

A New Temple!
[Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-5, 10-13](#)
[Luke 2:22-38](#)

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Do you want to have a meaningful life? Do you want to live a life of power and purpose? Do you want to live the kind of life God wants you to live? Do you want to worship God properly and well? Do you want to practice true religion?

In the Old Testament, the Temple was the center, the foundation stone, of their faith. The Temple in Jerusalem was the only place you could offer sacrifices. It was where you went to worship God. For the Israelites, worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem was the heart of true religion. That's why they were so anxious to rebuild.

Let's remember the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem twice: first in 597 BC and then again in about 587 BC. That time, they destroyed the Temple, too. Most of the people were then forced-marched into exile in Babylon.

In 539 BC, the Persians conquered the Babylonians. And now, Cyrus the Persian has given the Israelites permission to leave Babylon, go back to Jerusalem, and rebuild the Temple. The time is about 537 BC. As soon as they can, the exiles go back. They begin offering sacrifices. And soon, they lay the foundation stone for the new Temple.

This is huge. Everyone comes together. They worship and celebrate. And when the foundation stone is finally put into place, the people yell and shout and rejoice. But some don't.

“Many of the priests and Levites and head of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy” (vs 12).

The people are rejoicing for what is new but also weeping for what is lost. Which shouldn't surprise us.

When a church burns down and the congregation rebuilds, there's always conflict. On the one hand, there's tremendous loss. 'I was married in the old church. My children were baptized there. It was where we held my mother's funeral.' There's a lot of loss.

But the new church is handicapped accessible. The H/VAC is cheaper to run. The electronics are brand new. Bathrooms are updated. There's no asbestos in the roof and no lead in the paint. It's a much more user-friendly building. There's a lot to celebrate.

When churches change, weeping and rejoicing go hand-in-hand.

At least now, though, the Israelites are getting back on track. At last, they can start worshipping God rightly, being the kind of people God wants them to be.

Let's skip forward to our New Testament Lesson. The newborn Jesus is being presented at the temple. Clearly, the priests and the people are still making all the correct offerings and sacrifices. Right religion is being practiced. The Temple is going strong.

In fact, the importance of the Temple has increased. The Temple complex has expanded. It's become almost 40 acres of shops, meeting places, outdoor patios. The Temple is even more important now than it was back in 537.

And then, Simeon shows up. Oh, dear! Old Man Simeon has a celebration and a warning. Weeping and rejoicing. Jesus will be a light

of revelation to the Gentiles and glory for the people of Israel, he says. But also, Jesus is destined for the falling and rising of many. He will be opposed. Even Mary will suffer a sword in her heart.

Simeon is saying Jesus is going to rock the boat. Jesus is going to tear down and build up. Jesus is going to create newness all over the place. And one of those places is the Temple. Jesus is going to replace the Temple. Jesus is going to replace the Temple.

We Christians know Jesus is our Temple. Jesus is our Temple. Jesus is the foundation stone of our faith. Through Jesus we worship God rightly. Our faith is built on him.

Look at our bulletin cover, just a moment. The young man who drew it got it right. I put the Scripture out there and he came up with this cover. And he got it exactly right. Notice the cross on the top. Jesus is our temple.

Which means we don't have to go to Jesus. We don't have to make a pilgrimage to Jesus. Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name, that's where he is. We, now, right here, right now, are in the presence of Jesus. We are in the new Temple.

If we're going to practice right religion, if we're going to live a meaningful, godly life, a life of purpose and power, we need to know our Temple intimately. The old Temple was a place. You could go there and look at it and walk around it. Our new Temple is the living Christ. To really worship in him we need to know him, up close and personal.

Christianity is not just knowing what Jesus did. It can't be boiled down to "What Would Jesus Do". It's a way of life. We have to learn it **and** live it. And that means having an intimate, personal knowledge from the foundation up.

Monday night I was here practicing the piano. I heard a noise in the hall and suddenly there was Patty Ruckman with about 12 members of the New Bremen High School Choir. They were going to sing for a group meeting in the Assembly Room and wanted to rehearse. Patty sat down at the Piano, I sat behind her, the students stood around it and they rehearsed.

They were good. Very good. They weren't just singing notes. They weren't just mouthing words. They had learned the foundation. They were breathing in the right places, they were articulating, they were blending their voices together. It was marvelous. They were living in the music. They were in it, up close and personal. They were in the music the way we should be in Jesus.

Or, think of a championship sports team. They don't just run set plays. They can change, they can improvise, on the fly. They intuitively know what to do and where the other players are without having to think about it. They know each other so well they are in each other's heads.

Instead of stopping to ask WWJD, do we know Jesus so well we intuitively know what he would do? Do we do it without having to think about it?

Friends, Jesus is the foundation stone of our faith. He is our Temple. He is our way of life. Do you want to have a meaningful life? Do you want to live a life of power and purpose? Do you want to live the kind of life God wants you to live? Do you want to worship God properly and well? Do you want true religion, right religion?

Get to know Jesus, not just the facts about him. Get to know Jesus in person. Know what he did **and** what he's like. Get to know him the way a good choir knows the songs they are singing. The way a good sports team is inside each other's heads.

We don't have to travel to Jerusalem. We can worship God right here in New Bremen. When we gather in Jesus' name, he is with us. The true Temple, the living Temple, comes to us and invites us in. Because this is how much God loves us. Thanks be to God! Amen!