

30 December 2012
Christmas 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Great Waterfall of God’s Grace”
Text: Luke 2:22-40; Colossians 3:12-17

(The analogy of the waterfall of God’s grace from Concordia Pulpit Resources, Vol. 23, Part 1, page 22-24.)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas. I hope you also all had a Blessed Christmas. For I don’t think the two are the same thing. Many had a Merry Christmas because they got some special gift; because they got what they wanted - but they missed out on the blessed because Christ was not a part of their celebration. Some, I would think, had a Blessed Christmas in rejoicing at our Saviour’s birth, though it may not have been very Merry - maybe because they were missing a loved one, or away from family serving our country overseas, or because of depression or other troubles. I hope you had both, as I think Simeon - that we heard about in the Gospel today - did. For when the newborn, forty-day-old Jesus came to him that day in the Temple, it was both a Blessed and Merry Christmas for Simeon. He received the gift and blessing that he had been promised - **that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ** - and it filled him with great joy. The Word and promise of God had been *fulfilled*.

But it was not just the Word and promise of God made to Simeon that had been fulfilled - his joy went much deeper than that. It was the Word and promise of God made to His people all through the Old Testament. Luke makes that clear, for the words that we heard about what happened in the Temple that day are steeped in and oozing the Old Testament. Let me mention just three of them here, in connection with Simeon.

First, we are told, Simeon was **waiting for the consolation of Israel**. Or in other words, he was waiting for the *consoler*, the *advocate*, the *comforter*. The one who is on our side; the one come to help us in our need; the one come to comfort us stuck in sin with the forgiveness of our sins. The one the Lord had promised to send from the first book of the Old Testament to the last - from Genesis to Malachi. Simeon was waiting not just for the one promised to him, but for the one promised to the world.

Second, Simeon says, ***my eyes have seen your salvation***. What exactly did Simeon see when he looked at this forty-day-old child nestled in his arms? The word translated there as “salvation” is the Old Testament word for *the sin offering*. He saw the *Lord’s sin offering*. Hanging out in the Temple as much as he did, Simeon must have seen *lots* of sin offerings come, lots of lambs, but now he saw the one that all those other offerings were a shadow of and pointed to. The one who came to be the once and for all sin offering; the one come to fulfill all those other offerings. The *Lord’s sin offering*. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

And **third**, Simeon says he sees ***a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel***. Which sounds like what we heard from Isaiah in our Christmas readings: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . for to us a child is born, to us a son is given* (Isaiah 9). The darkness of sin and death would be shattered by this one for both Jew and Gentile alike. For this one is the Saviour not just of Simeon or of the Jews, but of the world.

So what is happening here is that all the rivers of Word and promise in the Old Testament are converging here in this child – and forming a *great waterfall of grace* that is now plunging down on Simeon and all people! Think of Niagara Falls - where does that come from? Where does all that water come from? From reservoirs, from snow melt, from rain, all coming down through rivers and streams, until finally they all converge and form that incredible waterfall. *That’s what’s happening here*. The Word and promises of God, spoken to so many people in so many times and places in the Old Testament, and which have been flowing for so long, finally have now converged in the birth of Jesus. *All* the Old Testament, fulfilled in Him. *All* the promises, fulfilled in Him. A great waterfall of grace from God in His Son now born for us, as one of us. That’s what Simeon saw.

The thing with waterfalls, though, is that you *hear* them before you see them. When you go to Niagara Falls, or even if you’re walking through the woods to see another waterfall, as you get closer, before you can see any evidence of the waterfall, you *hear* it. You hear the sound of the mighty, rushing waters, getting louder and louder, until you get to the place where the terrain opens up and you can finally see it, and you see the majesty of all that water falling so far and so gracefully down.

So it was with Simeon. Before he saw this *great waterfall of God’s grace*, he had *heard* it. He had heard the Word and promises of the Old Testament so that when he finally saw Jesus and held Him in his arms, he wasn’t dumbstruck at the sight, he spoke. He spoke the words he had heard for so long. He spoke the words he had heard about this great outpouring of God’s grace - about the consolation of Israel, about the *Lord’s sin offering*, about the light coming into the world. Finally, He had come. Finally, it was time. Finally, Simeon could now ***depart in peace***. He had seen

it; he had seen Him. And so he was filled with joy and peace.

And then there was Anna, an old widow who had devoted herself to fasting and prayer since her husband had died. This great waterfall of God's grace now poured out upon her when she came up and heard Simeon's words, and then she began to pour them out upon others, ***speaking of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.***

And now this *great waterfall of God's grace* has been poured out upon you. What the prophets long foretold and Simeon held in his arms has now been proclaimed and given to you. That not only your Christmasses be Merry, but each and everyday of your lives be blessed. Blessed in the grace and forgiveness of this child born for you.

For just as Simeon held Jesus in his arms and proclaimed that *the great waterfall of God's grace* was now being outpoured, so you and I are held in the arms of pastors as *the great waterfall of God's grace* is poured out upon us in Holy Baptism. For now through water and His Word Jesus takes us up as children in His arms and blesses us with His forgiveness, with His Spirit, with His life and salvation. All of His Words and promises are given to us and fulfilled for us there. From that moment on, we too, like Simeon, can ***depart in peace.***

But if we do not, if it is not yet time for us to depart and God sees fit to give us life and breath for a while after that, then like Anna, we hear this Word of *the great waterfall of God's grace* poured out upon us, and we begin to pour it out upon others. This is what Paul was writing to the Christians in Colossae, as we heard in the Epistle, describing the Christian life as one of *pouring out* compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; as one of bearing with one another and forgiving each other; as one of loving and harmony and thanksgiving; as one where the Word and promises of God dwell in us richly as they did in Simeon. That the great waterfall of grace we have received we also give, that ***whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***

Sometimes we do that, sometimes we don't. That's our reality - we're saints but we're also sinners. We're God's children but we don't always live like it. I'm sure Simeon had his moments too, waiting and waiting ***to see the Lord's Christ.*** So when you get dirty living in this world, when you don't live as the child of God you are, when you wallow in you sin, be washed again under the great waterfall of God's forgiveness, hearing the word of His absolution spoken to you both publicly and privately, forgiving and being forgiven by one another, and then also come and receive Body and Blood of the Lord's Christ, not held in your arms but placed in your mouth; given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

And then, as we do in the liturgy, sing with Simeon his song of faith: *Lord lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word.* Which you can sing, for you too have heard, you too have seen with the eyes of faith, and you too have received this *great waterfall of God's grace*, and so are filled with peace and joy. The peace and joy that surpasses all understanding. The peace and joy that only your Saviour can give.

And when that is given, you are blessed, whether you're merry or you're not. For you have received something far more and far greater than happiness: you have received the Lord of all, who has redeemed you and made you His own, His dear child. And now in His arms, He rejoices over you!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.