

SIMEON'S SONG THE NUNC DIMITTIS
First Sunday After Christmas
Rev. Steven D. Spencer – Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church

St. Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

Well it's over for another year, the celebration of Christmas. After all the parties, the food, the gifts, the services, the days after Christmas are characterized by leftovers, crinkled up wrapping paper, and a definite lack of energy. The holidays are winding down; now comes the long rest of a cold damp winter and a new year.

Where do you go from here? What have you planned? Plans aside, what will happen to you as 2012 begins and continues? There may be lots of positive things in store: Grandchildren or great grandchildren, a warm vacation, new love, stability, a new job. There may be some unwanted troubles: strife at work or unemployment, family disagreements, a call from the doctor because he wants to run some more tests.

What will happen to you from here? You have some plans, but you don't know much for sure. So, really, what can you be certain of? This brings us to our text and Simeon.

I. SIMEON

He's man of mystery is walking in the temple; I say this because we don't know much about him. We know his name is Simeon, but that's about it. Traditionally, he's pictured as a wise, elderly man who has led a good life of many years; but we don't know. He could be a nineteen-year-old, still working on a full beard. Is he married? Widowed? Healthy? Ailing? Does he have kids? Grandkids? A good life? Bad? We just don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. It tells us his name is Simeon.

The Bible also says that Simeon ***"was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*** That's why he's at the temple-he's going to see the Messiah.

Suddenly, He appears. The long-awaited Messiah is there; not just a human being, but the Lord has suddenly come to His temple. The Son of God has become flesh to be the Savior of the world, and He is making His first incarnate visit to His Father's house. The prophecy is fulfilled! The Messiah is on the temple grounds.

But does anybody notice? Does anybody care? Simeon does. He knows, and he cares because the Holy Spirit has told him. He confidently walks up to the Messiah and His escorts. He boldly takes hold of the Savior. And

there, out in the middle of all the temple activity, he sings so that everyone who hears will know: *"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, According to Thy word; For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to lighten the Gentiles, And the glory of Thy people Israel."*

The Lord Himself has come to His temple with salvation; He has come to redeem His people. It's a glorious and divine truth; so Simeon sings that song of praise. Ignorant of God's plan, it's quite likely that others thought he was nuts or a blasphemer, take your pick.

Temple-goers have come here to worship in the presence of the almighty Lord who made the heavens and the earth. There on the grounds, Simeon is holding a 40-day-old baby in his arms standing next to his parents who look like paupers. Oh, Simeon isn't concerned with the Holy of Holies, where the Lord dwells in His glory. He's peering at the Baby in his arms, and singing the strangest of lullabies: *"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word."* Like this Baby could fulfill his request. Like the Baby is in a position to send Simeon on his way. As if the Baby is the Lord.

We talked about this all through last year: If you go by your eyes alone, you're going to miss the Savior. Go by what the Holy Spirit says into your ears, and there He is. People who are looking for some glorious display of power to prove the presence of God will hustle by the Baby and keep on looking. But by faith, Simeon knows. The flesh and blood he cradles in his arms is the Son of God incarnate. He is Immanuel, "God with us," God is present with His people as God and man. He is with His people to bring peace, salvation, light, revelation and glory. Don't let the hairless head and the tiny toes fool you: This is the Lord of heaven and earth. And though that toothless mouth can't form words yet, He has been speaking from all eternity. He is there. By faith, Simeon acknowledges His Savior and rejoices in His salvation. He embraces the Word made flesh, and he is forgiven for all of his sins by the Baby Jesus. That's why he can depart in peace.

He departs in peace, and what happens to Simeon then? We're back to, "We don't know," for he disappears from Scripture. Traditionally, we assume that he's an old man who dies and is called to glory soon after. On the other hand, he could have lived forty more years. Maybe he had a good life; maybe he had a terrible one by human standards.

But Simeon departs in peace because God is faithful: He has kept His promises made through the prophets. The Virgin has conceived and bore a Son, and His name is Immanuel. That Lord has come to His temple, where Simeon has held and beheld Him. The prophecies will continue to be fulfilled. The Messiah will make the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute sing and the lame to leap for joy. He will be stricken, smitten and afflicted for our transgressions. He will be the cursed man on the tree, His bones will be put out of joint and His robe gambled away. All this will take place so that other promises of God will be kept: Promises of pardon and peace, double portions of grace for the penitent people of God.

God is faithful, and the promises will be kept; that is why Simeon departs in peace. He doesn't depart to peace; it is not that he faces a rosy, sublime sort of life because he has held the Savior. Whatever other trials lie ahead, he still faces death. He's still in this sinful world. But he is at peace because God is faithful. He has sent the Savior. He has not forsaken Simeon, but has come to redeem him. Whatever Simeon faces, he is at peace with God. The Lord has kept His promises, and Simeon knows the end of the story. The end of the story is life everlasting, because the Son has come.

II. PEACE TODAY AND FOREVER

So, taking stock right now, this is what you know about you. You've made it this far. And you have no idea what is going to happen to you tomorrow; even with all the careful planning, 2012 is still up for grabs. You just don't know.

Not knowing leads to all sorts of temptations. You're tempted to worry; and while a godly concern is good, worry too often turns into doubt of God's will and faithfulness. You're tempted to disappointment when things don't go as you desire; the greater sin here is that you vastly prefer your will over that of the Lord's, who truly works all things together for your good. We don't like not knowing, because not knowing means we have to live by faith. Faith isn't natural; in fact, it's impossible unless it is given by God.

But God gives you faith, faith by and in a blessed truth that you do know. Today, you stand with Simeon because you behold your Savior. The Holy Spirit has revealed this to you-not through some mystical vision or writing in the sky, but by His holy, inspired Word. His Word announces to you that the Babe in Simeon's arms will grow up and bears your sins on the cross. That same body is pierced and His blood is shed before He is placed in the tomb. That same Savior, with the same body and blood, is risen again on the third day. And before Jesus ascends into heaven, He speaks to His disciples of teaching and baptizing. He speaks of Word and Sacrament, and promises, ***"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."***

He is with you in His Word and Sacraments. It was He who cleansed you of sin in the waters of Holy Baptism. It is He, the Word made flesh, who is present in His Word when it is proclaimed. It is He who says to you, "Take and eat, this is My body...take and drink, this is My blood, for the forgiveness of sins." This is the same body and blood that Simeon held and beheld. And then went to the cross and rose again and ascended into heaven.

Like Simeon, you behold your Savior today. You don't see tiny toes and a hairless head; you observe a man preaching His Word. But faith tells you this: God keeps His promises. His Son has come, died and risen, as promised. His Son is here, in these means, to forgive, as promised. You know this by faith and not by sight.

It is little wonder, then, that you sing Simeon's hymn near the end of the service on Communion Sundays you have heard the Word, and received the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, for there the Holy Spirit has revealed to you your Savior. Truly locally present. And just like Simeon, you sing:

"Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word. For Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

You sing with Simeon because the Savior has come to you, too; and then you depart in peace.

You depart in peace, though not necessarily to peace. You stand to face some ridicule along the way. If Simeon looks strange as he sings to the Baby, you'll draw some strange looks for looking for Jesus in, with and under bread and wine, water and Word. Some will tell you that you've lost your religious sanity, if not your salvation. But you know the truth: Christ is here because He promises, and He always keeps His promises. You have His Word on it, so you may depart in peace.

Not that life will be peaceful. No, don't leave here expecting that the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh will go easy on you because you've been in the presence of God. This visit of your Savior only enrages them all the more. Don't hold the Lord to promises He hasn't made, expecting an easy life in this world as His child. His only-begotten Son suffered. You can expect your share of trouble, then; this unholy trinity (the devil, world and sinful flesh) will work their hardest to convince you that the Savior's presence at best does you no good, at worst only leads you into trouble. They will wield their weapons of worry, guilt, anxiety, sickness, grief and death. They will do their best to crush you. But the truth is that they have been crushed already; crushed by the Son of God whom you behold today. They can make you miserable for a bit, but their days are numbered. In Christ, yours are not. You don't know what chapters life still holds; in Christ, you know the end of the story though. And the end of the story is life everlasting. This is why you depart in peace. The One who suffered, died and rose again is with you, to raise you from your sufferings and death to everlasting life.

What does tomorrow hold? We do not know. So we commend tomorrow to the Lord, trusting that He will indeed work all things together for our good. He has promised to do so for His servants, even as He promises that His Son has died for you. You don't know much about what lies ahead, but you do know that you are His-and so you know the end of the story. Therefore, even now, you depart in peace: For in Christ Jesus all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and heaven is yours. You have His word on it, in Jesus name, Amen and Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN