

A JOURNEY THROUGH WINTER

(Luke 2:22-33)

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. (Proverbs 13:12)

1. REMEMBERING What times in your life could you label “winter” or “heart sick” times, when it was hard to hold on to hope?
2. REFLECTING How did you succeed in holding onto hope until your deferred hope was fulfilled? (If your answer to question #1 was “right now,” how are you doing with your deferred hope?)
3. DISCOVERING Read Luke 2:22-33 aloud. Answer the questions that follow.

²²When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, 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”), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵Now 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 upon him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷Moved 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, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the sight of all people,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

³³The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

- Simeon spent his entire life waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise that he would see the Messiah before he died. What do you imagine it was finally like for him to see Jesus?
 - How does Simeon describe Jesus and how does his description help us understand the gift God is giving?
 - What might Simeon have done to sustain his hope during his own winter, during the many years its fulfillment was deferred?
4. CONNECTING How might you facilitate or recapture Simeon’s spirit of anticipation in the fulfillment of God’s promises? (E.g. You might choose to read the book summarized on the next sheet.)
 5. RESPONDING What will you do to sustain your hopes in the future during the “winter” seasons, when their fulfillment is deferred?

Disappointment has an upside as well. It inspires hope by making hope necessary.... Disappointment brings forth better dreams, the longing for a larger hope, without which we are intolerably miserable.

(Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*)

HOPE FULFILLED: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe

In his classic children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, English author C. S. Lewis tells the enchanting tale of four children magically transported through an old wardrobe into the fantasy world of Narnia. Narnia was created by Aslan, the great, golden lion. It is a world of nymphs, dwarfs, fauns, and other delightful creatures, but all is not well. Aslan has been away and evil has entered the world. The cruel White Witch, who is the self-proclaimed Queen of Narnia, has cast a diabolical spell on the land that has had chilling consequences.

As a result of her spell, the land has become as cold and severe as the White Witch herself. The snow-covered ground is frozen solid, and the landscape is grey and bleak. There are no sounds of running water or singing birds. The occupants of the forest live in fear and tremble at the mention of the evil queen. They describe Narnia as a place where it is "always winter, but never Christmas"—a place of fear and trepidation, without cheer or celebration—with little hope for change. All who have dared to defy the White Witch stand frozen in time within the walls of her castle, turned to stone at the touch of the wicked witch's wand.

There are some, however, who continue to trust quietly in the ancient rhymes that promise the return of Aslan and springtime. These faithful few are rewarded when Aslan returns to Narnia and sets it free from the spell of the White Witch. As his presence in the land is gradually felt, the ice melts and the landscape reveals long-covered patches of green. Blue sky returns amidst the parting clouds and the land is bathed in the warmth of sunlight, the noise of running water, and the music of singing birds. But when the White Witch realizes her spell is weakening, she captures one of the children and threatens his life to reassert her power.

To redeem the boy, Aslan gives up his life on the great Stone Table, much to the delight of the evil queen. But her satisfaction is short-lived. Because of his sacrifice, the spell of deep magic from the dawn of time is completely broken and winter ends. Aslan and the figures once frozen in stone are given new life. Encouraged by these events, the four children and the other creatures of Narnia defeat the White Witch in battle, and Aslan's rule is established throughout the land.

We, too, live in a world where all is not well. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, people have experienced the chilling consequences of evil's presence in the world. Satan has cast a diabolical spell on men and women that causes many to live under the grey fear of death with few reasons to celebrate. For many, the future looks bleak because they possess little hope for change. The good news of the gospel is that the Lion of Judah has returned to His world to set it free from its long, bleak winter. Through the birth, life, and redemptive death of Jesus, the "spell" of sin can be broken. That's the message the early Christian witnesses proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and throughout the world.

Like Aslan's coming to Narnia, Jesus' coming to earth brought about significant changes. (Aslan is the Christ figure in Lewis' stories.) At Christmas we celebrate his birth. At Easter we celebrate his death, that as an adult He gave His life to set people free from the spell of sin. This work is for all people without distinction. People from all walks of life can be bathed in the warmth of sunlight when they embrace this gospel. Stone hearts are given new life. Singing replaces silence. Faithful followers of Jesus in every age have a reason for singing. They know that when the Lion of Judah's rule is established in their hearts, they join a battle in which victory is already assured. Their hope is a journey through winter.