

Sermon for The First Sunday After Christmas

Date: December 30, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

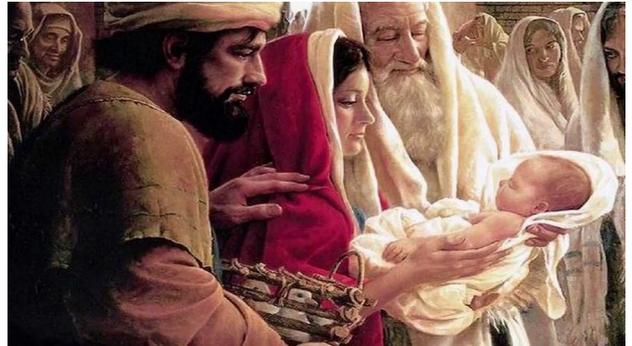
Old Testament: Exodus 13:1–3a, 11–15

Epistle Reading: Colossians 3:12–17

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22–40

Sermon Text: Luke 2:22–40

Sermon Title: The Waiting is Over



Introit: Psalm 98:1-4; Antiphon: Isaiah 52:10

Hymns:

LSB 366 – It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

LSB 352 – Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord

LSB 338 – Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

LSB 374 – Gentle Mary Laid Her Child

Distribution:

LSB 380 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

LSB 388 – Go Tell It on the Mountain

Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184



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Text: Luke 2:22–40

After the days required by Moses' Teachings to make a mother clean had passed, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem. They took Jesus to present him to the Lord. They did exactly what was written in the Lord's Teachings: "Every firstborn boy is to be set apart as holy to the Lord." They also offered a sacrifice as required by the Lord's Teachings: "a pair of mourning doves or two young pigeons."

A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He lived an honorable and devout life. He was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel. The Holy Spirit was with Simeon and had told him that he wouldn't die until he had seen the Messiah, whom the Lord would send.

Moved by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courtyard. Mary and Joseph were bringing the child Jesus into the courtyard at the same time. They brought him so that they could do for him what Moses' Teachings required. Then Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God by saying,

"Now, Lord, you are allowing your servant to leave in peace as you promised. My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people to see. He is a light that will reveal salvation to the nations and bring glory to your people Israel."

Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is the reason that many people in Israel will be condemned and many others will be saved. He will be a sign that will expose the thoughts of those who reject him. And a sword will pierce your heart."

After doing everything the Lord's Teachings required, Joseph and Mary returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was with him.

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

We heard from our Gospel reading:

A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He lived an honorable and devout life. He was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel.¹

Waiting is something we generally don't like to do. Waiting in lines, waiting in doctor's offices, waiting for installers or repairmen to show up. In the military there a phrase "hurry up and wait." We don't like it. We can be impatient and it all just seems to be a waste of time!

Advent forced us to wait, to wait for Christmas and not celebrate too soon. That while the world tries to get us into Christmas earlier and earlier. Stores have Christmas decorations up before Halloween. The world doesn't like waiting but in the Church we wait.

Four weeks of looking forward, looking back, waiting to celebrate, anticipating... Why do we do all of that? Well because waiting can be good for you. It can be a time of preparation and reflection, if we let it. Waiting can help you readjust and realign yourself.

... but then when the waiting is over, it is time to celebrate! When we finally reach the front of the line, when our number is called, when we finally hear that knock on the door, we know it's time. It's our time. It's our turn! That's part of what Christmas is about. Our turn is up and we get to peek into the manger. With the arrival of Christmas our waiting is over and we rejoice with the ripping open of Christmas presents, the singing of Christmas hymns and carols, the greeting of "Merry Christmas" to all the people we meet.

Today is the First Sunday after Christmas and we read about a man named Simeon. His account in Scripture is a good one to hear at Christmas time. He is an "Advent man." He is the "waiting man." He was waiting, "waiting for the One who would comfort Israel." In other words he was waiting for the Messiah. The thing is that's all we know about him. He was waiting. We don't know who his parents were, or what tribe of Israel he was from, or where he grew up. We don't even know his occupation, whether he was married or not, or even how old he was. All we know is that he was waiting.

... waiting for the one who would comfort Israel. The Holy Spirit was with Simeon and had told him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.²

Can you imagine the joy, that must have filled his soul, when his waiting was finally over? When after having seen probably hundreds or thousands of babies brought to the Temple for dedication to God, in obedience to the Law of God, he finally receives his Christmas present. Can you imagine the excitement he felt as he takes this eight day old baby boy in his arms, knowing that he has now seen "the One who would comfort Israel."

This baby is the One who would give peace and hope. The One who would rescue us from our slavery to sin. The One who is the long-awaited Redeemer, promised by God from the

1 Luke 2:25

2 Luke 2:35-36

beginning,³ and spoken of by the prophets. The wait for Simeon was finally over and he is now ready to “depart in peace.” He is now ready to die.

Simeon unwraps his present. He unwraps the meaning of this child, what this child will do, and the effect He will have in this world. This child is:

[God’s] salvation... He is a light that will reveal salvation to the nations, and bring glory to [His] people Israel.⁴

Then he also says to Mary:

This child is the reason that many people in Israel will be condemned and many others will be saved. He will be a sign that will expose the thoughts of those who reject him, and a sword will pierce your heart.⁵

That doesn’t sound like Christmas joy. That sounds more like finding coal in your stocking. Simeon finally gets his present after so much waiting, and he is filled with joy, and what do we hear when this child is unwrapped? We hear of good things like: salvation, light, revelation and glory, but also of: opposition, sadness, and the revealing of those thoughts and secrets we keep in our hearts.

What does this mean? We’d like Simeon to explain more... but there is no more. That’s all Simeon says to us. With that he disappears from recorded history, fades back into the annals of time, and we never hear from him again.

We do have an advantage however in being able to look back. We do know what Simeon’s words mean because we know what would eventually happen to this child. He is the Light of God, but His light hurts our eyes which are accustomed to the darkness of sin.⁶ He is the Glory of God, but glory that was revealed in serving, in lowliness, and in humility, and being nailed to a cross. He is the Revealer of God and of our sin, and so was opposed because we do not like our sin exposed, talked about, or pointed out to us or anyone else. He is our salvation, but is rejected by many because we would rather try to save ourselves.⁷

Simeon’s words came true. Because of Jesus many in Israel did rise and many did fall. Mary’s soul was pierced as she had to watch her Son – her Son who was conceived miraculously – as she had to watch this Son crucified. The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by Him through what we confess of Him publicly with our mouths.

So what do we confess? We confess that we are sinful and unclean. We confess that we deserve punishment for our sins. We confess that we need comfort, forgiveness, and a rescuer. We also confess that we are modern-day Simeons, who are not only waiting for our comfort, forgiveness, and rescue, but that we have in fact already received it. Our waiting, like Simeon’s, is over. You and I have the same promise Simeon received. Simeon was promised he “wouldn’t die until he had seen the Messiah, whom the Lord would send.”⁸

3 Genesis 3:15

4 Luke 2:32

5 Luke 2:34-35

6 John 3:20-21

7 Ephesians 2:8-9

8 Luke 2:26

We confess that we do see Him, and have seen Him, and have touched Him, as He comes to us as humbly and lowly as He came to Simeon. What did Simeon see? Simeon saw a baby that looked just like any other baby, and yet by faith He knew that this was no ordinary baby. This was His Savior, the Redeemer of the world.

We look and what do we see? We today see words on a page, water in a bowl, and bread and wine on an altar. They look just like any other words, any other water, and any other bread and wine. Yet by faith we know that these are not ordinary at all. Here in these humble and lowly means we hear and see and touch our Savior, our Rescuer, the Redeemer of the world. He comes to us still today just as He came to Simeon. Our waiting is over too.

What are you waiting for: Acceptance by God? He has accepted you and made you His child in Holy Baptism.⁹ What are you waiting for: The voice of God to speak to us? He has spoken to us and given us His Holy Word. What are we waiting for: Forgiveness? He has forgiven us, freely and fully, of all our sins. What are we waiting for: Eternal life? He has already given that gift to us, and we have already begun living that new life. What are we waiting for: To see and actually come into physical contact with our Lord? We already have, and will again today, as we eat His body and drink His blood in Holy Communion.

What are we waiting for that God has not already given us? The answer is nothing. God our Father has already given us everything. Our Advent waiting is over, our Christmas present, our Savior, has come! It is a time to rejoice!

Since we are modern-day Simeons, we sing Simeon's song! Only we don't often call it "Simeon's Song," we call it the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is Latin for "Now Depart." We sing it after having received our Lord's gifts, right after Holy Communion. Like Simeon in this song we are rejoicing in our Savior, in our Lord's goodness and graciousness, in His love and forgiveness, and we are acknowledging that we are ready to see Him face to face in peace and in joy.

Do you remember what I said earlier when we read Simeon's words? That when Simeon "unwrapped" this "Christmas present" and rejoiced, he spoke not only of good things but there also seemed to be coal in his stocking! He also spoke of rejection and sadness.

Isn't that what we still see today? In the Church we talk about sin, death and gloomy things – like finding coal in your stocking? Yet that is exactly why we are celebrating and rejoicing at Christmas.

That the coal in our stocking is usually fuel for the fire. Which is all you can be, outside of Christ's salvation for you. By God's good grace the coal is not lit! Its not burning! The fire of God's wrath against our sins is not turned on us. It has been taken by Jesus on the cross. The stain of our sin is no longer on us. We have been washed clean and made pure through the blood of Jesus, which He shed on the cross.

Knowing the gloominess of our condition, of our sin, and the secrets of our hearts for which we are ashamed should not put a damper on our celebration, but in fact increases our joy, because we know that no matter how dark our sin, how deep our guilt, how stubborn our wills,

our Christmas gift has taken it all away. This child has caused our “falling and rising.” Just like you see in Holy Baptism where we have drown to death our old Adam and have been raised to new life. So we can fall to our knees before Him in repentance, and He raises us up with forgiveness!

We like Simeon can and should rejoice! Our waiting is over!

What we should learn from this? We rejoice not only at Christmas, but every time of the year, because we receive these gifts from God everyday. Everyday we receive His forgiveness. Everyday He sends His angels to guard and protect us. Everyday He sustains us in the one true faith. Everyday, until we are taken from this day to the day which will have no end, and begin living our eternal life in all its complete fullness and joy.

So what are we waiting for? Only His call. His call to come home and live with Him forever. Until that day, we live like Simeon. Coming to our Lord’s House, and unwrapping His gift for all to see and hear, that they too might share in our joy and wait with us.

So when we sing that song of Simeon after we dine with our Lord, remember that we too are waiting for Jesus’ glorious return and the wonder of gifts we cannot yet imagine.

In Jesus’ name.

Amen.