confess a lack of love? Ask him for help.

In a little bit we're going to come to the Table. I'm going to give you time to take. We're not going to take corporately like we normally do, but I'm going to give you time to take and do the work of prayer before the Lord. Do the work. Don't put it off. I just read you from Hebrews that we have a high priest who knows our weaknesses. We're celebrating in this season because he has come to be like us and save us. Let that press you toward him.

For the unbeliever, if you're here and you don't know Jesus, welcome. I want to tell you that weariness looks very different for you without Christ, because you have no hope of rest, no hope of true rest except the thrill of something or someone new, or to try and find some kind of acceptance for whatever identity you've put on.

You could be married for 30 years, kids out of the house. You're successful in your career. But if you don't know the Lord, you're going to put your head on the pillow and you're never going to have true rest. You could be at any stage of your life, free to do whatever you want, pursue whoever you want, and you can embrace the mantra of our culture: "Only God will judge me." He will. You'll be trapped by your own intellect. You'll be trapped by your own provision, and that's a hard prison to escape from.

I want to tell you there's a part of you (I know, because it's in all of us) that wants fairy tales to be true, so come believe the only real one and be free. Read the book of John. Take the Bible in front if you don't have one. Take it home. It's our gift to you. Read the book of John. Read the book of Romans. Continue on in Luke, and see what it says about you, about me, and about Jesus.

If you want to talk to somebody tonight, we'd love to talk with you. Grab any of us here. Grab the person next to you. It might freak them out. Grab them. Ask them. But let your weariness give out. As our year closes, I can't think of any other prayer than how the New Testament closes, just to say, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come." Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I am so thankful for your patience. I am so thankful for Jesus. I pray tonight that you would help my brothers and sisters to hear your voice, to hear you, Holy Spirit, as you speak to them about the beauty of Christ, about the realness and the goodness of God's character, and help them to hear you, Lord. Where our hearts are weary, where we are cynical, where we doubt, where we fail to trust, help us, Lord. Maybe we just cry and say, "Help my unbelief." That's a prayer you honor. Help us, Lord.

For those who are here who don't know you, Holy Spirit, would you open their eyes to see the beauty of Jesus? Would you let their weariness give out, and let them just fall into your hands that are so capable,

that are so full of grace and love and mercy. May they find true rest for their souls. I bless your name, God.
I bless your name. We ask these things because of Jesus and in his name, amen.

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