

Presentation of Our Lord, February 2, 2020
“The Young and the Restful” (Luke 2:22-40)

Many of us probably rolled out of bed this morning curious as to whether or not Punxsutawny Phil would see his shadow – for we know that he alone can predict our weather for the next six weeks. Will we have six more weeks of winter, or will spring come early this year? And how many of us reading the Sunday paper will take a glimpse at our horoscopes to see the prediction for our immediate futures?

In our gospel text this morning, we see a man by the name of Simeon predicting the future, as well. He is looking ahead at what God will do through Jesus, the Christ.

Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph take the Baby Jesus to the temple as prescribed by the law of Moses for all Jewish parents. According to OT law, a mother must go to the temple after childbirth for the rite of purification because she is considered to be unclean. If she bears a son, she must wait 40 days after the birth, and 80 days if she bears a daughter. She is to take with her a sacrifice of a lamb and a pigeon, unless she is too poor to bring a lamb, in which case, a pair of pigeons would suffice.

Also according to the law, every firstborn male was sacred to God and was considered to belong to God. If he was a descendant of Aaron (or the Levites) he would later become part of the priesthood. If he descended from one of the other tribes, parents would then pay the sum of five shekels to buy back or redeem their child from God. This was called the redemption of the firstborn.

In the first few verses of our text, we can see a lot about Jesus and the home in which he was raised. First of all, his parents were very obedient Jews. They came on the 40th day after Jesus' birth with their sacrificial offering in hand. We assume that their son, also, would be taught to faithfully obey the law. He was made under the law, and although he would reject man's religious traditions, he would obey God's law perfectly.

Notice, however, that they did not bring a lamb – but the offering of two pigeons. This indicates that they were not a wealthy family – not unlike many of our own. I'm sure their basic needs were met and that they probably lived comfortably, but without many of the luxuries of life. Therefore, Jesus' life must have been humble and lowly as his birth.

This tells me that Jesus knows what it is like to walk in our shoes. He knows what it is like to work for a living and what it is like to be a part of a family with its challenges and struggles. He understands.

But also notice, according to Luke, that Mary and Joseph did not pay the five shekels to redeem, or buy back, their son from God. They knew that he belonged to God and would be a part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. The angel had told Mary she would bear the savior. The shepherds confirmed this when they brought the news of the angels to the manger. And today, they meet two elderly strangers, who again praise God for this baby – two strangers who, after seeing Jesus, are filled with peace and rest.

Today, the Baby Jesus meets Simeon and Anna – a meeting of the young and the restful.

Simeon was a part of the faithful Jewish remnant that eagerly looked for the Messiah. Because of his readiness and eagerness to die, he is usually pictured as a very old man. It had been revealed to him that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. So, guided by the Spirit, Simeon comes to the temple that day. Upon seeing the Baby Jesus, he immediately takes him in his arms, praising God for sending the promised Messiah and for allowing him to live long enough to see him.

Simeon is now filled with a sense of peace and restfulness, and is ready to die. He has seen God's salvation, who has come not only for the glory of Israel, but to be a light for all people. But soon, Simeon stops praising and starts prophesying. Because of this child, he says, many people would rise or fall.

How true that statement is. One either accepts Christ as Lord and Savior, or rejects him. The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that salvation is given by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And in the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus himself makes a distinction between the sheep – those who place their faith in him – and the goats – those who reject him. The sheep are blessed by God and given an eternal inheritance, while the goats are cursed with eternal fire.

So yes, Jesus comes for all, but the choice is ours. Will we rise to a new life because of him, or will our lack of faith in him as our Savior bring us eternal consequences?

Simeon also says that he will be a sign that will be opposed. Jesus is the sign of God's love for us, the sign pointing to God and to life in God's kingdom. But time and time again, he would meet opposition. People would attack and speak against him. They would say his miracles are done in the name of Satan. Finally, they would slander him, hang him on a cross, and lie about his resurrection.

Simeon's prediction remains true even today, for there are many in our world who directly oppose Christ and do everything in their power to wipe Christianity from the face of the earth. When I and many of you were students, there was prayer in our schools. Sadly, that's no longer the case because those directly opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ have fought to keep it out. And in the past few years, those who oppose the gospel have tried to take Christ out of Christmas. It is now politically incorrect to wish someone *Merry Christmas*. *Happy Holidays* has become the greeting of many.

So, Simeon predicts that Jesus would cause many to rise or fall, and that he is a sign that will be opposed. But his last prediction is for Mary alone: *and a sword will pierce your own soul too*. He is telling Jesus' mother that she would experience a pain above all pains. She would feel the pain of watching her son die.

As Simeon finishes prophesying, the prophetess, Ann, comes onto the scene. She, too, begins praising God and speaking about the child to others in the temple who were also looking for the redemption of Israel.

Anna's name means *grace*, and she is a godly widow of great age. We know that widows didn't have an easy time in those days. Often they were neglected and left to care for themselves the best they could. Anna has devoted herself to serving God through fasting and prayers. She remains in the temple night and day waiting for the appearing of God's Messiah.

And now she joins in a song of praise with Simeon, two faithful people who have long awaited this day, two people whose souls are now at rest because of this young Messiah, two people who have seen Jesus.

We can hardly imagine the joy these two must have experienced, coming face to face with Christ. But like Simeon and Ann, we, too, have seen the Christ. We have seen him among the poor and lowly in our midst. We see him in this community, the gathering of God's people. We see him in the waters of Holy Baptism when a child is joined to him forever. And we come face to face with Christ today as we share in his holy meal.

As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we come face to face with his broken body and shed blood, face to face with his suffering and death. But we also come face to face with his resurrection. In that meal, we are forgiven of our sins and reminded of God's promise given in our baptisms: *that if we are joined to him in a death like his, we will surely experience a resurrection like his*. And friends, that is more than a prediction. That is a promise in which we can find rest!