

8 February 2012
The Presentation of our Lord (observed)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“Promise Fulfilled”

Text: Luke 2:22-40; Hebrews 2:14-18

When God makes a promise to you, it may not be fulfilled quite as you expect. I suspect that was exactly the case for Simeon. ***It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*** That's quite a promise! Simeon would get to see with his eyes what not Abraham, Issac, or Jacob; not Moses or Joshua, David or Solomon would see - God's promised Saviour.

Now, we don't know how long Simeon waited for this promise. It is usually assumed that he was an old man, and that therefore he had been waiting a long time for this promise to happen, and maybe time was running out. But maybe while he was old, the promise was new. Or he could very well have been a young man - if that is so, that would make the impact of his words that much more dramatic, as upon seeing Jesus he says, ***Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.*** Or in other words, because of Jesus, he could die now - ***death no longer matters.***

But when God made this promise to Simeon, I wonder what Simeon expected to see? A full-grown Messiah? A glorious figure? A mighty warrior? Well, we don't know. But we know what he did see. A young, humble carpenter, his wife, and a 40-day old baby. They had with them the sacrifice prescribed in the Law for those who were poor. And they may not have even been the only ones bringing their first born son that day. The Temple was a busy place - there was always something going on, people coming and going, sacrifices being made . . .

But in the midst of all that, when Simeon saw this baby, faith believed what the eyes could not - that this child was the Holy One of God. That this child was to be the sin offering for his sin and for the sin of the world. And so great was his joy that he took the baby up in his arms and praised God.

I'm not sure Mary liked that very much, but all she and Joseph could do was marvel. Though this was their child, at the same time He really wasn't their child, but everyone's child. And this wouldn't be the last time Jesus was taken from her - He would be taken and hung on a cross. He would be taken from her arms and laid in the tomb. And at those times she would feel that ***sword*** Simeon spoke of, ***piercing through her soul.***

When God makes a promise to you, it may not be fulfilled quite as you expect. We can learn a lot from Simeon. For we too have received great and precious promises from God - but how will they be fulfilled? We may be quite surprised.

Because of Jesus, because of His death and resurrection, death no longer matters for us. We have been promised everlasting life! But unless Jesus returns first, we will all still die, and maybe not exactly how or when we would like.

Because of Jesus, because He (as we heard from Hebrews) is our substitute who made satisfaction for our sins, we have the forgiveness of our sins. We are children of God! But sin will still effect us in this world and life. There will be hurts and pains, sorrows and disappointments. Sin directed at us, and sin that erupts up from within us.

Because of Jesus, we have been set free from the power and dominion of the devil. But the devil will still attack us, and tempt us, and *try to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice* (Small Catechism, explanation to the Sixth Petition).

Because of Jesus, we have favor with God. He is our Father in heaven who has promised us every good! But that good may come through a cross, or through difficulty, suffering, or some other kind of *sword piercing our own hearts also*.

The truth is, God often hides Himself in what looks to be the opposite. The Almighty God in a baby carried in His mother's arms. Our Saviour defeating death by dying. God rescuing us from suffering by using suffering. These things make no worldly sense, but they are God's ways; the way of faith. And so, like Simeon, we believe not what we see or feel or experience, but what we hear. What has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God.

For then, like Simeon, we have a sure truth and guide, and a sure defense against the evil one. And like Joseph and Mary, we marvel at what God is doing. They did their part, bringing Jesus to the Temple that day to fulfill the Law, but what was really happening? *God* was working, fulfilling His promises, revealing His Son, and bringing joy to the hearts of Simeon and Anna. God fulfills promises in unexpected ways . . . Maybe what we're looking for is right before our eyes.

But in addition to all that, the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple also has an important theological point for us today as well. Ever since the Passover in Egypt, when the firstborn sons of all Egypt were slain, but the firstborn sons of all Israel were spared because of the blood of the lamb on their doorframes - ever since that day, every firstborn son was holy to the Lord, or belonged to the Lord. They could be redeemed, or bought back from God, with an offering at their presentation.

But what Jesus has done, as our Redeemer, is redeem *the world*. Because of Jesus, not only every firstborn son, but every person ever is now holy to the Lord! Every person ever, who by grace through faith are baptized into Jesus and joined to Him, have the right of firstborn sons and are inheritors of heaven. And so just as Jesus was presented in the Temple that day, so Jesus will present you to His Father in heaven, He Himself the sacrifice to redeem you, you holy ones, holy to the Lord, His saints. Because of Jesus, that is what you are.

Don't worry if you don't feel like a saint, or look like a saint. Believe what you hear, not what you see. In your baptism, God has promised that you too will see - with your own eyes - your Christ, your Saviour. That what you see now by faith, you will then see fully. I don't know if that will be before or after your death, but of this you can be sure - it will be so. You will see, and you will rejoice. And you will take your place with Simeon and Anna, Joseph and Mary, and all the saints around the throne of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end, blessing and praising God, who has kept His promises to you.

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