

# 27 Dec 2020 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Christmas – SIMEON SAYS

## WORKING TITLE: Simeon Says

### OUTLINE (Done Last)

#### Introduction – History

- In use since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, mainly in Vespers and Compline (last 2 of the historical liturgical hours)
- Purification (ceremonial laws) – Christ Fulfilled the Law.
- Tie into servant and master

#### Cornerstone or Capstone?

- Falling –
  - Religious Leaders - We've always done it this way; we can't be wrong.
  - The sword (of the spirit) Mary's pain vs ours
  - ~~Martin Luther King's mother~~
- Rising -
  - He lifts us up after we have fallen or wandered (good Shepherd)
  - We are being built into a building – he is the cornerstone
  - Holding into Christ – Simon vs us.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER?

**Who rose and who fell?** 'For the falling and rising.' For the fall of many Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, Nazarenes, Gadarenes; and for the rising of all that believed on Him. In some cases—as that of Peter and the dying robber—they who fell afterwards rose. In all these cases the presence of Christ involved a moral judgment. It became 'a savior of life unto life, or of death unto death.'

Isn't the Messiah more than a mere sign from God?

**How was a sword to pierce your very soul – who is the audience?** Almost from the very birth of Christ the sword began to pierce the soul of the 'Mater Dolorosa;' and what tongue can describe the weight of mysterious anguish which she felt as she watched the hatred and persecution which followed Jesus and saw Him die on the cross amid the execrations of all classes of those whom He came to save?

### WHERE IS CHRIST CRUCIFIED IN THE PASSAGE?

Jesus is the embodiment of salvation – His Death was the price for our salvation.

### WHERE IS THE IR FACILITATED?

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## **WHERE IS THE LAW THAT CONVICTS ME AND MINE?**

Deepest thoughts will be revealed; a sword will pierce your very soul

## **WHERE IS THE GOSPEL THAT COMFORTS ME AND MINE?**

A light to reveal the God to the Nations – Salvation for all people.

## **PRIME READING FOR THE DAY**

### **Luke 2:22–40 – Jesus’s Presentation in the Temple**

22 Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. 23 The law of the Lord says, “If a woman’s first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord.”[a] 24 So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”[b]

### **The Prophecy of Simeon**

25 At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him 26 and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, 28 Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,  
as you have promised.

30 I have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared for all people.

32 He is a light to reveal God to the nations,  
and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

33 Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. 35 As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

### **The Prophecy of Anna**

36 Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. 37 Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four.[c]

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She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. 38 She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

39 When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. 40 There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

- a. 2:23 Exod 13:2.
- b. 2:24 Lev 12:8.
- c. 2:37 Or She had been a widow for eighty-four years.

### KEY WORD STUDY

**(23) Γέγραπται** – (gegraphtai) it is written – implies the permanence of the Law (Luther, stehet geschrieben).

**(28) αὐτός** –(autos) - The word is emphatic. He took the child into his own arms.

**(29) Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα.** 'Now art Thou setting free Thy slave, O Master, according to Thy word, in peace.' Nῦν 'now, at last!' The present tense is the so-called *praesens futurascens* where an action still future is spoken of in the present because it is unalterably determined, and the result is already in course of accomplishment.

**(34) κείται.** Compare Philippians 1:17. Literally, "lies." The metaphor is taken from a stone which may either become 'a stone of stumbling' and 'a rock of offence' (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:32-33; 1 Corinthians 1:23), or 'a precious corner-stone' (1 Peter 2:7-8; Acts 4:11; 1 Corinthians 3:11).

**When** -After Shepherds & Angels (@ Nativity); 40 days after the Nativity, almost certainly before wise men.

**Nunc Dimittis** - also known as the Song of Simeon or the Canticle of Simeon, is a canticle taken from the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 29 through 32. Its Latin name comes from its incipit, the opening words, of the Vulgate translation of the passage, meaning "Now you dismiss".

**Sword** – The Word of God (yea, even a double-edged sword)

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## CONTEXT - OTHER PERICOPE

### Is. 61:10–62:3

- 10 I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God!  
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation  
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.  
I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding  
or a bride with her jewels.
- 11 The Sovereign Lord will show his justice to the nations of the world.  
Everyone will praise him!  
His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring,  
with plants springing up everywhere.

## Isaiah's Prayer for Jerusalem

- 62 Because I love Zion,  
I will not keep still.  
Because my heart yearns for Jerusalem,  
I cannot remain silent.  
I will not stop praying for her  
until her righteousness shines like the dawn,  
and her salvation blazes like a burning torch.
- 2 The nations will see your righteousness.  
World leaders will be blinded by your glory.  
And you will be given a new name  
by the Lord's own mouth.
- 3 The Lord will hold you in his hand for all to see—  
a splendid crown in the hand of God.

### Psalm 111[a]

- 1 Praise the Lord!
- I will thank the Lord with all my heart  
as I meet with his godly people.
- 2 How amazing are the deeds of the Lord!  
All who delight in him should ponder them.
- 3 Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty.  
His righteousness never fails.
- 4 He causes us to remember his wonderful works.  
How gracious and merciful is our Lord!
- 5 He gives food to those who fear him;  
he always remembers his covenant.
- 6 He has shown his great power to his people  
by giving them the lands of other nations.

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- 7 All he does is just and good,  
and all his commandments are trustworthy.
- 8 They are forever true,  
to be obeyed faithfully and with integrity.
- 9 He has paid a full ransom for his people.  
He has guaranteed his covenant with them forever.  
What a holy, awe-inspiring name he has!
- 10 Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom.  
All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom.

Praise him forever!

- a. 111 This psalm is a Hebrew acrostic poem; after the introductory note of praise, each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

### **Gal. 4:4-7**

4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.  
5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.[a] 6 And because we[b] are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." [c] 7 Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child.[d] And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

- a. 4:5 Greek sons; also in 4:6.  
b. 4:6a Greek you.  
c. 4:6b Abba is an Aramaic term for "father."  
d. 4:7 Greek son; also in 4:7b.

### **CONTEXT – IMMEDIATE**

**This Chapter** – The Birth of Jesus; Shepherds and Angels; Jesus Speaks with the Teachers

**Prior Chapter** – Introduction; Birth of John the Baptist Foretold; Birth of Jesus Foretold; Mary Visits Elizabeth; The Magnificat; The Birth of John the Baptist; Zechariah's Prophecy

**Following Chapter** – John the Baptist Prepares the Way; The Baptism of Jesus; The Ancestors of Jesus

### **CROSS REFERENCES**

### **COMMENTARIES AND OTHER WORKS**

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### *Introduction*

Did that Gospel reading sound familiar? It should! We sing this almost every Sunday. I won't embarrass anyone by asking for a show of hands, but how many of you knew the context of the song?

It has been in liturgical use since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, primarily in the last two of the Canonical hours, Vesper and Compline, celebrated before retiring for the night. We get the name Nunc Dimittis from the first two words of the song in Latin, meaning "Now release"

While it's not obvious from our English translation, the Greek text of 'Lord' and 'servant' are the same as I highlighted a couple of weeks ago: Master, allow your slave to go (die) in peace.

Simeon spoke the words upon seeing the Christ child at the temple in Jerusalem, when the Holy Child was about six weeks old. His mother, Mary, was there to fulfill the ceremonial law, since she had become ceremonially unclean through the process of childbirth. So even at this early age, the actions of Christ were in accordance with and in fulfillment of the unchanging law.

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Have you ever approached a stranger with a newborn and asked to hold the baby? I haven't, but according to reliable sources, most mothers would respond with an emphatic "NO." Simeon must have had a special touch to get Mary to part with her child, even for a short while.

While Simeon did praise God with this song, he also had prophetic word about the child to Mary:

*And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."*

So, are we appointed for falling or rising?

### *Falling*

If you look at the Gospels, it's clear that those who bore the brunt of Jesus's criticism were the religious leaders of the day - Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and Nazarenes.

Why did they merit such harsh criticism?

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They were concerned with appearances rather than substance, with the favor of man, rather than God.

They were obsessed with keeping the man-made laws in minute detail, but ignoring or circumscribing the God-given laws, thinking that in doing so they could more easily keep the Law and thus gain God's favor.

They were those who desire civic power, even within the context of the visible church, rather than true faithfulness to their vocations.

They were focused on their outward, public actions, rather than the attitudes of their heart, and an actual relationship with the Sovereign God.

They were so convinced that they had gotten it as right as humanly possible, that they had fully plumbed the depth of scriptures, and understood it so thoroughly, and so completely as know the mind of God, that no one, not even God Himself, could convince them that they were mistaken.

I'd imagine most of us, have some Pharisee in us. I'll confess that last one hits home for me – If I believe in something, it does take a lot to convince me I'm wrong. It just one of sin's manifestations in our fallen, corrupt natures.



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Almost from the very birth of Christ the sword foretold by Simeon began to pierce the soul of Mary, the Θεοτόκος (Theotokos), the Mother of God; and what tongue can describe the anguish which she felt as she watched the hatred and persecution which followed Jesus and saw Him die on the cross amid the taunts and jeers of those He came to save?

The word that Simeon used for sword is also used in Revelations (1:16), where the writer details the double-edged sword coming from the mouth of the glorified Christ. Christ, the living Word, will exposes the secret thoughts of many hearts. In his letter to the Ephesians (6:17), Paul talks about the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and the writer of Hebrews (4:12) says:

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Whether it is read, studied, sung, or heard, God's word will have its effect on us, either to soften or harden our hearts toward God; for our rising or our falling.

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If the law has been rightly taught and if we are truthful with ourselves, we must admit that we have all fallen, completely, and can't get up.

### *Rising*

Yes, we have fallen, but Christ is there to pick us up.

How can we be sure? Simeon says that Christ's light is for revelation to the Gentiles, in other translations, for revelation to all nations. If we are human, we ARE included in all nations!

Peter, in his first letter (1 Pet 2:5-8a), echoes the dual effects of falling and rising when he characterizes Jesus as either a stumbling block or the cornerstone:

*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:*

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame."*

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*So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,*

*"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"*

*and*

*"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."*

Jesus did not build His church out of the rock of the ground (nor out of wood, hay, or bricks), but out of living stones. As he calls us through His means of grace, the master builder places each of us in exactly the right place in His magnificent temple, as members of His invisible and unified church, with fellow believers of from every time, location, and tongue.

Even the belief (or faithing) is not something that we do. Paul, in his letter to the Romans (10:17), makes it clear that this too is a gift from God:

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

The reading concludes talking about one of members of that invisible church, Anna. Upon hearing Simeon's word, she did two things:

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- (1) First, she praised God for His faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to send the Messiah to rescue Jerusalem and
- (2) She told everyone about this good news, this gospel.

The fact that you are here today is evidence that your response to the Gospel is to praise God in word and song; I pray that each of us would share this good news with those who don't know the real reason for this season.

In closing, remember that just like Simeon, we have seen with our own eyes, held in our own hands, and even been fed by, the very body of our Savior in the Holy Supper. We can depart from this Divine Service, where God comes to us in both Word and Sacrament, with His peace and joy not only in this Christmas season, but through this year and in years to come.

AMEN