

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday After Christmas, December 27, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 129, 108:1-2, 138:1-5, 137, 642.
Lessons: Leviticus 12:1-8, 1 Peter 2:4-17, Luke 2:21-24
Sermon Text: Luke 2:25-35.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Joseph and Mary had just brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfil the laws you heard in our Old Testament lesson. Submitting to these laws, too, was part of the humiliation our Savior endured to redeem us from our sins.

Then Simeon appears: *“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 upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 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, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God.”*

Like many of Jesus’ followers he was a man who was insignificant in the eyes of the world. Nothing more is known of him than what Luke tells us here. He is described as just or righteous and devout. This suggests that he was what people would consider a ‘good man’. More importantly, he was also devout towards God. The Word of God was important to him. He held it sacred and heard and learned it. He practiced the religion of his ancestors. And he knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah. He was eagerly waiting for the one who would bring comfort to Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him, which would have influenced his whole life and conduct.

But there is more. He had received a special revelation from the Holy Spirit. This was a promise that he would not die before he had seen the Christ – the anointed Messiah. Today we look at

GOD’S MESSAGE TO SIMEON

- 1. God permitted him to see the Savior.**
- 2. He tells Mary and Joseph what God wanted them to know, and**
- 3. Simeon tells us – and all mankind – what to expect from this child.**

At this moment in time, the Holy Spirit caused him to go up to the temple, and he was given the ability to recognize the Messiah in the arms of his mother. His actions must have surprised both Mary and Joseph when he took their 40-day-old baby in his arms.

Simeon then gave a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. His words are used regularly in our worship services, sung in the familiar King James Version: *“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.”* (KJV) Now he is totally content to die. He had personally seen his Savior, as God had promised him.

Yet it is not necessary to see Jesus face to face. We, and all now who believe, see him through faith in his written word. Jesus told Thomas after his resurrection: *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* John 20:29 (NIV)

Salvation in the person of Jesus Christ is something we can hear and read about and comprehend, not just some vague, mystical, nebulous idea. This Savior is not a special secret requiring mental knowledge that

only the so-called “enlightened” or “elite”, brilliant people of the world can understand. This Savior is the way God sends eternal salvation to mankind. He is someone like us, who was born like one of us, who was tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

By faith Simeon recognized that this child is a blessing to the whole world in addition to all those born of the descendants of Abraham.

This Savior is not to be hidden in a corner, but to be made known to the whole world. He is the servant of the Lord of whom Isaiah wrote: ***“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*** Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

Christ came to be the light of the world, not just a candle in the Jewish candlestick, but the Sun of righteousness for all people. When Christ commanded his followers to preach the gospel to all nations, he made it clear that he is also a light to bring the true light of God to Gentiles.

With the eyes of faith Simeon sees a Savior dying on the cross. Simeon sees salvation for all people, both Israelite and Gentile. He is now ready to depart this life in peace because he has seen God’s salvation.

In addition to bringing light to Gentiles, this child is the Savior who is also to be the glory of God’s people Israel. It was an honor to the Jewish nation that the Savior of all mankind was born and lived among them. We know from the fact that Jews crucified Jesus that not every Jew believed. But he was still the most important Israelite ever born. And to those who were true Israelites, ‘Spiritual Israelites’ – a phrase used for all believers – he was indeed their glory. They shall rejoice in him.

Simeon praises God. He echoes King Solomon’s praise of God at the dedication of the temple when Solomon said: ***“Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.”*** 1 Kings 8:56 (NIV)

In confessing his faith, Simeon thanks God for this blessing he holds in his arms. With the eyes of faith Simeon sees more than a typical baby. This isn’t just someone like a parent holding a baby and hoping the child will be great, or important, or, as Christians would hope, ‘a faithful child of God.’ This is a man who knows, as a special gift from God, that this baby will be a blessing for all mankind.

He believed that the child in his arms was the Savior, the one bringing salvation. He has taken a long time to arrive. But it happened ***“when the time had fully come, [that] God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV)

Simeon here makes it clear that God ***“wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*** 1 Timothy 2:4 (NIV)

Simeon’s service as a watchman waiting for the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises has come to an end. He has now literally seen the salvation from God. In and through this child all the nations of the earth are blessed with full and complete redemption. This is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, including words repeated several times to Abraham: ***“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”*** Genesis 28:14 (NIV)

Paul repeats Simeon’s idea when he writes ***“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”*** Galatians 3:8 (NIV)

Jesus brings a universal reconciliation, from which no one in the whole world is excluded. Jesus is also a light for the Gentiles, to give the full brightness of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Now is fulfilled what had been long foretold by prophets such as Isaiah: ***“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,”*** Isaiah 42:6 (NIV)

Simeon’s hymn emphasizes, in the strongest possible terms, the fact of universal grace, that no one is excluded from the glorious working of God’s grace, his undeserved goodness and mercy. No one is excluded from the salvation earned by the merits of Christ. Christ died for all people. And to receive that blessing, only faith is necessary.

Like Simeon, all believers will learn to look upon temporal death as a deliverance from this world of sin when they fall asleep – when they die – in Jesus. Jesus died for all and offers his grace to all. And he, through

the work of the Holy Spirit, delivers that grace through faith. ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark 16:16 (NIV)

“The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 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, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”

Simeon here reveals to Mary and Joseph the full significance of this Child for the world. Simeon now spoke a blessing upon them both. These words filled them both with joyful wonder. They were gradually beginning to have an idea as to the meaning of all the prophecies concerning the baby which had been born to Mary.

Then he especially addressed Mary with a significant prophecy.

In the words ***“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel”*** We can see two pictures. In one sense, the natural pride and self-righteousness of every man, which is characteristic of man’s inherited depravity, must fall and be removed entirely, before the resurrection – the rising – in faith in Jesus the Savior can take place.

In another sense Jesus would cause some to fall and some to rise. For some Jesus would be a rock of offense, a stumbling block. Peter puts it this way: ***“Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.”*** 1 Peter 2:7-8 (NIV) Despite the fact that God had sent his son to live and to witness and to preach to Israel, the descendants of Abraham, many of them rejected him. They were the ones who were demanding “crucify him”. So many will fall and be broken on this Savior. If we despise Jesus, we are set for a fall, – a fall all the way to eternal damnation.

And for others he will be the living stone of salvation. There were a faithful few among the Jews, who will believe in him and accept him as Savior. God will work and strengthen faith in their hearts.

In addition, Simeon tells Mary that she herself would witness his suffering on the cross. Her own soul would be pierced with the terrible pain of watching her child die before her in such a horrible way.

Jesus is still a sign which shall be spoken against. Controversy still engulfs Jesus. The world raises its voices against Jesus and cannot tolerate him. This contrariness and resentment reached its climax at the crucifixion.

Those, and those only, who have been able to see Jesus by faith can face death with courage and not terror.

And so in the actions and words of Simeon we see a pattern and example and encouragement for ourselves. Just as Simeon was brought to see, through the special revelation of the Holy Spirit, so we are privileged to this very day to see with the eyes of faith.

This Savior was given for us! What a blessing for us that Gentiles are to be included in God’s salvation! And so, like Simeon, ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV) Amen.