

First Sunday After Christmas – December 27, 2015, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

“My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation”

Just a note about today's Holy Gospel: sometimes during the Christmas Season we like to rush from the birth of Christ and the shepherds all the way to the three kings! First of all we don't know how many kings there were. We know that there were three gifts, but we don't know how many kings. People like to give them names – we have heard Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar - but – not in the Bible. Sorry to say that, but tradition says that, and as Gray likes to remind folks – you don't put the three kings out until Epiphany. It wasn't two weeks after Jesus' birth, but instead it could have been as much as two years! We don't know when they came, but we do know that in fact, they DID come and visit!

Today we are focusing on a special day in Jerusalem, a man and a woman testified to what God was doing through this small child, and that the whole world should rejoice at His coming. It was no accident that both Simeon and Anna were older people with full résumés of life experience being present that day in the Temple. Anna's and Simeon's prophecies bring to us a promise of hope and expectation, along with testimonies that in this child - God's promise was coming to realization. The last Sunday before Christmas and on Christmas Eve we spoke about the prophecies that were made about and fulfilled by the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. Today, we are looking at prophecies that would be fulfilled in the grown-up Jesus. Here two old and wise prophets of Jewish virtue spoke not only for their nation but for all humanity, as Simeon's prophecy mentions Jesus' relationship with the Gentiles. However, with all of this good news there is also a hint that all will not go well. Mary will experience the pain of seeing her son rejected by a divided Israel.

The naming ceremony and circumcision of a young Hebrew child always took place eight days after birth. Today it is called the “bris.” Mary and Joseph carefully observed the letter of the Law. The fact that they were unable to bring a lamb was indicative of their getting started as a married couple. In a very realistic sense, *“He who was rich became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich.”* That the thank offering and the sin offering were united in this one presentation and that seemed to suggest gratitude and penitence were intertwined when these petitioners came to the altar of God. According to Exodus 12:2; Numbers 8:16 and Numbers 18:15, the first-born of man and beast were considered to be the property of God, but in the case of a child, he could be redeemed at the price of five shekels. Christ completely identified Himself with sinful humanity even from the very beginning of His earthly life. Can you believe the degree of humiliation to which the King of Glory was subjected? Willingly subjected.

God was never without a witness, even in the midst of the corruption of the Temple. Look at Simeon and Anna from today's Gospel, whose eyes, ears, hearts and minds were open toward God. Apparently Simeon was not a great preacher or an inspired singer. He was the type of man whose name would never be in the headlines of a national newspaper. He probably never occupied a place on any special committee or represented some organization at any important

conference. He would never have been the President of a bank; or mentioned in any important news releases. Except for this very brief mention in the New Testament, he was a relatively unknown man who lived somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. The greatest thing ever said about him was that “he was an intimate friend of the Holy Spirit.”

- The Holy Spirit was upon him.
- The Spirit talked with him.
- The Holy Spirit led him.

Simeon was in excellent company! Most people are not as wise in their choice of a companion! The word translated *consolation*—“*waiting for the consolation of Israel*” as we read is παράκλησις *paraklesis*. This is the same word used by Jesus of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It means “*Summoned, called to one’s side, especially to one’s aid. One who pleads a cause before a judge, a pleader, a counsel for the defense; a legal assistant, or an advocate.*” What did Jesus call the Holy Spirit? Counselor.

Simeon recognized that his nation was in great danger. There was a need that One should come alongside a guilty people, to understand their problems, to provide assistance, to plead their case before the Divine Judge. He knew that he would actually see the Messiah. We are not told by what means he would recognize the Messiah when the moment arrived. He probably never even worried about that matter, and never crossed his bridges before he came to them. You know what - we might be wise to follow that example! Isn’t it incredible that this great honor would come to this old senior citizen? That particular morning a compelling urge carried him to that part of the Temple. We are not told whether he had heard stories of what had happened in Bethlehem; we only know “*he came by the Spirit into the temple.*” He was just in time to be in time! The magnificence of his song is absolutely beyond description. It was filled with what could be called “eternal harmonies.” This was to be expected from a man so intimately linked with the author of all inspired music, the giver of all good gifts – the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

The word *servant* in verse 29 is δοῦλος *doulos* which means *bondslave*. The entire setting gives us a word picture of brilliant beauty. Simeon had been keeping vigil throughout the long dark hours. His Master had commanded him to watch, and while other things might have tempted him to leave his post, a great sense of loving obedience sustained his faithfulness. After long hours of solid darkness, the sky was beginning to brighten; the Sun of Righteousness was arising with healing in His wings. He had seen his Savior and now this bondslave could be relieved of his job; he would be free to do other things or to go to live in the Palace of His eternal Friend – the Lord Himself.

Jesus’ parents were probably surprised that a stranger should be so acquainted with facts relating to their son. It was true that the shepherds were aware of His presence but they knew because the angels had told them. How could this man have known? The Messiah, whom they knew was their son, would bring blessing to the Jews, but this strange man in the temple spoke of “*a light of Revelation to the Gentiles.*” Gentiles were considered “taboo.” If a Jew touched a

First Sunday After Christmas – December 27, 2015, Year C

Gentile they would be “unclean.” For someone in the Temple to be speaking of a “revelation to the Gentiles” this was unique, this was breaking new ground, a whole new idea, and both Joseph and Mary were surprised by this stranger’s message. Could it be that Simeon knew Isaiah 8:14? *"Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem"* Could it be that he knew all of Isaiah pointed to their newborn Son? He spoke of the fall and rise of many – was this the death and rebirth of many in Christ – and their resurrection with Him on the final day?

Through the death of Christ, which in itself would be a supreme sorrow to His mother, Mary, the evil heart of the enemy would be made bare. Sin, which for long had been hidden beneath a thin veneer of religious respectability, would no longer be hidden. This new manifestation of evil would only deepen the wounds already in the heart of Mary.

Anna, the prophetess, from the tribe of Asher, was an elderly woman who was unquestionably one of the most virtuous women in all of Israel. Luke details that she had been married seven years when her husband died and after that she lived in the temple, possibly in some room set apart for her. It has been estimated that if she got married at fifteen, which was not unusual for that day and age, and after seven years of married life, she would have begun eighty-four years as a widow. So her age at the time of Christ’s coming to the temple would have been one hundred and six. This is probably more compatible with the statement, *“she was of a great age.”* Other young widows probably got remarried, but instead, this lonely woman had drawn nearer to God. When her own home appeared to be in jeopardy, she went to live in God’s house, and may have even worked there, helping to keep the place clean. When her age slowed down her service, she retired to her room and interceded to God in such a way that even the Lord decided she was worthy of mention in the immortal story of His Son. The precious revelations of God were always given to those who were fasting and praying.

You see, at the arrival of the child Jesus to the temple, God used a man and a woman to announce the greatness of the event. This should serve as an important reminder to us that the job of proclaiming Christ is for every Christian – both man and woman, young and old. In those days the testimony of a woman was not held in very great esteem; her place was at home where she was expected to learn in silence. Today – thanks be to God, that is a whole different story.

The Bible tells us that with their mission accomplished, Mary and Joseph returned home. Ahead of them would be the impending threat by Herod to kill all male children two years of age and under, and so they would flee to Egypt, and then twelve years later return to the Temple for Jesus’ Bar Mitzvah. The precious words of Simeon would become true for the whole world to hear over and over again - *"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people."* (Luke 2:30-31)