

Scripture: Luke 2:25-35

Text: Luke 2:34-35

Message: Legacy and Destiny

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End of Year Service

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The great year-end review has been in full swing. There are declarations of the newsmaker of the year, news story, politician, entertainer, sports person or team of the year. Proclamations are made on the most significant event in medicine, sports, technology, entertainment, etc., etc.. Do you remember all the names and events that are brought forward? Maybe they stir a hint of memory somewhere back in the mind, as you reflect on this past year.

Let me try another question. Do you remember where all the focus of attention was 10 years ago? The final Harry Potter book came out. Steve Jobs unveiled the iPhone. The hashtag was invented and first used in a tweet by US product designer Chris Messina. (By the way, when he suggested the idea of the hashtag to Twitter, he was told flat out, "These things are for nerds. They're never going to catch on.") Also, 10 years ago, Buddhist monks joined anti-government protesters in Myanmar, starting what some called the Saffron Revolution. And the subprime mortgage crisis started in 2007, continuing into 2008. How much of that did you remember?

What about 100 years ago? What was making headlines then? Well, beginning in 1917, Albert Einstein and others applied general relativity to the structure and evolution of the universe as a whole. This led to the formulation of the big bang theory in 1922 by the Russian mathematician and meteorologist Alexander Friedmann.

Also, on November 2, 1917, the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed as a formal statement of policy by the British government. It stated that "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

100 years ago was also the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as the battles of Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele as part of the First World War. And, of course, we cannot forget to mention that in 1917, the NHL (National Hockey League) was formed.

But in that same year, some other people were born. But who cares about babies?

What could be more important than First World War battles and Vladimir Lenin leading the Bolsheviks? Well, consider the influence that has been made by John F. Kennedy or Indira Ghandi. A less familiar, but also influential person born in 1917 was John Whitney, a pioneer in computer animation.

All important people and events making an impression on world history. Do we remember them? Or only when we hear their names mentioned, or read about them?

Who were considered to be the movers and shakers in the first century? We have them listed by Luke at the beginning of chapter 2. Luke had done his research before writing this gospel. He was sure that he had all his facts straight. There were no calendars in Luke's day; dates were remembered by who was in authority. Caesar Augustus was number one man in Rome over the entire Roman empire. It was like being king of the world. Here was a man of authority and power. He decided that he wanted a census taken. So citizens under his authority had to travel many miles because of this decision.

There was also Quirinius, governor of Syria. Here was another important man. He was well-known enough that his name is used for specifying the date of the census that Luke wants to draw his readers' attention to.

We could also turn to Luke 3 to find another list. There we read the names of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, his brother Philip, Lysanias, Annas and Caiaphas. These seven men are the "who's who" of the first part of the first century. These are the men to be reckoned with. These are the men who determined the direction of world history.

Ten years ago that list would have included J. K. Rowling, George W. Bush, Hugo Chavez. Today we hear very little about them. Instead we hear about Justin Trudeau, Donald Trump, Theresa May and Kim Jong-un. In the year-end reviews we find a listing of the important people and top news stories. That is where we find what and who is important in our world.

But who does Luke turn our attention to after listing the "who's who" names for the year? In Luke 2, he writes, "So Joseph also went up to Bethlehem with Mary." Or in Luke 3, after the seven top executives are listed we are told, "the word of God came to John." "Ha!," says God. "All you big shots are passed by. It's not about you, or what you do that has the greatest impact in the world. You are not as important as you think you are nor as others may think you are."

In fact, Simeon had it right. When he saw Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus as a baby in the temple, he went up to them and praised God. Then he added, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel." This baby will have a major impact on the lives of many people. And old Simeon couldn't have been more right.

The calendars of the world do not centre on Caesar Augustus or Quirinius. Time is calculated by the year of *Jesus'* birth. One reason we remember people like Caesar Augustus or Quirinius is by their connection with Jesus' birth.

Jesus was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was a travelling preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled more than 300 kilometres from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race.

All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as much as that one solitary life. ('One Solitary Life,' attributed to James Allan Francis, 1864–1928)

Why would this one baby cause the rising and falling of many? Jesus expresses this same thought in Luke 20:17-18, quoting from Psalm 118, "What is the meaning of that which is written, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone or cornerstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (See also 1 Peter 2:6-8)

What Simeon is saying, what Jesus is saying, is that a person's relation or attitude toward Jesus is what really matters, to the point of having eternal consequences. The

meaning of our lives, our purpose, our hope and eternal future is in relation to Jesus.

We come to Jesus and humble ourselves in confessing sin. We rise in forgiveness and grace. We might want to stand on our own accomplishments and goodness. When we stand before a holy God, we are far from perfect and far from great. It's not about who we are or what we do; we are one more person or event in the history of the world. It's about what God does through us that will last. It is what we do in Jesus' name that has a lasting impact. It is the building of God's kingdom on the rock and foundation of Jesus that will last.

This child which Simeon took in his arms determines destinies. What really matters in this life is our relation to this person, Jesus. The gifts that you received for Christmas this year may wear out. Or in a year or two you may have forgotten what you received. Your influence in the community or your accomplishments at work will be forgotten. The people in the headlines and year-end reviews have a limited legacy, but will someday be forgotten.

What we have done for Christ has a lasting impact. When we have followed the Holy Spirit's nudge and served in Jesus' name, he has a lasting influence on others through us.

As we come to the end of the year, we consider what has taken place, what is important, and how God has been part of our lives and the life of our church.

We remember God's promises in baptism to Annabelle Cassibo. We give thanks for the promises made at the weddings of Eric and Courtney De Kroon and Reagan and Steven Willett. We remember God's blessing in the lives of those who have passed on and God's comfort for those who grieve: Tammo Hazelaar, Ebel Geertsema, Hanna Bakker, Lucy Van Dommelen, Coba Bangma, Hermien Pijl, Jayne Vanston, Ad Goosens.

We give thanks for Cadets and GEMS and Bible studies and SERVE and Summer Kids Club and weekly worship and The Big Give and so much more. Not that it's about us. It's not about having our name in the headlines or our picture on the front page. It's about what God has done through us. It's about living out our relationship with Jesus, serving faithfully that he receives the glory.

In all of our remembering of the past year, what is important? What is our legacy that we are leaving for others to consider? We remember what God has done. We remember his presence in our experiences. We remember his faithfulness. To God be the glory!

Amen.