

WHAT A WAY TO GO!
Sermon for the 1st Sunday after Christmas, 2021
Luke 2:22-40

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 2:22-40: ²² **When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, they took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord** ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord: “Every first-born male will be called ‘holy to the Lord’”). ²⁴ **They also went to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”**

²⁵ **Now there was a man in Jerusalem by the name of Simeon. This man was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.** ²⁶ **The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Christ of the Lord.** ²⁷ **Moved by the Spirit, he went into the Temple. When the parents brought in the Child Jesus to do for Him what was customary according to the Law,** ²⁸ **Simeon took Him in his arms, blessed God and said: ²⁹ “Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, as You have promised, ³⁰ because my eyes have seen Your Salvation, ³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all the peoples, ³² a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel.”**

³³ **The Child’s father and mother were astonished at the things that were being said about Him.** ³⁴ **Then Simeon blessed them and told Mary, His mother, “Look! This Child is appointed for many in Israel to fall and to rise and to be a Sign that is spoken against, ³⁵ that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. A sword will also pierce your own soul.”**

³⁶ **Moreover, there was Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage.** ³⁷ **This woman had been a widow for as much as eighty-four years. She never left the Temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.** ³⁸ **Just then she came up to them, gave thanks to God and kept speaking about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.** ³⁹ **When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they went back to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.**

⁴⁰ **The Child grew and became strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on Him.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

²⁹ **“Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, as You have promised, ³⁰ because my eyes have seen Your Salvation, ³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all the peoples, ³² a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel.”**

These are the words Simeon burst forth with when he finally saw the fulfilment of what he had been hoping for when he took the Baby Jesus **“in his arms (and) blessed God.”** Now that he had seen the Christ of the Lord, he could die in peace. What a way to go! What a way to depart this life!

It had now been 40 days after the birth of Jesus, and, according to Jewish custom, this was a special day following the birth of a first-born son, which Jesus was. For one thing, after the birth of any child, at the end of 40 days, the mother would be able to come back to the Temple. This ceremony was called the “purification” of the mother. However, when the child born was the *first-born* son, more was involved on that visit to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The origins of this go back centuries earlier to when Israel had come out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Remember, the final plague, the death of the first-born, was what had compelled Pharaoh to let the people go. All throughout Egypt, in every home, the first-born son was going to die. Only the Israelite homes were spared - they were passed over.¹ Their first-born sons lived. However, to always remember that their lives were spared, every first-born son from then on was to be dedicated to the LORD.²

¹ Exodus 12:1-31

² Exodus 13:2

But what service, what real service to the LORD, this particular first-born Son will perform! Jesus will be *completely dedicated* to doing the will of His heavenly Father! He will serve as the great High Priest, offering up the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice to redeem mankind when He offers up Himself on the altar of the cross.

So it was that on this particular day, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus **“to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.”** They also went to **“offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”**³

On any given day, lots of people were to be found in the Temple. People would be coming and going. Pilgrims would come from out of town, coming in for this or that festival as required in the Law of Moses. This was no big deal; it happened all the time. Nobody would pay any particular notice of Joseph bringing his wife and young child up to the Temple. Except, on this day, one man did. His name was Simeon. There was also a woman there, too, who knew what was going on. Her name was **“Anna, a prophetess, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.”** She had faithfully served the Lord for many years with worship, fasting, and prayer. For now, though, let us focus on Simeon and his words.

Simeon had spotted the Child Jesus when Joseph and Mary brought Him in. How? **“The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Christ of the Lord.”** Obviously, the Holy Spirit had directed Simeon to recognise Jesus. Simeon would see the fulfilment in the coming of the Christ, and now here He is, arriving as a little Child, to be presented in the Temple. Simeon and Anna are standing in for all of Israel in seeing the fulfilment of all of the prophecies and all of Israel’s history coming now before their eyes.

This brought them great joy and deep emotion. Going up to Joseph and Mary, Simeon took the Baby in his arms and uttered beautiful words of praise to God: **“Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, as You have promised,”** he begins. Recognising that the Lord has indeed kept His promise, Simeon is ready to go. *“Any time now, Lord! I’m ready! I’m at peace. The time of waiting is over.”*

Simeon continues: **“because my eyes have seen Your Salvation,³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all the peoples.”** Salvation is bundled up in this little Baby Boy. Earlier, when Joseph had found out that Mary was expecting a child, and had resolved to divorce her quietly, an angel of the Lord *“appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary home with you! For what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him ‘Jesus’! For He will save His people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:20-21). Jesus was a common name among the Jews. It was the same as the Old Testament (Hebrew) name Joshua. The name Jesus means “God saves.” When this name was given to an ordinary child, it could be a reminder of God’s promise of a Saviour. In Christ’s case, it identified the *one and only* Saviour of the world. Jesus’ name tells who He is (God) and what He does (saves). That’s what this Baby is coming as: *Our* salvation, *our* deliverance. Jesus was sent from God to save us from our sins and to deliver us safe and sound into God’s eternal kingdom. Now, Simeon gets to hold the Saviour in his arms and see Him with his eyes.

This Baby is the Saviour of all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike. Simeon declares what the Spirit has told him, that this Child is **“a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel.”** The Messiah of Israel was always meant to redeem the non-Jewish nations, too, not just Israel. The pagan nations that were sitting in darkness would see a great light. We Gentiles who did not know the one true God and thus were groping around in the darkness - now we shall have the light of the gospel to illuminate our way and to show us the truth. Jesus Christ is the light of the world.⁴

“Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, as You have promised,³⁰ because my eyes have seen Your Salvation,³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all the peoples,³² a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel.” And so it is that here in these beautiful words, Simeon is basically saying, *“What a way to go! My life is complete now. I have seen the fulfilment of God’s promises. What more is there but to have the peace of knowing the Lord has sent the Saviour promised from long ago.”*

Simeon is even given a foreshadowing of how salvation is to be accomplished. He tells Mary: **“Look! This Child is appointed for many in Israel to fall and to rise and to be a Sign that is spoken against,³⁵ that the thoughts of**

³ Leviticus 12:8

⁴ John 8:12

many hearts may be revealed. A sword will also pierce your own soul.” This is the shadow of the cross. Many will oppose and speak against this Messiah when He grows up. Christ will endure hostility and rejection. He will be nailed to a cross, a sight that will pierce Mary’s soul with sorrow as she sees her own Son suffer and die.

But this is how salvation will be won. Christ will suffer and die for our sakes when He is hung there on that cross. He will offer up Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, which otherwise would kill us. By His death *and* resurrection, all our sins will be forgiven in God’s sight. Our salvation will be secured because of Christ. The Baby in Simeon’s arms would do it. He has done it. We have salvation and peace now, resurrection and life forever, in Jesus’ name. The Holy Spirit worked faith in Simeon to believe in His Saviour, and He is working it in us, too, through His word of promise, the gospel.

And so, what a way this is to go! Like Simeon, we are ready to depart this life whenever the Lord decides to call us home. We know that our place in God’s eternal kingdom is secure, secured by Christ’s death and resurrection and made ours when we were joined to Christ in baptism.

We sing the Song of Simeon because we have heard with our ears the precious promise of salvation, proclaimed in God’s Word. We sing because we too, take Jesus in our own arms so to speak whenever we receive the very Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. What a beautiful song to sing! We hear God’s Word. We receive the Blessed Sacrament, and now we are ready to go.

And these words also work for us as a way to go from this year into the next. Once we are ready to die, then we are ready to live. There is no more fear. Our salvation and peace are secure in Christ. Now we are ready to live, to move into the new year with confidence and peace that the world cannot give. Now we are ready to love people, which is always a risky proposition since it means giving of ourselves, forgiving those who have hurt us, and serving others at the point of their need. Now we are ready to confess Christ with our mouths, telling others the good news that we ourselves have received. But we can do it. God has given us peace, a real peace and a sure salvation that are strong enough to live on and love on. We’re ready to go.

So let’s go in the strength and confidence that is ours in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. What a way to go! Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Father in heaven, we praise You that when the right time came You sent Your Son to be the Light of the world and to gather Your redeemed people. We thank You that You have adopted us as Your children through Him, and that You invite us to call You: “Abba, Father”. Enable us by Your Spirit to live as Your loving and obedient children, doing Your will with a glad heart and a pure mind. Give us strong faith and love, that people may see that the focus of our lives is not earth but heaven.

Dear Father, show us Your mercy. Deliver us from all evil. Rescue us from all that we deserve because of our sins. Protect us in the hour of temptation. Hold us with Your fatherly hand, and lead us from the restless ways of the world to green pastures and still waters.

Let Your grace rest on us that, young or old, we may grow strong in the Spirit, be filled with wisdom, and increase in the things that please You. Shine in mercy on all who feel the need of Your mighty aid. Brighten lives filled with darkness, and bring joy into homes filled with sorrow or suffering. Give the light of Your truth to those who rule in our land and elsewhere. Fill with Your wisdom all who are in positions of influence in our society so that godlessness, superstition, and ignorance may be removed from us.

Establish the reign of the Prince of peace over the nations of the earth. Bring all to the obedience of the holy Child. Grant that the light of His life, teaching, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection may shine on every land.

We pray for the sick, the wounded, the hurt, the troubled, and the fallen, especially in our congregations. Grant them whatever they need: health of body, strength of faith, firmness of hope, and, above all, the assurance of salvation.

Hear us, O Father, and direct and govern our hearts that, by Your grace in Jesus Christ, we may be ready to depart in peace and enter everlasting life, according to Your promise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Sunday after Christmas

Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses: ² “Consecrate to Me every first-born male! The **first offspring of every womb** among the Israelites, both human beings and animals, **belongs to Me.**”

³ Moses told the people: ...¹¹ “After the LORD has brought you to the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers and given it to you, ¹² you shall **set apart to the LORD the first offspring** of every womb and every first-born offspring of the animals that you have! If they are **males**, they **belong to the LORD.** ¹³ However, you shall redeem every first-born male donkey with a lamb or a kid and, if you do not redeem it, you shall break its neck! Of human beings, you shall redeem every first-born among your sons!

¹⁴ When in the future your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall tell him, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of slave-quarters in Egypt!

¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of human beings and the first-born of animals. This is the reason why I am sacrificing **to the LORD the first male offspring** of every womb and am redeeming **every first-born** of my sons.’ ¹⁶ It shall be a sign on your hand and a mark on your forehead! For the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.”

Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, dress yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience! ¹³ Bear with one another and forgive one another if anyone has a complaint against another! You also forgive, just as the Lord has forgiven you! ¹⁴ In addition to all these, put on love, which binds them all together perfectly! ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ, to which you have been called in one body, also rule in your hearts, and be thankful! ¹⁶ Let the Word of Christ dwell richly among you, as with all wisdom you teach and warn one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing to God with grateful hearts! ¹⁷ Moreover, whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him!

Luke 2:22-40

²² When **the time of their purification** according to the Law of Moses **had been completed**, they took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord: “**Every first-born male will be called ‘holy to the Lord’**”). ²⁴ They also went to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord: “**a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.**”

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