

In five days, we say farewell to the old year and welcome the new one. And actually, our farewell may be more of a “Good riddance!” Even, “Get behind me, Satan!” Typically, the old year is characterized as an old man with a flowing white beard taking his last steps with the help of his cane. But as this year draws to a close, you and I may see ourselves in that role.

Some of you dealt with sorrow as your loved ones passed away this year. And for some of you, you were not even able to be with them either before, or as they died. Some of you lived through days, even weeks, of wretched sickness. All of you dealt with separation and isolation.

In five days, the world will breathe a collective sigh of relief. The little bouncing baby we call the new year will surely bring our troubles to an end as we bury that old man, with his cane, once and for all. But we should know better than to do as the world does. We do not put our trust and hope in the passage of time, for each day brings with it its own troubles. If we think that the mere turning of the calendar page will be reason for rejoicing, we are to be pitied along with all the rest whose trust and confidence is not in the Lord God.

Our hope is not in the turning of the page of the calendar, but in turning the page of Scripture to the text before us here in Luke 2. Here we see an old man. Probably with a flowing white beard. Perhaps even using a cane. And this man, just like the year 2020, will soon be laid to rest. He is where we are right now. How good, therefore, that we are allowed to hear him speak, for his words, God through him, give us comfort and great assurance.

He, Simeon, takes up the baby Jesus in his arms and cries out, not with sadness and grief, but with pure joy, “*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen Your salvation!*” Simeon will soon die. God revealed this to him. But what of it? He welcomes death because, in his very arms, he holds his salvation, the Lord of life.

The year behind us is an all too clear reminder that death will indeed come. Even, at times, unexpectedly. Years are not the only things which come to an end. So do we. For many, this is reason to fear. Not for Simeon. He does not seek death, but he does welcome it. It’s not that he has nothing more to live for. He very likely has a family, children, and grandchildren. How can he, then, rejoice at the prospect of dying? Because he is not losing them. Just, for a while, he is leaving them.

And the baby in his arms is the reason for this. This child, whom his eyes are beholding, is the great enemy of death. For when He grows up, He will be nailed to a cross and there He will die. Yet not for Himself. He, Jesus, will die for Simeon, and for you, and me, and for all people. And in dying and rising again, He will swallow up death forever.

This is why we who are Christians could live like Simeon throughout the year. While most of the world was in a panic, we could rest assured that our life and our death is in the hands of our God. Death does not have a mind and will of its own. It is God’s servant to bring His dear Christians to heaven. We do not have a greater chance of dying during a pandemic, for death never comes by chance. It comes only when God sends it.

For Simeon, this would be soon. But look in his arms. This is Jesus Christ. This is God Himself who rules over death. And so, strange as it may seem, Simeon believes that his life will not end in death, but continue on in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And the same is true for you. You are baptized into Christ Jesus. This means that your life is His and your death is His. And His life, death, and resurrection are yours. And because He lives forever, even when you one day die, your life continues in Christ, for He is your salvation.

Even now your life, Scripture teaches, is hidden in Christ. You can say with St. Paul, "*It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*" Your life is not your own. You were bought with a great price. Jesus gave up His life for you. The blood of God Himself was shed for you.

Simeon did not see Jesus die and shed His blood on the cross. Yet he believed it. His eyes see, here in his arms, only a little baby. Yet he calls this baby his salvation, God's salvation for him.

There were many eyes which beheld Jesus as He hung on his cross. Those eyes were gazing also upon their salvation. Yet most all of these, soldiers, chief priests, and such, did not believe it. They were seeing God's salvation for them, yet how tragic that they did not have the faith of Simeon.

By the grace of God, you believe my friend. This is not your doing. For how can you believe what your eyes have not seen? And even seeing is not believing. This is God's salvation, Simeon reminds us. From start to finish. You have no part in accomplishing it. You have no part even in accepting it. It is all a gift of God to you.

This year, like Simeon, is about to be laid to rest. He was granted the privilege of beholding his Savior before he died. God does the same for you, for He does not want you to die apart from Jesus. He wants you, too, to be able to welcome death whenever He sends it to bring you to heaven. Whether that day is sooner or later. God makes your life to be like Simeon's; to be assured that in Jesus, whom you behold in your baptism and in the Sacrament before you on the altar, you have salvation; that in Him you now live, and in Him you are able to die.

Before this year comes to a close, it is important for me to give you wonderful comfort. For I know that the sins of this past year, and of past years, so easily come to mind and haunt us. These sins can cause us to doubt our salvation in Jesus.

Friend, be absolutely assured that God has forgiven you of all your sins. You can enter the new year leaving behind you all the shame and guilt which has been weighing you down. Jesus takes it all from you. Just as He takes your death, so He takes your sinfulness. And He gives you His holy life. And so be assured, be comforted. All is well, for you also, like Simeon, see in Jesus your salvation. Amen.