

Open Bible

December 31, 2017

Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Most of us remember the excitement of a new baby and pulling back covers to see. This may be what happened in the Temple at Jerusalem as recorded in our Gospel lesson for today. Two people were excited to see the baby Jesus. They were not grandparents, big brothers or sisters, or even friends. They were strangers. However, the meeting was arranged by God; both Simeon and Anna were moved by the Holy Spirit to seek out Jesus.

We are told many things about Simeon. He was righteous and devout (righteous means he conforms to God’s will; devout tells us he has awe and respect for what belongs to God.) I used to wonder how someone could be righteous when all people have sinned and come short of the glory of

God. But in cases like this it means righteous as compared to others. Not perfect righteousness required by the Law. It is evident that Simeon knew he needed the Savior. He was: “waiting for the consolation of Israel”, the Lord’s Messiah, and said: “my eyes have seen your salvation” We are also told that the “Holy Spirit was on him”. ²⁶ *It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.* ²⁷ *Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.* Simeon took the Child in his arms and praised God—

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

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God’s promise was fulfilled; he had seen the Savior and he recognized Jesus as the Savior of ALL nations (Jew and Gentile). Again this was an occasion for Mary and Joseph to marvel: *The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.*

But Simeon was not finished—blessed them and prophesied to Mary: *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

Then another stranger approached them—the female counterpart of Simeon. What is said of him also applies to her:

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

SUMMARY

Simeon and Anna amaze us. They are special people and models of Christian piety.

But the story is not about them. It is about the Child they worship. He is God’s Messiah, the One who fulfills all righteousness for us.

Christ was incarnate in human flesh to be our substitute under the law. Thus his parents faithfully observed what the Law required by bringing Jesus to the temple.

This reading is chosen for the 1st Sunday after Christmas not only to show off the newborn Christ and further reveal the miraculous circumstances of his birth.

The special emphasis for this Sunday is the Active Obedience of Christ. This begins with his pious parents: *When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.* ⁴⁰ *And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.*

Why is this important?

God's holy eyes not only see what we do wrong; THEY SEE WHAT WE FAIL TO DO RIGHT.

In one of the CONFESSIONS of sin we say: *I have done what is evil AND FAILED TO DO WHAT IS GOOD.*

Imagine as God views our lives, how we fall short in loving Him above all things! How we fall short in our love for others, even spouse, children and friends!

At some point in our life we could be so convicted of sin that we are on the brink of despair. When I think about how our sins can condemn us the character Johannes in the book THE HAMMER OF GOD comes to mind. Johannes is literally dying of despair over his failure to be as penitent as he thinks he should be. The author, Bo Giertz, describes the scene:

The giant hand was lowered, and from the semi-darkness in the far corner a tortured face appeared, the whites of the eyes glistening. The eyes were wide open with terror, the hair was matted by the sweat of anguish, and the twisted mouth was like a black hole in which two yellow teeth were glimpsed. This is Horror itself, thought Savonius, the anguish that ascends from the utter darkness of Chaos.

It is not impossible that you or I could be so convicted unless we know and cling to the Gospel that tells us Jesus provided perfect righteousness for us. This is ours by faith.

Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus was born as our brother to keep the law in our place and we say THANK YOU JESUS FOR KEEPING THE LAW.

There is good news in the words: *When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.*

One more thing:

The Ancient Church treasured Spirit-inspired texts and used them in worship. Simeon's spirit-inspired words are offered as our response to Holy Communion. We have not pulled back the covers to see the newborn Savior but we have been to the table where he serves us his body and blood offered on the cross for our salvation. With Simeon we praise God and go in peace.

CONCLUSION

Today we pulled back the covers to see the Christ Child, our Brother and Redeemer. By his obedience under the law we become God's children and as children we are heirs of salvation.

THANK YOU JESUS FOR KEEPING THE LAW!

As we finish 2017 and begin 2018 we are assured that the books are in balance because God credits the perfect obedience of Christ to our account. In fact, through faith in his obedience we become children and heirs of God. Heaven is not just a pious wish but it is our inheritance

For the New Year—resolve to seek Christ in His Word

The Word is the Spirit's means of producing faith like that of Simeon and Anna.

This same faith will empower you to grow in righteousness.