



Home for the Holidays

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God

Luke 2:38

Lesson Two: Giving Thanks

Tucked into the verses of the Christmas story is the account of Mary and Joseph presenting the baby Jesus before the priests and rabbis in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Law required such presentations in the Temple on the eighth day if at all possible. Had it not been for the census, Mary and Joseph would probably not have made it to the Temple. But Bethlehem was a only hard day's journey from Jerusalem, and so the couple traveled to fulfill the Law.

In the Temple sat an elderly prophetess named Anna. Rarely are we told the ages of women in Scripture, but Luke, ever the meticulous historian, reveals that she is eighty-four. She spent her nights and days in the Temple; praying, fasting, looking for the day when the Messiah would come. On this day, she was not disappointed. Anna was given words by God about the baby. Mary and Joseph marveled at what she spoke. And Anna gave thanks to God.

The holidays tug us along a road of gratitude, first setting aside a special day for us to remember to be thankful and then offering us several occasions to receive gifts for which to be thankful. Only a Scrooge could wander through the season without giving pause about the people and things for which to be thankful.

Recent studies, though, are indicating that we should do more than just pause. Dr. Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California Davis, in his ground-breaking book, *The Psychology of Gratitude*, challenges us to write down our notes of thanksgiving. He believes that the act of writing allows us to see the meaning of events going on and reaffirm them in our lives.

The idea is certainly catching on. Social networks allow us to "tweet" messages of thanks or to "like" certain things, this generation's avenue of thanksgiving. At the online gratitude community, thankfulfor.com, people are given a 24/7 opportunity to express thanks. What do people write about most in their gratitude journals? While there are plenty of posts like, "I am thankful for Bud Light," material things ranked below people, relationships and experiences. In fact, jobs and money were listed ninth out of the top ten.

As you travel through your days to the celebration of Christmas, pause at several points along the way to be thankful. Give thanks for your family who has been so instrumental in bringing you to this place and this time in your life. Give thanks for your circumstances which allow you to be where you are and with whom you enjoy life. Remember to be thankful for the God who is working behind the scenes of your life, orchestrating and directing.

This Christmas, come up to Jesus and give thanks.