

## 2.2.2020 Purification of St. Mary the Virgin (Luke 2:22-40)

Do you have a bucket list? Do you have a list of places you want to visit, things that you would like to accomplish, or once-in-a-lifetime experiences that you would love to participate in before leaving this world for the next? Maybe you'd like to see Egypt's pyramids, walk on the Great Wall of China, or gaze at the Northern Lights. Perhaps you'd like to learn how to play an instrument, speak a new language, or even try an extreme sport. With so many amazing things to do and see and accomplish in this world, a person could easily compile a bucket list with hundreds of ideas, yet in our Gospel reading this morning, we are introduced to a man who has only one thing on his bucket list, one thing that he knows must be accomplished before his death.

The man's name is Simeon, and he's described as a righteous and devout man, filled with the Holy Ghost, who was "*waiting for the consolation of Israel*" (Luke 2:25). This was the one thing on Simeon's bucket list, to see the Consolation of Israel, to see the Promised Messiah, for "*it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ*" (Luke 2:26), and isn't it interesting to consider that 2,000 years later, the Church still sets this day apart to commemorate the event that took place so many years ago. From our perspective, this may feel like any other Sunday morning, but if we consider Christ's presentation at the Temple from Simeon's perspective, from the perspective of a man who had just put an 'x' in the box next to the one thing on his bucket list, we will begin to understand the importance of this day in Salvation history.

To see things from Simeon's perspective, we need to step back in time and remember what the Old Testament tells us concerning the way God dwelt among His chosen people. In the book of Exodus we learn that after God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He led His people through the wilderness, and comforted them with His constant, protective presence by dwelling among them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22), and again later, when Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, the glory of God filled the Most Holy Place. Yet in the time of the Babylonian captivity, because of the false, idolatrous worship of the people, the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of God depart from the Temple. That first

Temple was looted and destroyed by the Babylonians, and in its place a second Temple was built, but God did not dwell in that Temple as He had in the first (compare Ezra 6:16-18 to 1 Kings 8:1-11), and we can be sure that people like Simeon wept at His absence.

Without God's holy presence among them, the Israelites were a "*people walking in darkness*," they were a nation "*living in the land of the shadow of death*," but in the day of Christ's presentation at the Temple, the "*people walking in darkness have seen a great light*" (Isaiah 9:2), for on that day the God of Heaven and Earth returned to His Temple. The Word who was with God in the beginning, the Word who was God in the beginning, was carried in human flesh into His own house in the arms of Mary and Joseph. Our Savior Christ was carried into His Temple, and the glory of the eternal God filled that Holy Place.

Earlier that day Simeon was led "*by the Spirit into the Temple*" (Luke 2:27). In some miraculous way, God had revealed to him that at last he would see *the Lord's Christ*. Can you picture him there waiting? Can you imagine how Simeon must have felt knowing that his one and only life-long desire was about to be fulfilled? As Mary and Joseph entered the Temple with the Christ child, the years of waiting were finally over. It wouldn't have been easy to recognize the forty-day old Christ child as God in human flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, Simeon did. The Bible tells us that Simeon took Him up in his arms, he took God up in his arms, and blessed Him, and said, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel*" (Luke 2:29-32).

When we read this passage carefully and prayerfully, and look to Simeon as a biblical example intended for our benefit, I believe we recognize several parallels between Christ's presentation at the Temple and the events of this Sunday morning. Our Gospel passage indicates that Simeon was led "*by the Spirit into the Temple*" (Luke 2:27). In a way unknown to us, God brought Simeon to the Temple on that day, and the first parallel I would ask you to consider is found in the question: Who brought you here today? By whose command did the sun rise this morning? By whose providence were you

given “*life, and breath, and everything*” (Acts 17:25)? By whose grace were you led once again to this place, the Lord’s Holy Temple? I’m convinced that God brought each and every one of us to His house this morning, and as it was for Simeon, I’m certain that He brought us here for a reason.

St. Luke tells us that Simeon was a righteous and devout man, and as you know “*it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ*” (Luke 2:26). Keep those facts in mind, the fact that Simeon was righteous and devout, and the fact that God promised to reveal Christ to him before his death, and then consider this promise recorded in the Gospel according to St. John. It was there that Jesus said, “*Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him*” (John 14:21). God’s promise to the righteous and devout man named Simeon is God’s promise to us. By living righteously, by keeping His commandments we manifest our love for Him, and God promises to love and reveal Himself to those who love and seek Him.

God brought Simeon to the Temple so that He could reveal Christ to him, and God brought us here this morning for the same reason, yet as I said earlier it wouldn’t have been easy to recognize the forty-day old Christ child as God in human flesh. That was only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just imagine how many people were in the Temple that day that saw the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and the Incarnate Son of God as nothing more than a peasant woman, her husband, and a newborn son.

Many people in the Temple that day saw Christ, but failed to recognize Him, and apart from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we will not recognize God *with* us today. Apart from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, we will not recognize God *in* us today. Simeon lived among a people who would’ve said that’s just a baby, and we live in a culture that says to us, that’s just bread and wine, but what does God say, and who do you believe? God said to Simeon, This is “*the Lord’s Christ*” (Luke 2:26), and Christ says to us, “*This is My Body... This is My Blood... Do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Simeon believed God, and in doing so, Simeon said goodbye to this world.

Remember the words that he spoke as he held Christ in his arms, “*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation...*” How small and insufficient must the treasures of this world look to one who has held Christ in his arms, who has fixed his gaze on God’s Salvation. How small and insufficient must the treasures of this world look to us who have held Christ in our hands, and have received Him into our bodies, who have fixed our hearts, our souls, and our minds on God’s Salvation.

In a world where people fill their bucket lists with places they want to visit, things they’d like to accomplish, or once-in-a-lifetime experiences that they’d love to participate in before leaving this world, by the grace of God may we be a people who set our “*affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2). May we, like Simeon, continually be led by the Holy Spirit to this place, the Lord’s Holy Temple, where may see God, hold Him in our hands, and then *depart in peace* to love and serve the Lord.