

27 December 2015
Christmas 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Oh My God!”

Text: Luke 2:22-40; Colossians 3:12-17

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

You've all heard the cries. The outbursts of joy. If not in person, then you've seen them on TV or on YouTube. When *that* present was opened. You know the one. The one that was wanted more than any other. The one that was so special, so important. The one that was waited for *so long*. It seemed as if Christmas would never get here. But when it did, would *that* present be there? Could it be? Maybe? Possibly? Hopefully? This one? This one? Then there it is! The paper is ripped off and the cry sounds out . . .

Oh my god!

And sometimes not just once, but over and over again. It is a cry that I'm sure sounded forth from homes all over our country, and perhaps all over the world. We laugh at such outbursts; we understand the uncontrollable excitement, even if we do not appreciate or approve of using the word God in that way. But here's the sad part: *they're actually right. That* present - what they *wanted* more than anything in this world, what they *loved* more than anything else, what they would have *done* anything to get - had become their god. Nothing else really mattered, or at least paled in comparison, to getting *that* present. And that obsession, that love, that desire, gradually squeezes out all else.

Well that same scene played itself out some 2,000 years ago as well. There was a man waiting for *that* present. The one that had, in fact, been promised to him. And though we don't know exactly how long he had been waiting, it seems like quite a number of years. He knew he would get it eventually, before he died, *but when?* It was so special, so important. Maybe at times it seemed to Simeon that it would *never* arrive . . .

Until it did. It probably wasn't wrapped quite as he expected. A rather ordinary looking man and woman came into the Temple with a baby. They came to redeem him, according to the Law that God had given to Israel after they came out of Egypt - to give a substitute for their first born son. The offering they brought indicated they were quite poor - instead of a lamb, they brought a pair of birds. But the plain wrapping couldn't fool Simeon! This was *that* present! And so he takes the baby Jesus up in his arms and cries out . . .

Oh my God!

And he's right. That poor, humble child nestled in his arms *really is* the God of Israel, the promised Saviour.

Now, Simeon used slightly different words than that, more Scriptural, but that's really what he was saying. That was his overwhelming joy that day in the Temple.

And so he said:

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

The picture on the cover of the bulletin today has him speaking those words while looking up to heaven. But I wonder . . . I wonder if maybe he wasn't looking down, at the child, and talking to Jesus and calling Him Lord. *Oh my God*, he says, looking into the eyes of Jesus and Jesus looking up at him. There You are, God. *I can die now. I got my present.*

for my eyes have seen your salvation

My eyes are looking at Your salvation, Your sin offering, God, he says. Joseph and Mary had brought a pair of birds to redeem Him, but He was the One who had come to redeem the world. The Lamb of God. The Lamb who is God. Whose blood will provide life for all people - first born, last born, and everyone in between; Jews, Gentiles, and all nationalities; from the beginning of time to the end of time. The One who would provide life for Simeon and redeem him from his sins. Which is why he could now die in peace. He was holding the forgiving One. He was holding His forgiveness. He was holding the Saviour who was holding him. So he needed nothing else.

for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

Here He was - God in plain sight. Hiding in human flesh and blood, yet for all to see. Do you hear me, fellow Jews? Here's the one! *That* present I've been waiting for! Many probably laughed, thinking him an old coot; or maybe they just shook their heads - what a shame that ol' Simeon has lost his mind.

a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

Even Joseph and Mary marveled at the words Simeon spoke. Certainly they of all people *shouldn't* have been surprised. It had been only 9 months since the angels had appeared to them, and only 40 days since the shepherds had come. But still it was almost too much to believe: God in human flesh. The Saviour of the world. The One who would lighten a world plunged into the darkness of sin, and who would bring glory to Israel - the

fulfillment of all the promises of old. All those promises made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses, David, and spoken through the prophets. *The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight* (LSB #362 v. 1), is how the popular Christmas hymn puts it. Who could not marvel?

But there was another there that day who heard Simeon and believed his words. Her name was Anna. She had lived in the Temple ever since her husband had died, fasting and praying night and day, hearing God's Word and relying on Him for everything. And in humble faith born from that Word of God that she lived in and that lived in her, she gives thanks to God, too. *Oh my God*, she cries out in her own quiet way. You've done it. He is here. The Redeemer.

And you cry out now as well. Those words of Simeon should sound familiar to you - we sing them after receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus in His Supper. After the Body of Jesus is placed not into our arms but into our mouths, and after his Blood is poured over our lips, we cry out with Simeon: *Oh my God!* for we have received God. *I can die now*, for we have received His forgiveness. *My eyes have seen* - not our physical eyes, for they have beheld nothing more than Simeon; the wrapping is still quite humble and poor. But *our eyes of faith have seen* - and received - *the salvation*, the sin offering, God has prepared for us. The sin offering that enlightens us to His mercy and love, and brings glory to Him.

That gift - yes, you know the one - is here for you. Each and every Sunday. Perhaps its frequency has made us a little less excited. Perhaps the things of this world capture our love and desire more from time to time. If so, let us repent, and put ourselves in Simeon's place today and see with his eyes of faith and joy. *Oh my God!* You've done it. You were born for me, lived for me, died for me, and rose for me. You've baptized me into your death and resurrection, given me your Spirit, forgiven me, and feed me. You've put Your Body and Blood here for me! *You wonderfully created me and yet more wonderfully redeemed me*, as we prayed earlier (Collect of the Day). *Oh my God!* Why would you do that for me? Sinful me, struggling me, failing me, rebellious me?

And those little infant eyes look up to you, too, and tell you the answer: *Because I love you*. And those full-grown adult eyes look down to you from the cross with the same answer. *Oh my God!* Is that not too wonderful for words?

But words we need, so as St. Paul said to us today: ***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Like Simeon. And whatever you do, in word or deed, - like Anna - do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***

Until like Simeon and Anna, you close your eyes in death, and then open them to see what you here believed. And you know what you'll say on that day? That day you receive that gift? You know the one. The one you've been waiting for. The one promised you when you were baptized. The one so special, so important. When that day finally comes and all the wrappings come off, the sound will cry out from here and all around the world
...

Oh my God!

And you'll be right! And live with Him forever.

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