

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 25, 2009

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Hymns: 138, 437:1, 137, 124, 118.

Lessons: Leviticus 12: 1-8, 2 Corinthians 2: 14-17, John 19: 25-27.

Sermon Text: Luke 2: 21-35.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You just heard a man say “LORD, I’m ready to leave this world right now”. Which of us can honestly say that? We want a peaceful end, not in sin or some great unexpected calamity. But you and all who believe in Jesus as your Savior can be ready to face God in peace, knowing what your reception will be. Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:28-30 are the invitation he offers to all men: ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*** All who believe in him can say with Simeon: ***“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.”*** (KJV)

This isn’t really a request of the Lord. This is a statement of fact as we read in the NIV: ***“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.”***

Simeon’s service in the temple as a watchman waiting for the fulfillment of the OT promises is at an end. The watch is over. The servant can retire in peace. With the eyes of faith Simeon sees more than just a baby in the arms of his parents. He sees a Savior dying on the cross. He sees salvation for all people, both Israelites and Gentiles. Today let’s look again at another man who points us to the Savior Jesus Christ:

SIMEON

- 1. What God had told him.**
- 2. What he told God.**
- 3. What he told Mary and Joseph.**

Here was a man whom Scripture says was “righteous”, that is, good, holy, and upright in character and in the eyes of God. That does not mean he was sinless, for no one except the child he took in his arms is sinless. He was devout toward God, that is, pious, religious. So here is a man who was probably highly regarded by those who knew him and he had been told something very special by God. ***“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.”*** Simeon had a special revelation from God. God had told him directly, through the Holy Spirit that he would personally see the Messiah, the Christ, before he would die. Is that so remarkable? Yes, but you have had similar opportunities to see the Messiah, the Christ. You have a written promise from God: His Word. Most people have had many opportunities to see the Messiah in the Word of God. Luther said that if he couldn’t find or see Jesus in a book of the Bible, then he doubted it was the Word of God. It is for that reason that he called the Apocrypha books that are ‘useful to read’ but are plainly not the inspired Word of God because they do not clearly contain Jesus the Christ. So you, too, have seen the Christ, although not in the way Simeon did. Simeon was no doubt finding comfort in this revelation of God. But don’t you, too, find comfort and consolation in the Word of God, the Bible? Have you memorized Words of God, his Words of grace to comfort you, to tide you over until you are in heaven? Or to ask it in a more practical way, have you memorized enough of the Word of God to comfort you in moments of extreme pain or

anxiety or difficulty? We have heard of people lost at sea awaiting rescue trying to remember the words of the Lord's Prayer, which is so engrained in most believers that it is almost automatic to say it in moments of difficulty. But there are so many other words of scripture which can and do give comfort. I love the visits in hospitals or nursing homes in which the people to whom I am reading the Scriptures know by heart the words I am reading to them. What a great way to use God's word for comfort!

We don't want to and can't say to someone who is surely dying "Things are going to improve; you're going to get better." The older I get and the closer I get to death and the more I see the inevitable results of life on earth, the more surprised I am that so many people want an aged loved one dying with a terminal disease to get through the current hospital stay and "get better". But maybe I shouldn't be surprised. Maybe they are just expressing wishful thinking. Maybe they can't imagine or fear the loved one dying. The uncertainty of life after death to so many people is because they aren't relying on Jesus Christ. He just doesn't take first place in everyone's life. Surely you know such people. Every child of God should always be ready to die, for death is simply the door to heaven for all who believe.

Scripture tells us that *"moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."* Simeon was moved by the Holy Ghost at this time. The Holy Spirit lead him into the outer courts of the temple area. We would like to think that the Holy Spirit leads us to worship services and prayers, but isn't it often something else which leads us to church: we "have to go" or "my parents are making me come to church" or "I may get yelled at if I don't go." But the Holy Spirit is really the guiding force behind leading us to our place at worship.

"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." Jesus' parents were doing what the law of God required in Leviticus 12. This was all part of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ to all the laws of God. Here is this old man walking up to them, and taking the child in his arms. Notice what Simeon does next: He *"praised God"*. And he has special reason to praise God for this special child, who is the true Son of God as well as the Son of his human mother Mary.

He then speaks what we know as the "Nunc Dimittis" from the Latin words for "now dismiss:" *"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) Perhaps the words are more meaningful and require a bit more thought as we read them in the NIV: *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

He addresses the Lord of the Creeds, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. That God had given Simeon a special word of promise that he'd see the Savior face to face. Now that has happened, and he is ready to die and leave this world and be received into heaven. He has seen God's salvation. Furthermore, he confesses that this salvation has been prepared in the sight of all people. Everyone has a chance to believe upon hearing the word of God proclaiming salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a light for the Gentiles and he is the glory of God's chosen people Israel.

Now I hope no one is confused by thinking that the nation of Israel that is in the news in January, 2009 – attacking Palestinians – is God's people Israel that Simeon and the Bible is talking about. Simeon was a Jew, a member of that nation of Israel. Jesus would preach the Gospel first to them, and when they as a nation by and large rejected it and crucified him, that message would be given to the Gentiles and no longer specially pointed to Israel. Within 40 years, that Israel Simeon speaks of would no longer exist as a nation. They would be scattered by persecution from the Romans, and their capital city would be destroyed in 70 A. D. That was their terrible fate predicted many times in the Old Testament if they would reject the true God. Jesus even predicted

that not one stone would be left upon another in Jerusalem. But Jesus was to be their crowning glory. All believers are considered part of the spiritual Israel that the Bible talks about enduring forever. The physical Israel was scattered to the corners of the world by the end of the first century A. D. In that history and in church history since then we find a warning for us, too. Nations and people who HAD the truth of the Word of God lost it through neglect, disobedience, and indifference.

But Simeon makes it clear that Jesus is the light of the world, to bring the light of eternal salvation to Gentile people who lived in the darkness of sin. Jesus is the greatest glory of the nation to whom he was promised since the time of Abraham. Scripture says ***“The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.”*** They knew their son was special, the Savior, the Son of God, but this is another piece of the puzzle they couldn't fully grasp and understand. The words which Simeon here spoke 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 entrusted to them. But Simeon has more to say. ***“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.”*** Listen to the KJV: ***Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”***

Simeon spoke a blessing upon them both and addressed Mary with a significant prophecy. Israel would be divided over against Jesus: he would cause some to fall and some to rise. For some Jesus would be a rock of offense over which they would stumble; for others he would be a living stone of salvation. This Child is set up, is established, by the will of God, for a double purpose. In the first place, He serves for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel, the true Israel, the members of God's kingdom. 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 in the faith in Jesus the Savior can take place. In the second place, He serves for a sign which will be opposed, spoken against. Many people, in fact the majority of the world, refuse to be humbled on account of this Savior, even though the assurance of succeeding glory in an eternity in heaven is held out to those who have faith in Him. They harden their hearts against Him and are thus condemned through their own fault. ***“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. And ***“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** 1 Corinthians 1:18.

He is a sign before the whole world, just as the serpent in the wilderness was a sign to all the people, even to those that refused to look at it until it was too late. In this manner, the thoughts of men's hearts are revealed. Many Jews could not accept Jesus the Christ, and in that way rejected their only hope of eternal salvation. Simeon also states that the work of Jesus, especially his sufferings and death would prove a severe trial for Mary. Her mother's heart would feel the hatred directed against her Son most keenly. It would often be like a double-edged sword penetrating her soul, as when she was witness of the crucifixion with its horrible tortures, which were essential to the salvation of mankind.

In Simeon we find a sad picture of what is to come, sad in an earthly way. But it is a glorious picture, this picture of Jesus' death, because you know why he died: So you won't have to die eternally. With Simeon you can say: ***“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.”*** Amen.