

The Song of Simeon
Luke 2:25-33
December 27, 2015

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he 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; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

Simeon is one of the most familiar strangers in the Bible. We remember Simeon because of his prayer, the one we call the *Nunc Dimittis*. *Nunc Dimittis* is Latin for "now depart." We know the words, but I wonder how many of us think about that prayer and what it meant; what it was like to be there the first time those words were spoken in the house of God.

Everything we know about Simeon is contained in the verses of our text. We know he was a believer. Luke calls him righteous and devout. We know he was anxious about the coming of the Savior. As Luke says he was *waiting for the consolation of Israel*. That is an Old Testament term for the promised Messiah. We know that the Holy Spirit was upon him. And we know that God had promised Simeon that he wouldn't die until he saw the Savior with his own eyes.

That promise didn't mean that Simeon would live to be extremely old. It simply meant that the coming of the Messiah was very close. Every picture we see of Simeon shows him as an old man, but the Bible never says Simeon was old or that he lived to a ripe old age. For all we know, Simeon could have been in his twenties or thirties.

We don't know much about Simeon's life, either. We're told he was devout, which means he was faithful to his religion in a time when faithfulness wasn't in large supply in Israel. In fact, Jesus called the religious leaders of the day "sons of Satan." Apparently, Simeon believed and practiced his religion faithfully from a spirit of devotion to God rather than a slavish obedience to the rules of men.

Luke tells us the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon which means he was filled with the Spirit. That explains why Simeon showed up at the Temple on this particular day, and why he did what he did. God gave Simeon the words to announce the truth about this baby.

Then, Simeon calls on God to fulfill the second part of his promise. Now that he has seen the Savior, Simeon was prepared to die in peace. That's probably what gives us the idea Simeon was an old man, but it doesn't mean that. Even as a young man, Simeon could say, "Okay, God, I am at peace. I have seen the fulfillment of your

promise and I can die any time that's good for you."

Young or old imagine the faith it took to make a statement like that. Simeon was looking at a baby who was barely a week old, and yet he knew he was looking at the Messiah. Jesus hadn't performed one miracle, yet Simeon believed. The Old Testament writings told Simeon all he needed to know in order to believe what his eyes couldn't see. He believed God's Word, he believed God's promise, he believed what the Spirit told him, and he was ready to live and die by it.

When Simeon said, "*my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,*" he hadn't seen the crucifixion or the resurrection. He had never heard sins forgiven in the name of Jesus. Simeon could believe what his eyes could not see because the Spirit led him to the truth of God.

Simeon's prayer makes an important point. Our salvation is not based on the events that took place. Those things are the "how" of salvation; how forgiveness functions, how God got around the paradox of human guilt and divine justice. Our salvation is Jesus. He is the miracle. He is our salvation. He is God's love wrapped in human flesh. He is God's provision for the sinful people he loves so much.

The whole plan of salvation might be easier for people to grasp if Jesus had been born in a palace; if he were rich and powerful in the ways of the world. That would better fit human expectations. If Jesus had demanded the recognition he deserved, like people who rise to high positions often do, the whole thing might be more comprehensible.

But that isn't the way God wanted it. Here was God walking and talking like an ordinary man. Here was God eating and drinking like an ordinary man. Here was God dying like an ordinary man. Imagine the wonder – God died. He died just like you and me will do someday. He died to redeem us from our sin and rebellion. He died to rescue us from the torment of eternal damnation. What Simeon saw says we are forgiven.

When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he was staring at the most incomprehensible wonder of all time – and God was looking back at him. The Holy Spirit gave Simeon the understanding of what he was seeing, and with that seeing, his life was complete. What else could there be? The promises of God were fulfilled.

Once God had done the impossible of the Incarnation, how could any of his other promises fail? What could be a bigger challenge for God than to come to earth in human form? Isaiah had already said that the sacrifice had been accomplished in heaven. Now that God determined to accomplish it in time, it was as good as done. Simeon saw the first step in God's plan and he had the faith to believe the rest wouldn't fail.

Simeon also confessed, as the Old Testament prophesied, that this salvation wasn't just for the Jews. Jesus was to be *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*. Up until the time of Jesus' coming, God and salvation was primarily about the chosen people of Israel. With the coming of the Messiah, God revealed that it was his will to redeem and save all

people. Jews and Gentiles alike.

Jesus is the light of revelation. He reveals, to the world, the will of God and God's love for sinful people. God's will is that his lost children be found. All of God's lost children.

Jesus reveals the will of God first by perfectly doing it, then by sending out his people to proclaim it to the world. Jesus revealed the will of God by taking the punishment for our sins. Jesus took the guilty verdict that stood against us. He suffered in our place. He died the death we deserve. Isaiah says: *He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed* (Is 53:5 ESV).

We are enlightened today by God's Word and his Sacraments through which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. The Holy Supper we come to brings us forgiveness, strength, and refreshment both here and for eternity. Jesus continues to be the light of the world through the faithful witness of the lives of his people. People who have been transformed by the grace and love of God.

This is the transformation Paul speaks about in his letter to the Roman churches: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Ro 12:1-2 ESV).

You prove, to the world, what the will of God is by living as one who has been forgiven much and, therefore, loves much. You prove the will of God by living as one set free from sin and so one who chooses to live free from guilt and shame. When you live out your confidence in God, you bear witness to Jesus and the glory of God, the Father.

I hope you're beginning to see how the whole Gospel is captured in Simeon's beautiful prayer. When Simeon talks about the Gentiles seeing the light of God, he talking about you. You are one of the outsiders for whom Jesus came to bring life and salvation. And because of that, you are now one of God's chosen people - the new Israel.

The last thing Luke tells us is that Jesus' *father and his mother marveled at what was said about him*. I don't find that too shocking. Even though they lived through the whole experience; visits from angels, the announcement of the coming Messiah, the miraculous virgin birth, the visit of shepherds - they were still human and this had to be more than they could wrap their minds around.

I can understand their lack of understanding that the baby they held, the one who needed fed and changed and burped, was at the same time running the universe, causing stars to shine, trees to grow, winds to blow, and the seasons to change.

We, however, have the advantage of hindsight. We can look back and piece together the puzzle that Mary and Joseph could only wonder at. We can see God in the flesh of a

small baby boy and, with that knowledge, we can go into the world and proclaim God's love for everyone and his desire to have all of his children home with him. We can tell the world that God loves them so much he sent his only Son into the world to cover their sins and to bring them home.