

**“Commit to Worship”**  
**Rev. Brian R. Louis**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church, Dec. 31, 2023**

**Gospel Luke 2:22-40**

<sup>22</sup>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 <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup> “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;

<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel.”

<sup>33</sup>And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about

him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined

for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so

that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own

soul too.”

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was

of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a

widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with

fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God

and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Holy wisdom, holy word.

Headfake sermon on the evils of drink. Just kidding. Happy New Year everyone!

Last week at the Christmas Eve candlelight service, I had the pleasure of standing in the back of the sanctuary after George and I went down the aisles lighting candles, and I marveled at how beautiful the scene was. How gorgeous the sanctuary was, the singing of "*Silent Night*" together, and what an amazing service we shared with each other in worshipping God and thanking God for the gift of Jesus' birth.

Worship is an important part of the expression of our Christian faith. It has also been an important part of the life of Faith Presbyterian. It was one of the things that helped convince me to come here. I was encouraged to see the following passage in the

church's April 2021 Mission Study: "Our mission has been and will continue to be to provide a spirit-filled worship experience for the entire congregation through both fresh and continuing concepts in worship and meaningful music to open the hearts and minds of all to the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

My prayer and encouragement to you all as the new year dawns is to either maintain your commitment to worship or if that commitment has flagged, renew your commitment to attending worship.

As we stand at the edge of a new year, I think it's a good time to make a commitment to attend and participate in worship as part of our faith formation as much as possible.

Even before becoming a minister, I loved worship. I looked forward to the music and the scripture and sermon I would hear that Sunday. It gave me a chance to connect with other Christians and to feel the Holy Spirit moving through the congregation in the sanctuary. It gave me the chance to connect with God completely for an hour, to worship, and thank the Lord for all the blessings in my life.

So, what is worship? According to our Presbyterian Church (USA) *Book of Order*, "every action in worship is to glorify God and contribute to the good of the people."<sup>1</sup> In worship, each week on the first day of the week we commemorate the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.<sup>2</sup> In worship, "we are drawn into Christ's presence and sent out in the power of the spirit."<sup>3</sup>

Why do we do the things we do in worship? Well, we are told in the *Book of Order* that the order of worship is rooted in scripture, the traditions of the church, and our Reformed tradition.<sup>4</sup> For example, the prayer for illumination we say now each Sunday is something that is believed to have been common in early Christian worship, but over time has become something distinctive about the Reformed tradition, of which Presbyterianism is part. As the *Book of Order* states, "A prayer for illumination calls on the Holy Spirit to empower the reading, understanding, proclaiming, and living of God's Word. This sense of utter reliance on the illumination of the Spirit is an important and distinctive mark of the Reformed tradition."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Order*, W-2.0202

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Order*, W-3.0101

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Order*, W-3.0102

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Order*, W-3.0103

<sup>5</sup> *Book of Order*, W-3.0302

According to James White, our Christian worship grew out of the synagogue worship tradition of the Jews. The Jewish synagogue service originated in the Sixth Century when the Jews were in exile in Babylonia. The temple and Jerusalem itself had been destroyed and the Jewish people were in exile. They began gathering and worshipping Yahweh together. They read scripture to make sure they remembered who they were and where they came from. Worship for them was instruction and prayer time together. They remembered in these services what God had done for them in the past and they rejoiced in those memories. In reading scripture, they read their own history. They sang songs rejoicing in those memories. And they heard sermons reflecting on that history.<sup>6</sup>

White writes, "The core of synagogue worship is identification with the community's corporate memories of what God has done for God's people."<sup>7</sup>

Christians over the centuries have used that foundation from the synagogue worship and built upon it with our own traditions and rituals, including proclaiming the Word and adding the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>6</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship: Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 142-143.

<sup>7</sup> 144

Our New Testament lesson today is a full of references to worship, and the practice of one's faith. It reminds us how important worship and rituals are in faith formation and the expression of our Christian identity.

First, let's take the family of Jesus. They were loyal, faithful Jews, who took their faith seriously. The passage from Luke speaks of taking Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord to remain faithful to the law. Jewish religious law stated that every firstborn male was to be presented to the Lord. Joseph and Mary also offered a sacrifice as well.

Luke's gospel shows us that Joseph and Mary are committed to Yahweh.

Then there is Simeon, who is described as righteous and devout. Surely the Lord wants us to be righteous and devout, to praise God, and to worship God, as an outward sign of our love and devotion to the Lord most high.

Luke also says that the Holy Spirit was on Simeon and with him. At some point, and the gospel does not say when, that the Spirit told him he would not die until he saw the Messiah. That day he met Jesus, Luke says he was, "<sup>7</sup>Guided by the Spirit" and he came into the temple courts; and when he saw Jesus, he knew exactly who he was. Simeon proclaims, "my eyes have seen your salvation," and that Jesus would be a light not just

to the Jews, but to all people. Here, for the first time, is mention of salvation for the Gentiles, that Jesus is the Savior of all people.

And then there is Anna. What do we know about Anna from the gospel? She is described as a prophet. So, she had special skills others would not have. But she had other callings as well, and one of them was to worship God. She worshipped God every day. She spent all of her time worshipping God. She is totally committed to worship.

Anna had been worshipping God every day for years in the temple. And she was given the greatest gift ever in life. She saw and met the Messiah. After having this encounter with Jesus, she is still struck by the glory of that moment and tells her fellow worshippers in the Temple about the Messiah and what she has seen.

In the current edition of our devotional *These Days*, Scott Phillips writes of the story of Anna: "Scripture tells us she never left the temple, and we know the temple would have been filled with people. We read that she worshipped and engaged in spiritual practices of fasting and prayer, actions that would have drawn her closer to her creator.



Phillips writes, "Why is it that I hear loneliness [sic] in this story? Her life was filled with the presence of God and the companionship of other worshipers. Perhaps I could only wish my life were so full."<sup>8</sup>

Are our lives fuller because of our attending worship? Does the presence of God in the sanctuary lift us up? Does the fellowship of believers praising God boost our spirits? Is the fellowship of worship and coffee hour bringing smiles to our faces and making us feel more fulfilled and happier in our lives? If we answer yes, then why wouldn't we want more of that?

And if we answer no to those questions, let us ask ourselves why? Why don't we feel uplift and lighter and happier spirits after worship. Perhaps there is something going on with us that is getting in the way of the joy of worship. If that is the case, I encourage you all to look at yourselves and see what might be getting in the way of joyful worship, and then talk to me or a trusted friend about it.

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<sup>8</sup> Scott Phillips, *These Days: Daily Devotions for Living by Faith*, Dec.30, 2023

We are called to worship God, and we are called to do that together. As James White writes, "The importance of meeting or coming together can hardly be overstated."<sup>9</sup>

Let us in this new year commit to being at worship as much as we can. Let's commit to be here so much that when we aren't here, people wonder where we are because we are here so much. Let us live in the Holy Spirit here in our midst and let us pray that the Spirit guides us back here to Faith every Sunday so we can glorify and praise the Lord who has given us everything. For all the blessings in our life flow from God's blessings and grace. Let us make a commitment to gather to worship the Lord and thank God for all this grace and joy every week and feel the spirit of God lift us all up.

Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship, Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 34.