

Luke 2:22-40

In four days the eggnog glasses will be filled with champagne, "Joy to the World" will be replaced by "Auld Lang Syne," and people will turn their focus away from the manger scene to College football bowl games on television. I wonder if all the New Year's festivities haven't become a way for people in general to deal with post-Christmas blues? The buildup to Christmas is so long and pronounced, that when it's all over we have an emotional letdown of sorts, and so New Year's Eve celebrations come front and center for us to fill the bill.

Every year around this time there is pictured, in cartoon form, the old year as a wrinkled old man, Father Time, passing the torch to the new year which is depicted as a tiny, bright-eyed, baby. We see that picture in our text for today. Old Simeon and Anna come face to face with the Baby Jesus, and the torch which they had long carried, is passed into His tiny, baby hands.

For a long time Simeon and Anna had waited for this moment to arrive. Just like in the cartoon, the old year is so relieved when the new year comes, and happily gives everything over to him, so we see Simeon expressing this relief and joy with the words, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace." The old year cannot leave and go away until the new year comes. And as Simeon's words declare, he would depart this life in joy only after the Infant Christ was brought to him in the temple.

Maybe you feel somewhat like Simeon and Anna. Even if you're not ready to depart this life in peace, you feel the burdens of life and they can be pretty heavy at times. In the cartoon, the old year is not just wrinkled; all the stress of dealing with the problems he faced from January through December have turned his eyes dim, his back hunched over like a cripple, and his once bright smile into a tired, old frown. Is that a picture of how you have felt at times? Or perhaps, after dealing with all the stress that Christmastime brings with it, of how you feel right now? Then you can find relief and joy in our story from Luke 2, for what Christ does for Simeon and Anna, He also does for you.

Jesus would take that torch, and Simeon knows this. "Behold," he tells Mary, "This Child is appointed...He will be a sign opposed and a sword will pierce your own soul as well." Whatever burdens Simeon and Anna had been carrying, Jesus in His life and death, would take them from them. It would cause grief to His mother, Mary, for she would see many turn against her Son. She would watch Him suffer. She would hear Him cry from the cross. And she would see Him die. Simeon and Anna would see none of these things. When Jesus was brought in to them, they were ready to go. They would die long before Jesus would begin His public ministry. But they were ready to go because Christ came to them. "Let me now," says Simeon, "Go in peace, for I have seen Your Salvation."

And so we come to December 27, 2009. Like Father Time, you may have the marks of many troubles from this year thrust upon you. And even worse, you along with me, have a conscience plagued with many sins that we have done over the past year. And though we come again and again for relief and pardon for our sins, the guilt can seem to stay with us. Even repenting of our sins and weaknesses, we know oh so well, of how we have let our loved ones down this year; how we have let our church down, our community down, of how we have let our Lord down. We cannot go on like this. Our sinfulness affects our life in a negative way. The burden is too great for us to bear. We have not just seen troubles around us; those troubles are within us, and I am to blame...you are to blame. Like Father Time, we cannot even go one more day. We need relief from our sins and guilt now. We must pass on the burdens of our life now.

Jesus came in to the temple at just the right time for Simeon and Anna. And He is here at the right time for you. There is no burden He does not take from you. There is no sin of yours that He shies away from. He puts all your guilt upon Himself. He takes the blame for everything you have done. Jesus knows that you cannot go one more step, and so He takes the many steps up to Calvary's cross for you. He knows that you cannot last much longer with your troubles weighing heavily upon you, and so He opens His arms and accepts the weight of God's punishment in your place.

In the cartoon, as soon as the old year passes the torch to the brand new year, the new year begins to age. The baby grows and matures quickly, and as he grows he becomes troubled and scarred with all the burdens he inherited. And that's what happens to Jesus. Even as a baby, when He is eight-days old, as soon as He comes into the temple His blood is shed--drops of blood falling from His circumcision. Those drops of blood fell for you. From that day when small drops fell, to the day in Gethsemane when large drops of blood and sweat fell to the ground, to the next day when blood ran from His head, His hands, and feet, and side, Jesus was feeling your pain, experiencing your sorrow, dealing with your troubles in life, being burdened with your sins. He did all of this for you so that you can always go one more day with Him; so that even when you're down, you can have joy in your heart.

In the cartoon, after Father Time hands everything over to the brand new baby year, he lays down to pass away. But for you there is only life waiting--life with Christ now and forever. Like Simeon, who knew that even in death he would live because he had seen his salvation in Christ, so now that Jesus has taken your sins, and guilt, and burdens, you can really live--live with peace in your heart for God has forgiven you. Live at peace with others for you can now forgive them. Live with hope for Christ is with you and will never forsake you. Live in confidence and faith for He is your Salvation, and your eyes see this, as Simeon's did, every time you come up to partake of the Holy Meal of Christ.

For those poor people who only come out of their shells at Christmas to take a brief glance at the Christ Child, and then are rarely, if ever, seen in church again, they never even hear of Simeon and Anna and the joy and comfort this story gives us. But you are here and this comfort is for you. Father Time will be passing his torch this coming Thursday evening, but for you every time you come to hear Jesus' words of grace; every time you come to partake of His Sacrament, Christ is here before you, just as He was there with Simeon and Anna. And He gladly takes everything that you give Him. And in their place He gives you a reason for living; He gives you new life, and pardon, and real salvation. Amen.