

Luke 2:22-40

Christmas 1C + December 30, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
A Little Lamb at Work

The Word of the Lord from Luke 2:27b-28a: "When the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, [Simeon] took Him up in his arms and blessed God." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Simeon stands in the temple courts, gathered there by the Holy Spirit. We don't know how old he is: we're prone to assume that he's an old man because the Holy Spirit has told him that he will not die until he has seen the Christ, but he could in fact be a strapping young man in the prime of his life, such as myself. We do know that he is righteous and devout, and that he's been waiting for the consolation of Israel. *Consolation*. Long ago, the Lord declared through Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort My people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2). Simeon has lived his life waiting for that double pardon, that grace upon grace, to appear; and he stands in the temple courts because the Holy Spirit has revealed to him that today is the day.

The temple is always a busy place, but Simeon picks out the Messiah: He's a forty-day-old baby, carried in the arms of His parents. But soon He is in the arms of Simeon, who blesses God and says, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel."

Among other things, this is a great follow-up to the nerdy sermon of Christmas Day, because it's a marvelous revelation of the Incarnation. As Simeon prays and blesses God, where does he look? He could look toward heaven, addressing the Father on His throne. He could turn and face the temple, looking toward the Holy of Holies and rejoice that, for centuries, God has dwelled with His people there. *Or ...* he could look into the eyes of this month-old infant, and honestly say to Him, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word." That's a little odd, isn't it? When grown men talk to babies, they make googly eyes and say silly things. Plus, if you want to get something done, you don't ask a baby to do it. But here is Simeon in the temple, asking this child to safeguard his eternal life. Why? Because this child is almighty God in flesh for Simeon's salvation.

That's why Simeon is there at the temple. He's been told that he will find the Christ, and he does!

There is also a woman there named Anna, a prophetess and widow for most of her life. She too is faithful and devout, and so she has devoted her life to fasting and prayer in the temple. That hour, she begins to give thanks to God for this baby; and because of this baby, she speaks of Him to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. In other words, her unrecorded message is along the same lines of Simeon, perhaps something like: "Have you been waiting for the Messiah to come, the One who will comfort God's people by redeeming Jerusalem, as foretold in Isaiah 52? Look no further! The Lord has come to His temple! Look! There He is! No, not behind that couple, but there in Simeon's arms!"

That's why Anna is there. She is there because – joy to the world! – the Lord has come.

How delightful for Simeon and Anna. They have lived by faith, trusting the promises of God; and now, as the Holy Spirit reveals, God is keeping His promises. That's why they are there.

Why are Mary and Joseph and Jesus there? Because Jesus is already at work for your redemption. Luke makes it clear throughout this text, because the word "law" keeps popping up – five times in eighteen verses, to be precise. Thus our text begins, "And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'"

God established this particular Law right after the Passover. Because He had saved the life of every firstborn man and beast among the Israelites in Egypt, they were to be consecrated to Him – after all, they owed Him their lives. So every firstborn animal – except a donkey – was to be offered to the Lord, and these animals then were used by the priests and their families for food and support. However, firstborn children were not to be given away: instead, they were to be redeemed by the sacrifice of a lamb – a reminder of the Passover lamb that had saved the firstborn in Egypt. Once again, a lamb would take the place of the firstborn son.

For those who couldn't afford a lamb, the Lord permitted the sacrifice of two turtledoves or pigeons instead.

This is why Mary and Joseph are at the temple: they, with Jesus, are fulfilling the law. On the fortieth day of His human life outside the womb, Jesus is redeemed by a sacrifice as the firstborn of Mary; and we find that the King of kings is in a family so poor that they have to go with the option of sacrificing the birds instead of a lamb.

We hasten to point out the reason for *this* sacrifice and redemption. Jesus doesn't have to be redeemed: He doesn't owe His life to God because He is God Himself. This sacrifice is done for you: our text makes this plain through repetition: at the beginning of our reading, Luke notes this is done "according to the Law of Moses;" halfway through, he repeats that this is done "according to the custom of the Law," and near the end, he writes once again that this is done to perform "everything according to the Law of the Lord." If Jesus is going to be the perfect sacrifice – the perfect Lamb without any defect, He has to be perfectly Law-abiding. That's why Luke tells us that He is circumcised on the 8th day and presented on the 40th. The Baby Jesus is busy keeping the Law for you.

All of this is summed up, by the way, in that oft-overlooked Christmas text from Galatians 4:4-5: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Jesus is there to keep the law. That's what should get our attention when Jesus is presented at the temple. Even though it's a pair of pigeons that is sacrificed that day, the Lamb is there – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. With every other presentation of every other firstborn son for the many centuries since Exodus, the point of the ritual has been to say, "God has spared this child from death and accepted the death of a lamb instead." But this time is different: this time, the point of the ritual is to say, "God will *not* spare *this Child* from death, for this is God's Lamb. Rather than spare this One from death by the sacrifice of another, God will sacrifice this One so that you might be numbered with the firstborn of the kingdom of heaven."

So there's the Son of God, presented to keep the Law so that He can be the perfect Sacrifice, the perfect Passover lamb.

And that is why you are here today. After all, those who think that Christianity is about showing up on Christmas and Easter aren't here the Sunday after; shoot, even we pastors don't always have a whole lot of energy to come to church on the Sunday after Christmas! But you are here because, like Simeon and Anna, the Holy Spirit has revealed to you that the Christ is here. By faith, you see Simeon in

the text saying that a baby is the almighty Son of God; and instead of thinking that the poor man is a little goofy, you say, "Amen! *Of course* that Baby is the Son of God." Likewise, by faith you hear of Jesus going about His life and ministry without sin, and you say, "Amen! He is keeping the law for me, because daily I break God's law, and sin, and earn for myself only His judgment."

And then, most remarkably, you look at the same Jesus crucified, bleeding and dying; and by faith you say, "Amen. Truly this is the Son of God. Truly by His death, He fulfills the law that the wages of sin is death ... and truly, there is the Lamb of God who takes my place and dies for me, that I might be God's consecrated child, set apart for eternal life."

And so you are here, because the Lord Jesus is here with grace upon grace. By the forgiveness of sins, He gives you the credit for His perfect, holy life: when God the Father looks upon you, He doesn't see your sin, your disobedience and the many ways you've managed to add to your unrighteousness in the past few days. When God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of His Son, because He clothed you with Jesus' righteousness, wrapped you up in it, in your Baptism. There, you received the adoption as sons! Furthermore, He speaks that forgiveness into you; and even if the pastor is older and goofier-looking than Simeon might have been, it is still the Lord's Word of comfort and pardon. It is God Himself who declares you to be a holy child.

And speaking of Simeon, it's no wonder that you sing his song – you know, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." And look at when you sing it! You've just received the same body and blood that Simeon held in his arms, the body and blood of Christ who was born for the forgiveness of your sins.

Take time to marvel at this text, my friends. Jesus does not grow up to *be* the Savior. He already is at work to save you when He is forty days old – and already when He is eight days old, He has shed His blood to keep the law so that He might be the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb who is offered in your place. He is your consolation and your redemption. However many days the Lord grants you, now you can depart in peace according to His Word, because His Word to you is, "I forgive you all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen