

2 February 2020  
Presentation of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Simeon’s Epiphany”  
Text: Luke 2:22-40

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

When you’re looking through some old photo albums - or today, your Instagram feed - and you come across some pictures that are out of place, out of order, you know they didn’t happen in that sequence but for some reason, there they are . . . they stick out. You notice. And maybe you look at them a little closer or a little differently because, being out of order, they caught your eye.

The Holy Gospel we heard today is kind of that. We usually hear this story the Sunday after Christmas, where it fits in the sequence of Jesus’ life. It makes more sense there. To hear it *today* . . . well, we celebrated Jesus’ birth, remembered the coming of the Wise Men, moved on to Jesus’ Baptism, and then heard Him called the Lamb of God by John. And Christmas seems so long ago! So it’s kind of odd to go back now, to this day when Jesus is only 40 days old . . . By the calendar, this is accurate. Today *is* the 40th day after we celebrated Jesus’ birth. But liturgically, we’ve moved past it. So it’s out of order. A bit out of place.

But perhaps this is a good “sticking out” for us today. That instead of hearing this story as part of the *Christmas* story, we hear it as part of Jesus’ *Epiphany* story. Where really, I think it fits *better*. For it tells us of Jesus’ epiphany to Simeon and Anna. His revealing. Simeon had been told that he wouldn’t die before he saw his Saviour. And on this day, his Saviour is uncovered, revealed. Now, Simeon had seen this same thing lots of times before - in that sense, this day was nothing special. A mother with her baby, coming to the Temple, coming for the rites of purification after childbirth. He had seen, too, the presenting of the firstborn - lots of times. This was all simply part of the daily life of the Temple.

But on this day, perhaps Simeon was taking a little more notice. After all, there were rumors going around that something odd had happened. Some shepherds from the suburbs, from Bethlehem, were blubbering about seeing angels who told them about a special birth. The birth of . . . wait for it: *the Christ*. The promised Messiah. The one Simeon had been promised he would see before he died. Maybe it was the beginning of the end for Simeon . . . maybe (if this story was true), the parents would bring the Christ *here* . . . Maybe. And maybe he told Anna, too.

So doing some quick calculations in his head . . . Simeon knew when the story the shepherds were telling had begun to spread, though he didn't know the exact day of the birth . . . so add 40, carry the one . . . if He was coming, it would be soon.

So when Mary and Joseph walked up into the Temple that day, maybe it wasn't a complete surprise to Simeon - but it was complete joy! When the Spirit told him this child was the one. The Christ. The promised one. The Son of Abraham. The Son of David. The one who would fulfill all the promises of God. So now Simeon was ready to die. In peace. God had kept His Word.

We don't know how much longer Simeon lived after this day. We don't hear any more about him. Was he an old man who lived only a short time longer - mere days or weeks? Or was he a young man who lived quite some time after this, even seeing this same Christ crucified? We're not told. The picture on the cover of the bulletin shows him as an old man, which it is often assumed that he was. Maybe because Anna was old. But maybe he wasn't. Which would make it all the more remarkable that he was ready to die. Old people who have lived a long life and have lots of aches and pains and troubles - yeah, maybe we expect it from them. But younger people who still have a lot of life ahead . . .

But Simeon's ready. Whether he's young or old, lives only a few days or many years, he's ready. His Christ has made him ready.

*What about you?*

You are, too, of course. Ready. Your Christ has made you ready as well. You are baptized. You have the forgiveness of your sins your Christ has won for you on the cross. He has given you His Spirit. You have His Word and promises. You are at peace with God. You are ready.

For like Simeon, you have been epiphanied. You know the Christ and have received Him - not taking Him up in your arms, but having that same Body and Blood put into your mouth here at this altar. In *this* Temple. Which is why we sing Simeon's words right after seeing and receiving the Christ here. *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word.* Whether you're young or old, live a lot longer, or your time here soon comes to an end. Like Simeon, you're ready. Your Christ has made you ready.

And then Mary and Joseph leave. The whole thing lasts only a few moments. The offerings completed, they go back home. To Nazareth. Jesus grows up, becomes strong and filled with wisdom. But He'll be back. Teaching in that same Temple. Cleansing that same Temple.

But what, then, of Simeon? As I said, we don't hear anything more about him. *But what do you think?* What do you think he did after Mary and Joseph left that day? Did you

think he went out of the Temple thinking: *Yes! Finally! I've seen the Christ! Now I can do whatever I want. I can do all those things I've been wanting to do. I can catch up on all the fun I've missed out on while I've been stuck in the Temple (even if it's sinful) because the Christ is here! Yoo hoo!*

That's absurd, right? Yet sometimes Christians think that way. I'm forgiven, *so . . .* I know this is wrong, *but . . .* It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission, *so . . .* Is that ever you?

Or after that day, do you think Simeon started seeing things in a new way. That his eyes had been opened to *more* than just seeing Jesus? Perhaps those same eyes that saw Jesus now began to see in a new way - to see himself and others in a new way. Jesus didn't have to epiphany him, but he did! So now there was so much more to see. And seeing, so much more to do. Not for himself, though. What was going to top this? What more could he do for himself than God had already done for him? And was now doing for him in this Christ Jesus? No - gift given, gift received. Now Simeon could live the rest of his life in a new way - however long He had. A gift way. For others.

And *that's* you as well. For Jesus has epiphanied you and given you Simeon-eyes. That by His Spirit, you see in a new way. Yourself and others. There is so much more to see than the merely physical, and so much more to do. Gifts given, gifts received. Now, a new way, a new life. A gift way, a gift life. For others. With a Jesus-heart.

For that's the other thing Jesus gives to you: His heart. A heart to live and love as He did. Because you **are** now as He is: **a son of God**. Everything that He is you now are. He poured it all out on you in Baptism. He has given everything to you, holding back nothing. His kingdom is your kingdom, His life is your life. His Father is your Father, His Spirit is your Spirit. His forgiveness is yours, His victory over death is yours. He has withheld nothing from you.

For what did the Son of God do with all that He is and has? He saw you and your need, and He came to do something about it. He didn't have to. He didn't have to epiphany Simeon, He didn't have to epiphany you, He didn't have to come and live in this world of sin and death for you - but He did. He didn't have to fulfill the Law and all its obligations - be circumcised, be presented in the Temple, live a perfect life - He's the one who created it all, spoke it all, and gave it to us! But He did. Because you needed Him to. No one else could. And there was no other way to raise you to life than to die your death with your sin (since He had none of His own), and raise you with Himself. So He did. Birth, cross, tomb, life. He who *had* everything *did* everything *for you*.

So now you. You who have Simeon-eyes to see in a new way and a Jesus-heart to love in a new way. You who have been given everything by your Christ, by Jesus. When you walk out these doors . . . how are you going to see, what are you going to think, what are

you going to do?

I get asked a lot: Well, what do we *have to do* as Christians? Do we have to tithe? Do we have to keep the commandments? Do we have to do good works? And how much? Because that's another way Christians sometimes think. That if it's not about getting to do whatever I want, then it's about doing what I have to do.

**But it's not either of those things.** And hearing this story today, a little out of order, can help us understand that. That when you walk out that door, it's not about freedom to sin as much as I want, and it's not about being burdened to do what I don't want - it's about joy. The joy of Simeon. The joy of being sons of God. Epiphany joy. That having Jesus, we see things in a new way. We think in new ways. Son of God ways. The Son of God who didn't have to do anything. Who already had everything. But He saw you in your need and so came to give. And it was joy for Him. Or as the book of Hebrews tells us: *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame* (Hebrews 12:2). Joy. What He did gave Him joy. Because it gave Him you.

That's quite different than: *Do I have to?* For if you have to, there's no joy, only force, obligation, resentment, anger, bitterness. *Do I have to?* is life under the Law.

But that day in the Temple wasn't really about the Law. Yes, it was about fulfilling the Law, Jesus crossing every "t" and dotting every "i" for you. But that, you see, makes it Gospel. What Jesus is doing for us. To set us free from the Law. So we can leave this place this day, after having Jesus come to us, having everything we need, with the joy of both Simeon and Jesus. The joy of receiving and giving. Not going back to my old way of life, as if nothing happened here, but also not being burdened with the "have to dos." But rather in joy. Living as a son of God. Knowing that if I die this day, I'm ready. And if I don't, having all I need, I can give to others, being the son of God I am, that Christ has made me. Until the day when I do die, in peace, and Jesus presents me to His Father. In joy.

*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart - this place, and this world - in peace.*

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.