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Luke 2:22-40
First Sunday after Christmas
December 30, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “And he (Simeon) 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.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The world has moved on from Christmas... but, for the Church, the season is in full swing. It might not feel like that because the ‘mood’ of this time of year is so heavily influenced by the secular. But, if we can stay true to Scriptural theology, then we rejoice in this morning’s text, which shows that that Word made flesh, the incarnate God, is truly our Christ, our atoning sacrifice, the fulfillment of the promises foreshadowed by the temple.

Toward the end of Advent, and again on Christmas morning, we heard these words of John 1: “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” And, if you now consider our Gospel reading carefully, you see how the bringer of the Gospel upholds, fulfills, and honors the Law.

Indeed, we must never forget that the Gospel does not just include Jesus dying for sins, but also Jesus living for righteousness. As the apostle reminds us, “In the fullness of time God sent forth His

Son, born of a woman, born *under the Law*, that He might redeem those who were under the Law.”

Yet, the inclusion of the mention of the Law in today’s text is more than simply an ‘honorable mention.’ The focus is really on all the ceremony and conduct of the temple – it’s not on the *moral* Law, which, taught in the Ten Commandments, is still in effect; rather, the focus is on the *ceremonial* law that pointed people to their salvation... all that holy and sacred stuff of the Old Covenant waiting to be fulfilled by the temple-made-flesh and tabernacling among us in the New Covenant. Isn’t that what Simeon and Anna were waiting for? Both of them knew by faith (were led by the Spirit to know) that the temple and the consolation of Israel went together.

In fact, in just the first three verses there are five or six references to ceremonial Law terminology that highlight the centrality of *it* and the temple in our text. God led faithful Mary and Joseph to know that the coming Christ of the Gospel does not yawn at or shrug off the ceremonial Law, but honors it and cherishes it and shows himself to be the fulfillment of it.

So, in come Mary and Joseph to the place of the sacred – the temple – to do for the child what had been God’s ceremonial law for fifteen hundred years.... And here, they run into *Simeon*.

We have great reason to love Simeon, because he really illustrates all who love the Lord’s promises and wait for those promises to be fulfilled. And you know what I mean by that, and you

know how challenging that faithful waiting can be. All our days, we struggle to bear the load of the sins of others, to bear our crosses in this broken and often lonely world and in a society increasingly secular; then, we're reminded that those problems really are only a thorn in the side and pale in comparison to the problem of our sin. And, this goes on day in and day out, week in and week out, all our life long as we wait for the Lord's deliverance.

That we feel the length and burden of this can be proven by the fact that we all assume Simeon is an old man, that he's been waiting deliverance and vindication for a long time. The text never says that... it just says that he won't taste death until he sees the Lord's Christ. But, why have to give that promise unless one is increasingly aware of his own mortality and afraid of its impending force upon sinners, or (conversely) *longing* for death because of all the burdens of this life?

Nevertheless, this Simeon has been promised by God of his deliverance, and – our text says – he (Simeon) came in the Spirit into the temple. That, too, friends, is not at all different than you. You might think that the phrases “the Holy Spirit was upon him” and “he came in the Spirit into the temple” and “it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit” – you might think those to be describing mystical divine direct revelations... and truly the last one *is* (the word for “revealed” is the word for “oracle”); after all, how many babies were possibly being presented in the temple at that time? This is

Jerusalem, not Bethlehem.... How did Simeon know which child was the Christ, if not for the pointing of the Holy Spirit? But, is that so different than what you have been granted? How many false christs in this world vie for your attention with their false promises and futile hopes for eternal life? And yet, have you not in your baptism been given the Holy Spirit as a gift to point you to the true Christ? Does the Holy Spirit not reveal to you the utterances of God as found in the sacred writings? Is he not the Lord and giver of the baptismal life and its faith, so that he leads you into the house of God each Lord's Day? "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

To adore the Lord's Christ, one needs to be led by the Lord's Spirit. Faith is *God's gift to you*, not *your response to the good news*. Rather, at the proclamation of the good news, the Lord grants you His Holy Spirit to point you to the source of that good news, even if that source is a baby held by his mother.

Yes, faith is God's gift to you. Cherish it, for it will do for you what it did for Simeon, as it brought him to the point of eternal joy as he took hold of the Christ child in his arms and blessed and praised God's name. When you take up the Lord's Christ in your arms – actually, according to the Lord's plans, even better! – in your mouths and hearts – you, too, may sing Simeon's hymn.

In fact, let's take a moment to consider it, for we know it so well and yet know its intricacies so little.

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace” – that’s true, but not the way you think it is. The word Simeon uses for Lord is not the typical “kyrios” that we’ve grown to know (like the Kyrie Eleison – “Lord, have mercy”); rather, it’s the word “Despota” – like despot, a master of slaves. Here, the relationship Simeon wants to tout is that he is the unworthy servant who could have been driven into the ground and the dust of death because he has no worthiness or merit before his Master, but his Master has proven to be merciful, to speak of peace between him and those who ought be enslaved by their sin.

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word” – and the term for “word” there is not the *logos*, but the *ρημα* – the “utterances” of God, who has spoken softly and ruled kindly, rather than governed harshly and reigned forcefully. “Comfort, comfort, ye my people... speak comfort to them,” He had told his prophet. And, those utterances of comfort had been spoken in view of the salvation He (the Despot, the Master) had prepared... that salvation wrapped in the true Christmas present of the flesh and blood of the baby now brought into the temple. What a plan and promise and purpose the Despot had devised and prepared in the presence of all people – a plan of ‘dwelling among us’ – a plan of atoning sacrifice, a plan of temple

fulfillment, a plan of a wooden altar bearing His own Son who – like all the preparatory sacrifices before him, to fulfill them all – would offer up his own body for the punishment due sinners and would pour out his own blood for the sake of their cleansing.

Simeon's hymn continues, "My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles" – *revelation* there is the Greek word you would expect it to be from the title of the Bible's last book: "Apocalypse" – simply means "revelation," God revealing to you His plans, just as He revealed them to John and said "Write it down in a book," so also He reveals his plans to Simeon, to you, to all nations.

And those plans come to fulfillment in the Christ hanging on the tree – and Simeon even says there will be a particular sign and sight and vision that will divide the people... it will be a sign opposed by the world, rejoiced in by the faithful.

That language about a "sign" need not be interpreted to be so cryptic as unrecognizable. How often throughout the gospels do we hear the Jews asking Jesus for a sign to prove that He is the Lord's Christ, the Lord's chosen One, the Lord's Messiah. And, what does Jesus say to them? – "No sign will be given you except the sign of the prophet Jonah: As he was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

There's the sign to be opposed, isn't it? The sign to make the hearts of many revealed. What does the world think of God's plan to put His Son on the cross and bury him in the ground? (Notice, Jesus didn't talk about Jonah coming out of the great fish... not because it's not important, but because it's a *given* after the three days. Everybody knew that was what happened to Jonah, and everyone knows that's what God has prepared for His Christ in the plan of salvation. So, the sign to be opposed is all that leads up to it: What does the world think of God's plan to put His incarnate Son on the cross and bury him in the ground? What do *you* make of it? Are our hearts not revealed before God who searches the heart?)

It doesn't take God to read the heart of Anna; what a picture of great faith is she! – “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.” God grant us the faith and joy of Anna! – that, no matter how many years we are widowed, no matter if lonely or penniless or frustrated by ‘nothing going my way in life’ or even knowing no welcoming place in this world but the house of God – we can nevertheless, with Anna, give thanks to God and confess His name before all peoples, for God prepared His plan of salvation in the presence of *all* peoples, so that you and I – gentiles though we may be – we too can say, “God has revealed His light, as a revelation of His plans of salvation, to lighten my darkness.”

Perhaps *that's* why Mary and Joseph marveled at these things. To be sure, there had been much for them to compute and come to grips with regarding this child... faith had been confirmed for Mary perhaps when she felt the first kick in the womb, for Joseph perhaps if the shepherds coming to worship the child told Joseph of the angels. Yes, there had been a lot to make sense of... but this marveling at what was said need not mean that they marveled in doubt or wonder – as if they didn't understand why Simeon would cherish this special child. Perhaps they marveled simply because the Gospel playing out just as God had promised it is worth marveling over, isn't it!

That's so for you, too. The Gospel is always worth marveling over because it *still* plays out as the Lord had planned it and he regularly – weekly – brings to you again His Christ – still in flesh and blood – brings him to you sacramentally for your benefit, that you might sing Simeon's song not as if *longing* for what Simeon saw, but singing because you share in the same Gospel benefits in which Simeon delighted. For *him*, for *you*, for *every generation* – the Lord's promises are unfurled in the Lord's Christ: "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +

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