

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." 36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Well, it's over. Christmas is over! It came and went—no white Christmas this year. As of early on Friday morning, as far as I can tell, there is no longer any Christmas music on the radio. How was your Christmas? Were people happy with and thankful for the gifts you gave? Did you receive what you wanted? Did you have fun with friends? Did you enjoy seeing family? Are you back at work after a couple days off? Do you wish it were Christmas Day for about 2 weeks? Are you happy and relieved the Christmas holiday and its excitement and stress is over? This Christmas—were all your hopes and dreams fulfilled?

"The Fulfilled" is the focus of our worship service today—but what does it even mean to be fulfilled? What does it mean to "find fulfillment?" Well, if your Amazon.com order has been fulfilled—it means the gift has been delivered. Your purchase is complete. The dictionary also gives two more definitions: "satisfaction or happiness as a result of fully developing one's abilities or character." And, "the achievement of something desired, promised, or predicted." So—did you find fulfillment in your Christmas experience this year? Did your experience give you happiness? Did it go how you thought it would? If your answer is "yes" or "no"—it doesn't matter. This sermon is for you, because today we are going to talk about **The Gift that Gives True Fulfillment**.

If you think back just a minute to all those questions about you how your Christmas was, you'll notice I asked about presents, family and friends, and your mental state in this busy season. You may have also noticed that there was something glaringly missing: any mention of the reason for CHRISTmas—I didn't mention the newborn Savior himself at all! And therein lies the problem, because in our life, all too often we look to the wrong things in life for fulfillment.

Sometimes we look to money and possessions to give us happiness—to make us feel complete. We think that if we have enough *stuff* we will be happy. If I can just have a reliable car that doesn't break down, *then* I'll be content...if I can just have the wardrobe I really want...*then* I'll really feel comfortable wherever I go...if I could just get a little nicer place to live, *then* life would be better. Maybe your mind is responding—that's not me! I don't need all that stuff, and in fact, I am a self-proclaimed penny pincher! Well trust me, I know from my own experience that frugal people can look to money for fulfillment as well. It's not the stuff I wanna buy with my money—but my bank account that I depend on to be plentiful. But, no matter how much money you have or how secure your bank account is, you can never be too sure that you're okay and have enough. And so you're wracked with worry. Your desire for fulfillment can *never* be fulfilled by money or possessions, because it is my nature to always want more and to always fret about if my financial well-being is *really* secure.

Sometimes looking to the wrong place for fulfillment simply involves too much of a good thing. For example—love for others! I love my wife a lot. She is absolutely wonderful, and I am incredibly blessed to be married to her. She makes me very very happy. She is caring, loving, and supportive. But if I look to her to fulfill my life—if I look to her as my ultimate source of happiness and purpose in life...then I am going to be sorely let down. If she looks to me for fulfillment...she is going to be let down. Because I am going to forget important things she's told me. I am going to be emotionally vacant. I am going to fail to sympathize with how she's feeling. I am going to fail to give her the love, attention, and quality time that she needs and deserves. I try to be a nice guy and a great husband, but I am faaar from perfect. So if you look to another person or relationship to make you complete, when you realize they're not perfect or when they let you down, you will be absolutely devastated! Having loving relationships with people is a great gift from God, but viewing someone else *too highly* just causes you to be bitter and feeling let down.

One final false source of fulfillment—our own life accomplishments and activities. I look to my own life for my importance—to feel fulfilled about *who I am*. No matter how good of a friend, employee, or spouse you are—no matter how good you are at sports, how many friends you have and how many parties you get invited to, no matter how many people like your Instagram photo, favorite your tweet, or like your new Facebook profile picture—the one that you put up kinda hoping a bunch of people would notice it...you will never find complete fulfillment in those activities and accomplishments. You will wonder why someone who surely saw your picture didn't click the "like" button. You'll always wonder if you're doing a good enough job at everything in your life to please your friends, your boss, your family. You'll always question if you're really good enough. It's impossible to find true fulfillment in our life accomplishments.

All these things—money and possessions, people and relationships, and our accomplishments and activities...they'll never give us fulfillment. Because they do not have rock-solid proof to support them. No matter how often people tell you you're great or tell you they love you or tell you they appreciate you and all that you do—there's a part of us that always questions the validity of that statement. The doubting part of us will ask "What if I mess up? What if their feelings change? What if I do something that's not nice—so I can't feel good about how nice of a person I am? What if...it's human nature to ask what if? And have doubts about everything.

But there is one thing that fulfills us that we never need to question. That will never leave us wanting and asking and wondering about its validity. One who makes us totally complete. Jesus! We need only look at the proof—look at what Jesus did to back up all of God's promises.

Jesus was willing to become assume the humble character of a baby being born. He was willing to become human. And beyond the amazing humility required for God to become human—think about the facts of the Christmas story. The most important birth in the history of the world, and God orchestrated it so that there was no room for Jesus to be born in a proper place. He was born in an animal house. Jesus wasn't laid in a comfortable crib in a climate-controlled neo-natal unit. No, Jesus spent his first night in an animal feeding trough. Suitable for an animal, but for the King of Kings? No.

Willing to subject himself to all the laws—Luke 2:21-24 detail all the different regulations Mary, Joseph, and Jesus adhered to. ²¹ **On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.** ²² **When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord** ²³ **(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"),** ²⁴ **and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."** And verse 39 says that Joseph and Mary did everything required by the Law of the Lord. The God of the universe was willing to be under laws made for human beings.

Jesus was also willing to be hated! Simeon said in verse 34: **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against."** Jesus was willing to not have social status. Willing to be the object of people's rage. Willing to be disrespected by people over whom he possessed ultimate power. Willing to be rejected by people who had been waiting for him for dozens of generations! Some people would follow Jesus, and some people would spend every ounce of energy they had to try to shut down Jesus' ministry and take his life. And Jesus knew this would happen! But he allowed it to happen, so that he would fulfill God's promises.

He wouldn't do all of that unless he had a reason. And that reason is you! Jesus is the gift that truly fulfills your life! He destroys financial worry—because he's given you the riches of heaven! The best relationship is with Jesus, because he will never let you down. He will love you perfectly and love you in the exact ways that you need. You don't have to try to give your life importance—Jesus showed you just how important you are because he was willing to become a human, be subject to the whole law, and to be hated, tortured and killed for *you*! Jesus completes your life. So like Simeon, you can say, "I have seen my Savior! I don't need anything else. Praise the LORD!"

Just like he completely fulfilled Simeon and Anna's life, Jesus also completely fulfills your life. And just like Simeon and Anna shared that fulfillment with others in word and song, so can you! You can say, **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."** You can **"give thanks to God and speak about the child to all who are looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."**

So...How was your Christmas? No matter how your Christmas experience was—whether you had a great time or a terrible time, whether you got every gift you wanted, or you plan on making use of every single gift receipt you have, whether your earthly Christmas experience gave you lots of joy or lots of sorrow—your Christmas is complete. You have true fulfillment. Because God has given you what he promised, what was predicted, and what we desperately need. Jesus. Amen.