

# The Song of Simeon

## **Sermon Text: Luke 2:22-35**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

<sup>22</sup>And when the days of their purification according to the Law of Moses were complete they brought Him to Jerusalem to present to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>As it was written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord."

<sup>24</sup>And to give a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup>And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon. This man was upright and reverent, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup>And to him it was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup>And he came in the Spirit into the Temple. And the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do to Him according to what was written in the Law concerning Him. <sup>28</sup>And he (Simeon) took Him (Jesus) in his arms and blessed God and said:

<sup>29</sup>"Now, let Your servant depart in peace, Lord, according to Your Word, <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen Your salvation <sup>31</sup>which You have prepared before the face of all people. <sup>32</sup>A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup>And His (Jesus') father and mother were marvelling at the thing he (Simeon) said concerning Him (Jesus). <sup>34</sup>And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother, "Behold, this One is set apart for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a Sign that is spoken against – <sup>35</sup>and your soul will also be pierced through by a sword – so as the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

For over 4000 years the people of God had awaited the Messiah. Following the Fall in the Garden of Eden God spoke to Eve and gave her the promise that one day the Seed of the woman would come and crush the head of Satan, that Ancient Serpent. Generations had lived and died awaiting the Birth of the Messiah. And in the city of Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon. He was a man of upright living, devout and reverent. He had been waiting for the Coming of the Messiah, waiting to see the consolation of Israel, to see the day Israel would receive comfort from the Lord and be at peace. Simeon had waited his whole life for this moment. The text does not tell us the age of Simeon, he could have been a young man or an old man, but the text implies that Simeon was an elderly man, who had lived a long life in expectation of the Coming Messiah. God's Holy Spirit had spoken to Simeon and given him the promise that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Such a promise filled Simeon with joy, as he knew that the Messiah would come in his own life time. However, this promise also left him in anticipation as he knew neither the day nor the hour of the Lord's Coming.

Then on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after the Birth of Jesus His parents brought Him to the Temple. This was to perform two Old Testament rituals. One, the firstborn child of any family belonged to the Lord, and according to the Mosaic Law the child had to be presented in the Temple to the Lord and redeemed by his parents by making a payment to the Lord. (Exod. 13:2). And the second ritual that needed to be performed was Mary's cleansing ritual. Following the birth of a child, the woman was ritually unclean. On the fortieth day after the birth of her son (eightieth day for a daughter) she had to go to the Temple and sacrifice a lamb for her cleansing, or if she was poor, as were Mary and Joseph, then she could offer two doves or small pigeons. (Levi. 12)

This presentation and purification of Jesus and Mary is significant for three reasons. One, Jesus Christ, who came to redeem mankind, first had to be redeemed Himself. Two, the Old Testament sacrifices were a foreshadowing of the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, and here a sacrifice is being made to cleanse the uncleanness brought about by His birth. This shows the extent that Jesus went to share in our humanity. Christ was born in flesh and became like us in every way, except without sin. (Heb. 2:17, 4:15)

Christ shared fully in our humanity. He Who redeemed us shared in our redemption by being redeemed Himself. He Who was sacrificed for the cleansing of our sin was Himself cleansed via a sacrifice. Just as He Who places His Name on us in Baptism was Himself baptized, in order to share in our baptism. In order to save humanity Jesus shared fully in our humanity.

And the third significant part of this presentation and purification is that it was all done in accordance with the Law of God. In this text Luke repeatedly says that this was done according to the Law. Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to fulfil (Matt. 5:17). For the sake of our salvation Jesus fulfilled the Law of God, and not just the Moral Law (don't kill, don't steal) but all of the Law of God, including the Ceremonial Laws (kosher, circumcision). Jesus lived a life in perfect obedience to the Law of God. And He did so for your salvation. In order to save us humans, who are incapable of keeping God's Law perfectly, Jesus took on flesh, dwelt among us and He fulfilled the Law on our

behalf. He did what we could not do. Then by dying on the Cross He took the punishment we deserved and gave us the blessings that He deserved. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), all who break the Law of God are guilty and deserving of death. Not just a physical death, but eternal death and suffering in Hell. As for those who keep God's Law perfectly they are deserving of Eternal Life. None of us have every kept God's Law perfectly and therefore we are deserving of punishment, death and Hell. While Christ, the only person to ever keep God's Law perfectly was deserving of blessings, life and Heaven. But instead, out of love for us, Jesus decided to take the punishment that was meant for us and in return gave us the blessings meant for Him. This is what Luther called the Joyful Exchange, that the Law-breaker goes unpunished while the One who kept the Law is punished in their place.

But this is why Christ was born. As St. Paul said "He was born under the Law in order to save those under the Law." (Gal. 4:4-5) Christ was born under the Law and lived a life of perfect obedience to the Law. Then He suffered the punishment meant for those who break the Law. And all of this was to save us, those who are incapable of keeping the Law. Christ was born to die, in order to bring salvation to all people, to cleanse us from our sin and to redeem us from our spiritual debt. So that when we leave this life, we may depart in peace and be united with Christ in eternity. Christ's death in our place is an exchange that should fill us with joyful hearts and peace of mind. And it is this joy and peace that filled Simeon on the day that he held Our Lord in his arms.

Simeon had been waiting his whole life for the Messiah to come. He was waiting for the One who would bring comfort to the people of Israel. Now, in the Temple of Jerusalem, Simeon stood with the Saviour of All People held in his arms. The joy and relief that would have washed over Simeon in that moment is beyond our comprehension. Here, Simeon stood holding his Salvation in his arms. The Creator and Redeemer of All was able to be cuddled up in his arms and held close to his heart.

The joy and comfort was so overwhelming that Simeon broke in song,

"Lord, now let Your Servant depart in peace, according to Your Word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to reveal You to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."

The Song of Simeon is one of the most profound in Scripture. Now that Simeon had seen the Messiah he could peacefully depart this life. Now that he knew that the Messiah had come into the world Simeon was content to die. For Christ had come to trample down death and to bring the gift of eternal life. No longer did Simeon need to fear death, for now death would lead to life. For Christ, had brought peace, not only to Simeon, but as the angels said "peace on Earth and goodwill towards men."

Simeon had received consolation and could now depart this life in peace. For the Word of God was fulfilled. In the narrow sense Simeon's words referred to the Word spoken to him by the Holy Spirit, that he would not die before seeing the Christ. But Simeon's words speak broader than just the one promise given to him. For Christ came according to the Word of God, not only the Word spoken to Simeon but according to the all the promises given throughout the Old Testament. God gave the promise of the Messiah to Adam and Eve, to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Judah and Moses and David and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah, and the list goes on. The Birth of Jesus occurred in accordance with the Old Testament prophesies and promises of God.

By the Birth, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, He has brought the salvation that God has prepared for all people. God sent Christ to redeem all people, He intends for all people to come to Him in faith and be saved. Not only the Jews, by the Gentiles also. Jesus is the light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. In the Old Testament God choose Israel to be His people, whom He would redeem. Now, through Christ, all people are called to join God's People. All of humanity has been called by Christ to join the New Israel, which is God's Church. In Romans 11, St. Paul refers to Israel as an Olive Tree. This tree alone is God's tree; this is the only tree to be saved. But through Christ, us Gentiles, us wild olives, are grafted into this Olive Tree of Salvation. We who were not God's people, have through Christ been called into His people. By faith we have been joined to the people of God.

And sadly, many through unbelief have fallen away from the people of God, as St. Paul said, by faith we have been grafted into the tree, but by unbelief branches have broken off of the tree.

Following the Song of Simeon, Simeon turned to Mary and told her a prophesy concerning the Child Jesus. That He had been set apart by God for the rising and falling of many in Israel. Jesus had come to save all people, but not all people would receive that salvation. Before Jesus many are raised up in faith and many fall down in unbelief. The humble are exalted and the prideful are put to shame.

As Simeon said, Christ will be given as a Sign that is spoken against. Many praise God and come to Him in humility. While others are opposed to God, they hate Him, speak against Him and reject Him. And by this we are able to know who has faith and who does not have faith. For Christ is the Sign that is spoken against, and by this the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Those who submit to God have faith but those who oppose God have rejected their salvation.

And as for Mary, Simeon foretells that her own soul will be pierced through by a sword. This is foretelling the

sorrow that she will feel when she sees her Son dying on the Cross. Mary will share in the suffering of Christ. Not as some co-redemptress as some believe, but that her heart will experience its own suffering at the death of her Son. In the narrow sense Simeon is telling Mary of the sorrow she will face, but in a broader sense Mary stands as a representative for all Christians. For as Jesus said, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21, c.f. Matt. 12:49)

Just as Mary shared in the suffering of Christ, so too do we share in that suffering. The world hated Christ first and it will also hate us, for He dwells in us and we bear His name. The enemies of Christ, are also the enemies of the Church. And by this the thoughts of the hearts of many will be revealed. For as Christ said, "the one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." Those who love the Church love God, but those who hate the Church hate God. And those who love the Church are welcomed by God, and those who hate the Church are rejected by God. Just as God promised Abraham, so He promises us, "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you." (Gen. 12:3)

Those who reject Christ and His Church, have forfeited their salvation. But to those who love Christ and His Church and come to Him in faith, to you this salvation is given as a free gift. And this should fill us with joy and peace.

For Christ has come, in accordance with the Word of God to bring peace on Earth and goodwill towards men. Our hearts should be filled with the same joy and peace that Simeon felt that day that he held Jesus in his arms.

Many of us get weighed down by the struggles of this life. We feel that we can't experience joy and peace in this life. Like Simeon, we have a sense of joy, we know that the Messiah will one Day return and that one day we can dwell with Christ in Heaven, but we're left in anticipation. We're waiting for the Day of Christ's Return. We're waiting for the Day that we go to Heaven, then we will be content, then we will have peace and joy.

But we don't have to wait, we're not like the young Simeon who was still waiting for the Birth of Jesus. We have Christ now, He dwells with us and in us. And just as Simeon came to the House of the Lord and was able to hold Christ in His arms, so too do we come every Sunday into the House of God to receive Christ given to us. Through Word and Sacrament, Christ comes to us this very day. In the Word read and preached we are able to hear Jesus, and in the Sacrament of Holy Communion we are able to take hold of Him. When the pastor distributes Communion you can see Jesus. When he places the bread in your hand or when the wine enters your mouth, you can feel Jesus, you can touch Him and smell Him and taste Him. For as Jesus said, "this is My Body," "this is My Blood." Christ is truly and physically present in Holy Communion. His Body and Blood are really and truly present in the bread and the wine.

There is a reason that we sing the Song of Simeon straight after Holy Communion. For when you hold the bread in your hand you are holding the true Body of Christ. In your hands you are holding your Salvation, your Redeemer, your Creator. When you hold the Communion Bread in your hand you are holding the Messiah just as much as Simeon held Jesus in his arms. And that should fill you with incomprehensible joy and peace.

For after we have received Communion we are content to depart in peace, for Christ has been given to us for the forgiveness of our sins in accordance with His Word. In Communion we have received the salvation prepared by God in the presence of all people. In the bread and wine of Communion we have received the Light to the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel. Amen.

And may the Lord's Christ, bestow on you the joy and peace that He won for you by His Birth, Death and Resurrection. Amen.