

Christmas I - Luke 2:33–40

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Luke 2:33–40

³³Joseph and the child's mother were amazed at the things that were spoken about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Listen carefully, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶Anna, a prophetess, was there. She was 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, ³⁷and then she was a widow of eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple complex, since she was worshipping with fasting and prayers night and day. ³⁸Standing nearby at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord. She kept speaking about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹When they had accomplished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town, Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

See Your Salvation

To the world, Christmas is ancient history. It's over, the joy and peace has come to an end, time to move on. Tonight, there will be one more year gone. You and I will be one year closer to our graves. Time marches on, and you and I reluctantly grow older. What do we do? What makes us keep going? If I could see or predict each of your situations a hundred years from now, wouldn't that be great? I know you listen to every word I say now, but wouldn't this make you listen a bit more intently?

But the point of Christian preaching is exactly that: To make us certain of our futures in five, ten, one hundred, even two thousand years. The purpose of the Church and goal of our going to church is to hear and see the answer to that question.

It's for this reason, that our Biblical Narrative today from Luke 2 is very fitting for us. Christmas isn't over of course, we're only half way through the season, but it feels over. So reluctantly, in our text, we travel away from the manger and fast forward 40 days. New Years causes us to acknowledge the passing of time. And in our text, where do we go other than to the temple? And it's there we find two people who are keenly aware of time. The old priest Simeon and the old prophetess Anna.

Simeon "was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Lk. 2:25-26). Anna was a prophetess. She married when she was young, but was married for only seven years when her husband was taken out of this life, and she became a widow. Depending on how you read the text, she's either 84 years old now, or has been a widow for 84 years, making her about 110 years old. Either way, she's very old, had never remarried in all those years, but instead she "did not leave the temple complex, since she was worshipping with fasting and prayers night and day."

Two elderly people, waiting their entire lives for this moment. Their example, even in their old age, is a model for all of us even as we age and move into another year, looking forward uncertainty into our futures.

The aged Simeon, moved by the Spirit to go into the temple just as Jesus' parents were going there to fulfill the law of purification 40 days after birth, took Jesus in His arms and blessed Him

and His parents. He blessed God for the grace of being permitted to see the Redeemer before his death. A little strange, but a wonderful thing to happen before the 40-day old Christ and His parents. But then Simeon got very serious.

“Listen carefully,” He said to Mary, “this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Simeon turns into a prophet, looking 33 years into the future. He sees an appalling sight. The same infant Christ he holds in his arms is the Redeemer of the World. He was to be light to the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel, yet His own people rejected Him and delivered Him to Gentiles to kill Him.

“He is destined to be the falling of many” as Simeon says, Christ’s salvation is offensive. The fact that Christ came to save is offensive because people don’t want to believe they are in need of saving. They are good enough. They refuse to let the Law kill their sin and pride, so instead, they kill their Savior.

Three crosses are set on a hill, two holding robbers, the third bearing the one time Child of Bethlehem, the innocent Son of God. There He hangs, helpless and naked, nails and spear have pierced Him through. He was rejected by those He came to save, but even more painful now is the fact that He is forsaken by His heavenly Father. Stars shown at His birth, but now the sun has hidden its greater light at the sight. At the base of cross stands Mary, who just a month before came to Bethlehem with her betrothed husband and gave birth to God, is now a widow, Joseph having died long before. A month earlier she had pondered all these things in her heart, but now she bears the thought of losing her Son and Savior. As Simeon describes it to Mary “a sword will pierce through your own soul also,” and she undoubtedly feels it.

Not exactly the prophecy of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus’ future that Mary wanted to hear. And probably not us either. Why are we forced to meditate on these sad thoughts today, still within sight of the manger, still in the season of Christmas?

This is exactly why Christmas took place. Sad times happen for all of us. Christmas isn’t just poetry, it’s not just a cute story. It was the beginning of a hard and bitter life for the Redeemer, and more importantly, it was the beginning of our salvation. Christ’s whole life was a sacrifice of humiliation that is crowned by His death on the Cross. Christ’s entire life on earth, from His conception and birth to His death, was a horrible abasement and deprivation. But it was the price for our salvation. It had to be this way. There was nothing else that could redeem the sinful world.

Anna’s words aren’t recorded for us, but even in her thanksgiving we see hints of the cross. “She kept speaking about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” Those who wait for and look for redemption know what the price of redemption is: a perfect life and holy death. Either yours or God’s. And since we couldn’t do it, Christ would and did.

This is why Jesus began His life in a manger, in a feeding trough. Jesus came to be humiliated, so we could be exalted. This is why the 40-day old Jesus and His parents are in temple, to submit to the law. Jesus, even though He is God’s own Son and ruler of the world, is still a

slave under the Law. He came to be under the Law, in order to redeem us who were under the law, so that we would be adopted as God's Sons.

This is why Simeon also says Christ was "destined to be the rising of many." Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of the entire world. But then He rise from the dead, proving that God the Father accepted His atoning sacrifice for our sins, proving that we are free from the slavery of sin and the law, and proving that we will rise from the dead too. The horrible future death of Christ means a glorious future for us: eternal life and salvation.

But we're not there yet. We still have to wait for the fullness of that redemption to come to us, just like Simeon and Anna. And, like Anna, and I'm sure Simeon as well, there will be sad things that happen to us in our future, maybe this next year. But that's why we have their example recorded for us.

Simeon and Anna were in the temple, waiting for this day and praising God. There was no greater thing they could do than be in God's House. No matter what sadness was before them or behind them, the Sun of grace was shining, Their future was certain because of this child. Their future was their salvation. And by God's grace, they were able to physically see and hold their salvation in their arms.

Oh, wouldn't be nice if we could see Christ? Wouldn't it be great if we could hold in our arms the infant Jesus? How comforting and strengthening that would be for us.

The truth is, we can, and we do. God permits us to see and hold the same Christ that Simeon saw and held in His arms. In the Lord's Supper, Christ comes to us in His true body and blood. Christ becomes flesh, He is incarnate for us in Christmas, Christ's Mass.

God knows that you and I are human beings who rely on our senses. We can't know the future, the only things we can know is what we can see and feel. We need to be embraced to feel important, we need to see with our eyes to be confident, we need to hear with our ears that we are loved. We don't know our future, except that there will be sadness, so we need physical reminders and comfort.

God knows that, which is why He gives us the Lord's Supper. God lets you visibly see Christ in His Body and Blood every time you commune. He lets you hold Christ in your hands. And even more, Christ unites Himself with you. Christ embraces you and purifies you with His own righteousness.

So in the low between our celebrations of Christmas and the reminder of time in the New Year, or whenever sadness comes to us, what better place to be than in God's Temple, like Simeon and Anna? It's here where God gives you a glimpse of your future, no matter if you are 16 or 110. Here, God lets you see your salvation.

And having heard and seen it, we pray with Simeon,

Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace according to Your Word.

My eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people.

A light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Your people Israel.

Amen.