

It takes exactly one year for the New Year's baby to become the wrinkled, hunched over, old man we know as Father Time. He is handed the torch on the first day of January when he is but a day old. And before you can say the words, "Merry Christmas!" he is barely able to crawl toward the finish line where the next New Year's baby is waiting.

Year in and year out we watch this scene unfold before our eyes. Yet we do not ponder it all that much because every year at this time, we know that a new year awaits us, and things will surely be better when it comes.

We thought that last year, didn't we? What could be worse than the fear, and separation, and isolation of 2020? How glad we were to see that old man bite the dust! Yet as promising as 2021 might have been, it has proved to be almost a duplicate of the previous year. When will the New Year's baby come along who really can deliver, who is not just the same old song and dance?

We meet this baby in our Luke text for today. Mary and Joseph bring Him into the temple. And just in time. For Simeon, the wrinkled, hunched over, old man is taking his last steps. But he knew the baby was coming. The old year cannot pass away until the new year comes. And so, the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not die before the Christ Child would come. He takes the baby Jesus up in his arms and cries out in joy, and what sounds like great relief, "*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation!*"

Simeon understands what we must learn. Salvation is not a thing. It's a person. The person he is holding in his arms. This is why Simeon could let go of everything else. He could let go even of his own life. His eyes were beholding his salvation. The baby had come to carry the torch for poor, old Simeon.

Now maybe you are not poor, wrinkled, hunched over, or old. And maybe you are. It doesn't matter. It does not matter where you are in life, or how life has treated you. He who is your salvation is here. And He is ready, willing, and able to take from you what you can no longer carry.

Perhaps, like Simeon, it's everything. If you are coming to the finish line, He who was taken up into the arms of Simeon, is ready to take you up into His own arms and carry you to heaven. He is, after all, your salvation.

Perhaps that which you can no longer carry is the guilt with which you have been living for a long time. Something, or many things, you said or did, things which burdened you, even sickened you. You have made resolutions in previous years perhaps. Resolving to stop doing those sins which cause you such guilt. But to no avail. The sins continue, and so does the guilt.

Did it ever occur to you that you were handing off the torch to the wrong baby? The New Year's baby cannot take from you everything in your past that burdens you, nor everything in your heart that grieves you.

But Jesus can and does. He took that torch, in fact, for the whole world. The torch burning with the wrath of God. The torch of punishment for sin, all sin. He carried that torch to the cross where He died. And that torch has been put out by His death. It is buried in His tomb. Jesus came out alive. But the sin and guilt, the punishment and wrath, it will never come out. It is all dead to you. You who are baptized into Jesus Christ. In your baptism, you see, Jesus handed you something else in exchange for the burden of your sin and guilt. He gave you forgiveness for your sin. He gave you life forever with Him. He who is salvation, gave you salvation, a place in heaven. No New Year's baby can give all this. Each new year comes and then it goes. But *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

And so, as you approach the altar this morning, whether you come like Simeon, hunched over and approaching the finish line; whether you come with grief over loved ones lost; whether you come with youth and vigor, come with the torch you have been carrying. Come with your fears, your guilt, the load of your sin. It is not the New Year's baby who is waiting. It is your salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. He takes it all from you. Everything you cannot carry. And He gives you everything that He is, everything He did for you and purchased for you by His sufferings and death on the cross.

He forgives you, my friend. Wherever you have been in life, whatever you have done in life, no matter how awful, Jesus forgives you. And He gives you the certain promise that in the coming year, and all the years ahead of you, He goes with you to love you, to comfort you, to carry you, because He is your salvation. Amen.