

## Luke 2:22-40

During the last few days, people by the scores have stood in lines at stores from coast to coast returning gifts they do not want. When the gift was opened on Christmas, expressions of thanks were offered with not the slightest hint that the gift was unwanted and unappreciated. But once Christmas is over, to the return lines they go.

And the same thing happens with the gift of God--the Baby Jesus. Few are so blunt as to vocally oppose the Nativity of our Lord. Many even make the effort to come to church at Christmas time...something they rarely do throughout the year. But now that Christmas is over, how many aren't there who return the gift of Jesus back to God, their actions speaking the words, "Thanks, but no thanks." In many cases, the gift was not even unwrapped and opened. Jesus, sadly, for many is less appreciated, less wanted than a pair of socks.

Standing in contrast to this, we see Simeon and Anna in the temple in the days after Christmas praising God for the gift they had been waiting for. There are no returns going on here. Anna, after seeing the Baby Jesus, could not stop speaking of Him to others. Simeon did not take Jesus and stand in the return lines at Wal-Mart. He took Him up in his arms and blessed God for all to hear.

We are very familiar with his words. We sing them after our service of Holy Communion. Martin Luther intentionally placed his words there. For him, there was nothing which could better express the mind and heart of the Christian, after receiving the Lord's Supper, than the words of Simeon. The day of Christmas may be over for us, but whenever we gather to receive the Sacrament, it is Christmas once more, for His birth takes place within us as He comes to us in bread and wine.

We do not know how old Simeon was. We meet him, and Anna too, only here in Luke 2. We know Anna was an old woman, and we assume Simeon was old as well. Yet all we know is that, for him death was close. He could have been a man of great age, or he could have been a young man dying of a disease. But one thing he knew--he would not die before his eyes had seen the Messiah. God's Spirit had made this promise to him. And so here in the temple, after taking up the Infant Christ in his arms, Simeon cries, "*Now, Lord, You are letting Your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen Your salvation...*" Simeon knew that for him, this life on earth was about to come to a close. Yet, rather than shedding tears of sorrow, he rejoiced with delight. He could now die in peace and rest in peace, for he had seen with his own eyes, the salvation of God.

Wouldn't it be great if God gave us such a promise? "Before you die, I will allow your eyes to see My salvation...your Lord and Savior." With such a promise, we could live with peace and assurance. Death could not suddenly come upon us unawares. Death could only come after Jesus. Our eyes would see our Savior before they would fall asleep in death. What comfort. What assurance we would have.

But do you realize that what was given to Simeon is also given to you? What God showed to Simeon, He has also shown to you. When Mary and Joseph brought the Baby Jesus into the temple, there were certainly other babies there as well. Every day Jewish parents brought their infants to the temple to carry out the requirements of the Law. And every one of those babies looked pretty much the same. When Simeon came up to Mary and Joseph, there was no identifying mark indicating to Simeon that this child was the Messiah. Their baby was not glowing. There was no visible golden halo hovering over His head. The numbers 777 were not etched on His forehead. The eyes of Simeon saw a baby. Yes, this baby was God in the flesh. But there was nothing about Him that caused Him to stand apart

from every other male child around Him. And therefore, although Simeon saw the Lord with his eyes, Simeon really saw the Lord with his eyes of faith. He believed, because the Holy Spirit told him so, that in his very arms he held his Savior, even though his Savior was hidden with flesh.

When you come to the Lord's Supper, you come with the eyes of Simeon. You come up believing, because God says so, that here at His altar you behold your Savior. There is nothing about this bread and wine to indicate that it stands apart from the bread and wine you eat and drink at home. It does not taste divine; it tastes earthly. There is no halo resting over it, and when you walk back to your pew, you feel no different. And yet, receiving this Sacrament you cry with joy the very same words Simeon cried, "*Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation...*" Your eyes see bread and wine. But like Simeon, you look beyond the flesh covering your Savior. You believe, according to God's own Word, that here covered with earthly elements is Christ for you.

This means, my friends, that you are prepared to die. Simeon was ready for death because God gave him Jesus before He gave him death. And so for you. God is here giving Christ to you. He is showing you His salvation which is for you. And He does this, in mercy, before He closes your eyes in death. Death is not a consequence of age. It is the result of sin. Old people die, but so do young people. Take note of those worshiping here with you today. Some of us may not be here...you may not be here...I may not be here when 2013 draws to a close. Death may come first. Not one of us is without sin. "*Far as the curse is found...*" we sing in the familiar carol. And all of us are under the curse. We are conceived and born in sin. Everything we think, say, and do is tainted with sin. And sinners die. Simeon had to die, and so do we. At some time in the future, every one of our bodies will be under the ground.

But look, look at how Simeon faced death. Not with dread, but with joy. He did not seek death, but neither would he be afraid when death sought him. He had a Savior in Jesus. One who would live, suffer, die, and rise again for him. And friend, his words are clear and they are inspired by God--this Savior is also for you. "*In the presence of all peoples*" he cries... "*A light for revelation to the Gentiles and to Your people Israel.*" No one is excluded. No one is left out. This Infant Christ grew up to die on a cross, and He bore the sins of all. He lifted the curse from you by becoming Himself accursed by God. He broke the teeth out of the mouth of death by allowing death to swallow Him up. But He rose from the grave so that you believe, as Simeon did, that you have life in Jesus Christ.

Of all the people in the world, you are truly blessed. Most do not attend a Christian church...you do. Most are not baptized into Christ...you are. Most do not have the assurance Simeon had...you do--because you have the pure Word preached to you, you have the body and blood of the Savior given to you in the Sacrament, you have the comfort of knowing your sins are forgiven not because of what you do; not because of how you feel--you are forgiven because God, in mercy, gave the Baby Jesus for you who took your sins, your curse, to the cross. You have a forgiving God no matter how sinful your life has been. You have the certain hope that Simeon had, that death is not to be feared, but to be embraced when it seeks us, for we live and die in Christ Jesus.

In the temple, Simeon took the Baby Jesus up in his arms, but before long, Jesus would take Simeon up in His arms and carry him into the joy of heaven. This is the joy that awaits you, too. Now you take Jesus up into your ears, into your hands and mouth, into your heart and life. The day will come for you, too, when Jesus will take you in His arms. And on that day, you and your loved ones can sing with joy, "*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word!*" Amen.

