

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

In the name of our Newborn King, our Savior Jesus, dear friends,

Well, now what? In the past weeks we've had Advent Services, a Children's Christmas Service, Christmas Eve services, Christmas Day worship. We've heard the Christmas story and sung dearly loved Christmas hymns. We've given presents to those we care for and opened some as well. We've visited with our families and talked with them on the phone, eaten good food, and taken a reprieve from our diets so that we could eat cookies and snacks. And then the day after Christmas came.

All of the fun and excitement of Christmas can sometimes come to a screeching halt beginning the very next day. Now we have to go to the store to exchange our new clothes for different sizes, take down the lights and decorations, clean up after the dinners and parties, and get back to our regular lives. The good cheer of strangers begins to fade as quickly as it sprung up before the holiday. And church attendance typically drops off as if Christ's birth is the main thing (or in some cases, the only thing) to be celebrated the whole year.

And yet, we are here just two days after Christmas. Is there a post-Christmas letdown for Christians? I mean, what exactly are we to do for an encore to our most festive celebration? Maybe it's not about what WE do for an encore to a wonderful Christmas season and celebration. God's Word for us today tells us about a man who saw Jesus 40 days after that 1st Christmas. The man's name was Simeon. We would do well to take a lesson from him today on how to extend our Christmas joy for a lifetime. As we consider his words of prayer when he held the Christ-child, it will cause us to

SING THE SONG OF SIMEON! Because we too

1. **HAVE SEEN THE CHRIST-CHILD** (25, 28-29) and we
2. **HAVE TRUSTED IN THE PROMISE** (26-27, 29-32)

The story of Simeon is a rather short one. In these words from Luke, you have heard everything we know about the man. Not much of a biography, is it?! Now there are several guesses made as to who exactly this Simeon was, but they are all just guesses. For example, one tradition says that he was one of the 70 who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek—a very famous translation called the Septuagint. We don't know if that's true or not.

In any case, it is apparent that Simeon knew very well the Old Testament prophecy regarding the promised Messiah. He knew that Isaiah had written: ***Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (7:14).*** Luke chapter 2 tells us that he was ***righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel.*** He fully expected God to console and comfort his people. Perhaps he remembered other words of Isaiah: ***Comfort, comfort my people, says your God (40:1)*** and ***Shout for***

joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones (49:13). He was aware that the comfort for God's people would come through the promised Savior. Redemption would come through the Christ; he would be that consolation.

We also learn here that **the Holy Spirit was upon him.** It is clear that the Holy Spirit was doing more with Simeon than he does as he lives in a typical believer. The Holy Spirit had given him a special gift—something out of the ordinary. He had the gift of prophecy; God revealed things to him.

So this was the man who was given the privilege of seeing the baby Jesus...and he rejoiced at the sight of the newborn Savior. Do you realize that he was one of the few believers at that time? So many were led away by their religious leaders into work-righteousness and self-righteousness. And not many had actually laid eyes on the Son of God, recognizing that they were doing so. We know of only a handful who did—and do you remember their reactions?

Joseph, who obeyed God; Mary, who pondered all the things about Jesus in her heart; Elizabeth who rejoiced; Zechariah who prophesied; the shepherds who worshiped and spread the word of his birth; Anna, who gave thanks to God; and Simeon whom we hear about this morning. All of them had SEEN THE CHRIST CHILD and in joy and thanksgiving, praised their God and Savior.

YOU TOO HAVE SEEN THE CHRIST CHILD. Simeon saw with physical eyes and with the eyes of faith. What a blessing to him to have that privilege! But we have that same faith, and in that way have also seen and know Jesus to be the Savior, the Anointed One of God. And I'm talking about more than just having "seen" him in our Christmas celebration—we truly know him as our Lord and King.

Simeon must have considered it a miracle to see with his own eyes and hold with his hands that baby Savior. As he held the Christ Child, he showed his humility before God. He said, **Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.** By addressing him as "Lord" (or we might translate it "Master"), and calling himself God's "servant" or "slave," Simeon showed that he understood his position before the Almighty and Holy God. And do you realize that in that one line of his prayer we have a law and gospel sermon? In that one line he speaks of sin and grace. His sin condemned him and made him a slave of the Lord. But God's grace prompted him to send salvation not just to Simeon, but to all sinful people. Seeing his Savior, Simeon offers that God can now dismiss his servant—he's ready to die now! The promised blessing of seeing the Savior before his passing from this world had been fulfilled. Simeon was now ready to be with the Lord.

Our "seeing" the Savior is no less a marvel. Our sin separates us from God too, but God's grace and love in Christ removes all those sins from us. We believe and know that death is not an enemy for us any more than it was for Simeon. When Christ paid for sin on the cross and died, then rose conquering death, he did it for us! Death doesn't scare us in the sense that we don't know what will happen. We know, like

Simeon did, that we have a Savior. We have SEEN THE CHRIST CHILD, and we know what he did for us! We will be going to heaven with our God because of him! Because YOU HAVE SEEN THE CHRIST CHILD, you can SING THE SONG OF SIMEON—a song of praise and love and thanks to God!

I once received the following email from a member of our congregation: *“Hi Pastor. This is (name). As you know (my wife) and I are having a baby. Last night we were reading the Old Testament and were in Leviticus chapter 12. It talks about childbirth and how a woman becomes clean after having a child. I was wondering if I should bring the 1-year-old lamb for the burnt offering, and the pigeon for the sin offering, to church or take them directly to your house. Can you let me know? Thank you. Have a nice day.”*

I thought that was so funny that I have kept it for many years. It’s funny because it’s absurd to think of New Testament Christians living under those Old Testament laws—well, that and envisioning me dealing with a lamb and a pigeon... Anyway, it was the very words of Leviticus 12, referenced by our Grace comedian, which prompted Joseph and Mary to make the trip to the temple in Jerusalem. Mary would bring the purification sacrifice for herself.

The other reason to go to the temple was for the 6-week-old child, Jesus. Exodus 13 talks about dedicating the firstborn son to the Lord; this is what they were doing. That is how God worked the fulfillment of his special promise for his faithful believer, Simeon. ***It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.*** And so God used the timing of Mary’s purification and the presentation of Jesus at the temple to keep his promise that this old believer wouldn’t die before seeing the baby Savior. Simeon had TRUSTED IN THE PROMISE of God and God did not disappoint him.

Imagine...imagine how wonderful it must have been to hold the baby Jesus! Holding babies is something most of us enjoy. What a joy to see the cute, smiling faces and tiny little hands and feet! What did Simeon think as he looked at the tiny hands and delicate face of Jesus? Did he coo over how cute the baby was? Maybe, but for Simeon, his holding this baby went way beyond that!

Simeon knew the prophecies and promises of God and trusted in them, so surely he saw more than those superficial features. Did he hear in his head the law and gospel that would spill from those tiny lips once they were grown? Did he envision the blood dripping down that forehead as a crown of thorns was rammed into his scalp? Did he see those tiny palms all grown up and ripped up by nails? Did he see the glorified Christ, risen from death, calming and reassuring his disciples? He surely knew who this child was and, in some ways, what he would do.

As he held the Christ Child, he said, ***For my eyes have seen your salvation.*** He was confident that this was the Savior of all people as he continued, ***which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory to your people Israel.*** Gentiles, non-Jews, did not have the knowledge of God

and his Word that the Jewish people were blessed with. They were in the dark when it came to God. But Simeon knew that this Savior was a light for them too; a light that would show them the way to salvation! And as for God's chosen people Israel—Christ was a bright spot for them too. Simeon said these things because of God's promises in Scripture—promises he trusted in and waited for.

We are so similar to Simeon really. You can SING THE SONG OF SIMEON because YOU HAVE TRUSTED IN THE PROMISE of God too. His song is also called the *Nunc Dimittis*. That is Latin for "You now dismiss". We sing that in some of our orders of service. In fact, we will sing it toward the end of our service this morning.

When we sing the Song of Simeon at the end of our worship services, we might conclude that we are departing the worship hour in peace, but that's not the whole story. It is more appropriate and faithful to Simeon's rejoicing, if we sing it with this in mind: that having been built up with the gospel, forgiven of our sins in the Lord's Supper and assured that we have eternal life through Christ, we are prepared to depart this life and be with Jesus. It is only when we have SEEN THE CHRIST and TRUSTED IN HIS PROMISES that we are ready at any moment should the Lord call us home. Because we now understand the sense of Simeon's words—or are reminded of it—you and I can sing them with the same faith and with similar thoughts today.

The promise of God to send a Savior was what Simeon counted on. The promise of God to us is this: ***That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).*** God makes tremendous promises to us and he always keeps his promises!

We trust in Christ as our Savior from sin and he promises that our sins are gone!

We look to Christ as our Savior and he promises that we'll go to heaven!

We believe in Christ as our Savior and we are prepared to die every bit as much as Simeon was. Seeing our Savior with the eyes of faith changes our lives—we are never the same again.

We don't know how many days or years Simeon lived after holding Jesus and praising God, but you can hear in his words how he was changed—not that he believed something new, but that he was satisfied and prepared to be with God.

We don't know how many days or years we have to live, but this much is the same: Having SEEN THE SAVIOR and TRUSTED IN HIS PROMISES, we can SING THE SONG OF SIMEON, a song of praise and thanks to God for saving us through Jesus.

You don't need an encore to that, in fact, there can't be anything better than seeing Jesus! We have everything in Christ! True Christian joy and excitement come to us every day because we know that the little child whose birth we celebrate was the Savior who rescued us from sin and promises us eternal life. Let the spontaneous, heartfelt joy and peace of Simeon's song be contagious because you also have SEEN THE SAVIOR and TRUSTED IN HIS PROMISE. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.