

Luke 2:25-32

It is on New Year's Eve that we see the great exchange depicted by cartoon characters. The old year - an old man with a long, flowing, white beard, hunched over on his cane, handing the torch to a brand new baby boy - the new year; bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, and ready to plunge ahead into, what is now, 2018. But, of course, in twelve months this baby boy will age rapidly and he will, as an old man at that time, gladly pass on the torch once more.

Does the passing of the torch ever come to an end? Yes. And this we see in our Gospel text for today. Simeon, surely an old man, perhaps with a long, flowing, white beard, comes face to face with the Baby Jesus in the temple. As with every old year in its dying days, Simeon is ready to depart. But he cannot leave until the new year is ready to come. That day is today. Jesus takes the torch from Simeon, and Simeon can die in peace, for his eyes have seen the Lord's salvation.

And so have yours. We are now at the close of the year. How has the year 2017 treated you? Even if you do not have a long, white beard, or walk hunched over a cane, this year has aged you as it has aged me.

We have had many reasons to rejoice throughout the year 2017. The blessings have come, even from the strangest places. We can say with the prophet Isaiah in our first reading, "*I will rejoice greatly in the Lord; my soul shall exalt in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation.*" Our baptism has not left us in the year 2017. God clothed you with salvation in those waters, and you still wear those garments today. Through every day of 2017 you remained God's child in Christ Jesus, and this is reason to rejoice.

But not every day in the year 2017 was a day in which you and I felt like rejoicing. There were days when we felt like cussing; days when we wanted to crawl up in our bed away from the world. There were days in the year 2017 when we broke down in tears; when we were angry; and when we just felt numb to it all.

And now the year has come to a close, and many of us, whether we walk upright or not, within our hearts, in our spirit, are barely able to crawl forward. We're ready to leave this old year, but how can we? We cannot take the torch from ourselves. We must pass it off to someone else; to someone who can and will carry it for us; who will carry us forward into the year 2018.

And so we see Simeon entering into God's house. The time has come for him. His years are at a close. But he is not sad; he is rejoicing. For the new year is there before him. The new year, the new life, is the baby being held in Mary's arms.

This is why Simeon cries, "*My eyes have seen Your salvation!*" Salvation is not a thing; it is a person. Jesus is the salvation of all sinners. He comes to take our sins and carry them in His own body. And so Simeon sees Jesus as a brand new, little baby boy, but this baby will age rapidly. And at the end He walks, He stumbles, not with a cane in His hand, but carrying a cross. At the end of Jesus' life, He too, like every year that comes to a close, is ready to pass off the torch to someone else. But He will not. For no one can take it from Him. He must hold it Himself. He

must carry our sins to the bitter end. He closes His eyes in death, still bearing that awful burning torch. But then the third day He rises never to die again.

What this means for you is that the age of sin and death is at an end. Jesus ushers in the new year for you. Today, as this year comes to a close, Jesus takes it from you, and you enter the new year with Him. Every day when you rise, He meets you, ready to carry you through that day.

We cannot go on without Him. We are like Simeon in this. We cannot carry our own guilt. We cannot move forward without promise, without hope. Simeon could not die until Jesus came. And neither can we. We cannot die without Him. We cannot enter the year 2018 without Him. We cannot enter a new day without Jesus.

And He knows this. This is why He comes to you. Simeon was led into God's house by the Holy Spirit. And so are you. You are not here by chance. You are here, like Simeon, perhaps barely walking, barely moving forward, but Jesus is here to take the torch from you.

He does this by taking your sins. He forgives you for every one of them. He takes your guilt. He takes your shame. He takes it all from you. His word to you is one of promise and hope. As Simeon did, you now can depart in peace. You can leave this house rejoicing. Your sins are forgiven. Your Lord declares you innocent. He is your salvation, whether you feel His presence or not; whether you feel saved or not.

Your eyes see water in the baptismal font, but here your Lord came to you, and He held you in His arms. Your eyes see bread and wine on the altar, but here your Lord comes to you, and you, like Simeon, hold Him and taste His salvation.

You may not quickly see death as Simeon did. But you are prepared to see it, because nothing in your past can keep you out of heaven. Jesus takes your past from you, with all its evils, and you have new life in Him; a life that will never end.

Today the passing of the torch comes to an end. You have carried that torch far too long. Jesus is here to take it from you, and He does. Depart in peace, my dear Simeon. Amen.