

# Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas, Year B

## The Text: Luke 2:22-40

In the Christmas Day Gospel, the evangelist Luke described the events around the first day of Jesus' birth. Today Luke fast-forwards to take us to the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Jesus' life on earth. We know from today's text that Jesus is 40 days old because the opening words speak of the time of purification according to the law of the Lord. That Law is Leviticus 12 which stipulates that a period of 40 days must elapse for the mother of a male before she can approach the priest and make a sin offering. So in today's text, that's what Mary and Joseph do. They take the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, and to give a sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This presentation of poultry tells us that Mary and Joseph are lowly, for this is the permissible sin offering for people are too poor to afford the regular offering of a lamb.

These particular details in the introduction of our text, just a week after Christmas Day, is Luke's way of continuing the theme of 'the unexpected' in God's plan of salvation. The kind of Saviour God promised is in itself unexpected. We would expect God to perhaps show Himself to the world in all His unveiled glory, in a stunning and brilliant burst much like a New Year's Eve fireworks display. Or perhaps by sending a mighty King arriving with all the fanfare of a celebrity, then charismatically leading his military to bring freedom to the captives. But instead the unexpected occurs: God's mighty King is a baby. There is no splendour. Not even a room with bring-your-own-linen available in downtown Bethlehem. So he has a feed box for a bed surrounded by animals and the foul odour of their excrement. God makes Himself lowly to step into a lowly world.

We would expect the news of this miraculous birth to those who deserved special favour from God. To those who were esteemed highly in the eyes of the community. To the elite; to the dignitaries and aristocrats. Yet God chooses to be born as a real human baby to real human parents. They are not celebrities, not special, not worthy in anyway. In another unexpected twist, God has simply chosen ordinary everyday people; He has again visited the lowly, those too poor to afford a regular offering, to bring salvation to the world.

In our text today, God's unexpected surprises continue. We are introduced to a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, a person we know very little about. We are told

that Simeon is a righteous man and he is awaiting the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not see death before he would see the Lord's Christ. So Simeon is longing for the fulfilment of this promise before He dies; longing for the day when God would reveal His promised Christ to him.

Once again, God chooses to reveal Himself to those who we wouldn't expect. Why would God promise to reveal Himself to an aging, dying man? Was Simeon special or worthy in anyway? No. That he is a righteous man isn't because of any virtuous work. We are told in the words immediately following that he "was expectantly awaiting the consolation of Israel. His righteousness lies in his expectant longing; in his faith. No different to us, Simeon is a sinner having fallen well short of what God demands. As we look back on the last year in the light of God's Word, it doesn't take much for us to find those occasions where we need Jesus our Saviour just as Simeon did. Like us, Simeon is righteous through faith because He is clinging to the hope of salvation in Christ just as we are.

God fulfils His promise to Simeon that he will not die before he sees the Lord's Christ. Simeon goes to the Temple at the same time as Joseph and Mary presenting their child Jesus to do for Him what was customary according to the Law. Simeon was expectantly waiting to see the Christ, but I doubt very much that he was expecting a baby. Yet God revealed to Simeon that this was indeed the Christ, and he received Him in His arms and he glorified God and said:

Now Lord you dismiss your servant in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before all people, a light of revelation to the nations and glory to your people Israel.

This is Simeon's song of praise to God in the temple for letting him see the Christ child and hold him in his arms, before he died. In the church we often sing this after we have been dismissed from Holy Communion, thereby acknowledging we have also seen our Saviour in flesh and blood, the bodily risen Christ in bread and wine, confessing that the reception of the sacrament prepares people for their heavenward journey.

When we celebrate Holy Communion the Christ child who was born for us and crucified in our place, and who rose from death and flooded the kingdom of darkness with His light, comes to us as host of this holy meal, giving us His body and blood to forgive us for all our sins. God in Christ again does not withhold Himself from the lowly. God through Christ again comes to His Temple—not the building in Jerusalem that is no longer there, but to His new Temple, the people of God, His church, gathered around Him, the fullness of God in bodily form.

As we stand at the beginning of another year and look back over the way we have come, we see our record of imperfect endeavours, our shortcomings and sins which the blood of Christ must cover up. But we also see a future bright with promises like the bud of a rose which has not yet unfolded its petals. Throughout this year pray that the Lord would grant us the enduring faith of Simeon to see the Lord's salvation and give him thanks face to face in eternity. Pray that like the child Jesus we will continually grow in true wisdom and receive the favour of God. Throughout this year there might be things from God in our life that we would not have expected. But what we can expect is that He is faithful to His promises. He has proven that by sending the promised Saviour into the world for Simeon to behold, and for us to behold too, by grace alone through faith alone, until the day we see Him face to face in Heavenly glory. Amen.