

2.2.2025 The Purification of St. Mary the Virgin (Luke 2:22-40)

Our Gospel lesson this morning is the account of Christ's presentation at the Temple. This passage describes the Blessed Virgin Mary arriving there, with St. Joseph and the 40-day-old Christ child, in order to offer the sacrifice required by the Old Testament Law, which states that a woman shall bring to the priest *"a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering,"* or if a woman couldn't afford a lamb, *"then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering"* (Leviticus 12:6-8). According to the text of our Gospel lesson, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who had carried the God of the Universe in her womb, couldn't afford a lamb, and therefore she would offer *"a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons"* (Luke 2:24).

This Gospel passage also speaks of Simeon, and describes him as a righteous and devout man, to whom it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. The text tells us that when the Holy Family came into the Temple, Simeon took the child Jesus up in his arms, blessed God, 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).

Simeon's words are very familiar to Anglicans. When the first Book of Common Prayer was compiled by Thomas Cranmer nearly 500 years ago, in 1549, these verses were selected as the final canticle in Evening Prayer, and so, for hundreds of years these words have been on the lips and in the hearts of faithful Christians as they lay down to rest at the end of the day, and it's easy to understand the reason why. This ancient hymn of praise offers particular comfort in the form of a nighttime prayer, as we close our eyes, once again placing our lives in the hands of God's never-failing care, and bringing to mind His Divine love manifested through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, as we pray, *"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation..."*

With these words on our lips and in our hearts, we can rest in peace, and as

we pray these familiar verses, it's important to remember that Simeon's prayer is his response to taking the Christ child up in his arms. This prayer is a response to seeing the Salvation of God, our Savior Christ, and the thought that I would ask you to consider today is just how closely Simeon's experience, on the day the child Jesus was presented at the Temple, parallels our own experience here in the Lord's Temple this morning. Let's explore this thought by first asking the question: Why was Simeon at the Temple that day? St. Luke tells us, in plain language, that Simeon was a man who walked with God, that *"the Holy Spirit was upon him... And he came by the Spirit into the temple..."* (Luke 26-27). So the same Spirit of God, which had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die before seeing Christ our Lord, the same Spirit that provided Simeon with the hope of seeing the Salvation of God, miraculously guided him to the very place where that hope would be fulfilled, and the fullness of joy found, and is it any different for you and I today?

Just as the Spirit of God led Simeon to the Temple 2,000 years ago, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit has moved in our lives, guiding you and I here this morning, and as we begin to consider Simeon's example, perhaps the first truth we encounter is this: Those who desire to see the Salvation of God must go to His Temple. We live in a busy and prosperous culture, and the list of places we could be this morning, and the activities we could be enjoying, are almost endless, but those who desire to see Christ must be diligent in setting aside this time to turn away from those distractions, and to turn toward the Lord. I'm certain there are other places Simeon could've been that day, but he allowed the Holy Spirit to lead him to the Temple where he held the Salvation of God in his arms, and we've followed the same pattern by turning away from the distractions of this world and allowing the same Spirit to guide us here, where in Holy Communion we not only adore Christ, but receive Him into our bodies, and feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Simeon was led by the Spirit to the Temple where he had a personal encounter with Christ, the Salvation of God, and the same Spirit led us here today, where we have a personal encounter with our Lord through hearing His Word and receiving the Sacraments He instituted, and the parallels between Simeon's experience twenty centuries ago and our own experience

today don't stop there. Consider Simeon's confession of faith. When he took the Christ child in his arms, he blessed God and said, "... *mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*" Simeon confessed with his lips, and believed in his heart, but certainly there were many people in the temple courts that day who would witness that scene and see nothing more than an old man and a poor family who couldn't afford a lamb for a burnt offering. Where others saw nothing but poverty, Simeon saw one pearl of great price, a treasure he would sell everything to obtain (Matthew 13:45-46).

Again, is it any different for you and I today? Our culture looks at Sunday and sees a day off work to claim as their own, yet we look at Sunday and see the Lord's Day, a day to rest in Him. People walk by this building and see an old, historic church, yet we see the House of God and the generations of faithful Christians who've worshipped Him here. The world looks at the Cross of Christ, and as St. Paul states, they see "*foolishness*" (1 Corinthians 1:18), and yet, through the eyes of faith, we see the Salvation of God. Where others see only poverty and nonsense, we see the treasure of heaven and the power of God only because of the grace and mercy of the One whose Spirit has led us here, whose voice we've heard, who calls His own by name (John 10:3).

The last parallel I'd ask you to consider is the effect this encounter at the Temple had on Simeon, and the way it aligns with our own experience. Simeon was a man who walked with God, who was led by the Spirit to the Temple where he had a personal encounter with Christ, and it was this embrace, holding the Savior in his arms that led him to say, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation...*" God had fulfilled the promise He made to Simeon that he wouldn't die before seeing Christ our Lord, and with that promise fulfilled, Simeon said goodbye to this world. Just imagine how "*the cares and riches and pleasures of this life*" (Luke 8:14) must look to the person who has seen God, to one who has held Salvation in their arms.

Just imagine. It shouldn't be difficult to do so, because like Simeon, we were led by the Holy Spirit to come to the House of the Lord today. Here, we are invited to "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), and after we behold Him, we receive Him in Holy Communion,

and then we “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Like Simeon, we depart in peace, because we’ve seen, embraced, and received the Promised Messiah - God’s promise of redemption fulfilled in our lives. Now, I leave you with this question: How does this world appear, how do “*the cares and riches and pleasures of this life*” look to you, to you who have seen the Salvation of God?