



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for The Presentation of Our Lord

February 2, 2025

Custom of the Law

Luke 2:22–40

²² And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; ²³ (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

²⁴ And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

²⁵ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. ²⁶ And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, ²⁸ Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

²⁹ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart In peace, according to thy word: ³⁰ For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, ³¹ Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; ³² A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

³³ And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; ³⁵ (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

³⁶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

³⁹ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

The events in today's Gospel take place 40 days after the birth of Jesus. He had already been circumcised – on the eighth day, according to the demands of the Law. In fact, everything He did was according to the Law. He had come for this purpose: to be born under the Law, to take our place under the Law, and to fulfill the Law perfectly and completely in our stead. So, even though He was perfect and Holy, without any need for



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circumcision, He had to be circumcised to place Himself under the Law of God as our substitute. And now, a month later, Mary and Joseph return to the Temple, after Mary's ceremonial purification according to the Law, to present her Son to God. What an incredible moment! Can you imagine? Bringing God to God in God's house, where He had received the sacrifices and prayers of His children for centuries! It boggles the mind.

At the Temple that day was a man by the name of Simeon – and it was not a coincidence. We're told that Simeon was a devout and righteous man, a believing child of God, who was "looking for the consolation of Israel." He was an old man, and for his entire life, he had been waiting for the Savior, the promised Messiah, to appear and rescue the Children of Israel from their torments, their sin, and their grief. What is the greatest consolation we could hope for in life? Relief from guilt, relief from our estrangement from God. How Simeon had yearned for this – the restoration of peace between God and man. He wasn't looking for some political savior like most of his countrymen, for the Holy Spirit had made known to him what the Messiah was really all about.

We're also told that the Spirit had revealed to Simeon that the time of the Savior was close at hand – so close, in fact, that he would not die before he would see this Messiah with his own eyes.

What a revelation! To know – *from God* – that you would see the Savior in your lifetime! We all live in the hope and expectation of seeing Christ return at any moment – but have we not lived with that expectation our entire lives? Indeed, the Church has lived with it for more than 2,000 years. Isn't it understandable, then, when people can have a hard time truly expecting to see the Lord in their lifetime? But, how would you feel if – without any shadow of doubt – God had told you that *you* would see Jesus with your own eyes before you die? Simeon had lived in the same hope you and I have. And now the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that finally, the time had arrived – the Savior had arrived – and it was time for Simeon to go to the Temple to meet Him!

Think about it: to see his Savior all he had to do was go to the Temple. Simeon must have thought: "Of course! How appropriate! Where else would I go to meet God?" For Israel, the Temple was the dwelling place of the Lord – the place of sacrifice, where the priests offered up sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the people; the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept – the very mercy seat of God, where God would graciously come to His people and accept their sacrifices and forgive their sins; the very place where the blood of sacrificed animals was offered in expectation of this coming Messiah, who in turn would shed His own blood for the life of the world.

Now, Simeon had been going to the Temple year after year. His entire life, he faithfully attended the services, witnessed the sacrifices, and enjoyed the dwelling place of the Lord. But now, he was going there to behold God in a way he never had before, to behold with his own eyes the actual God/Man Messiah, sent to pay the terrible price for his



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sin and accomplish his salvation!

So he goes. And, as he sees Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus, he knows by the Holy Spirit that this is the One – this infant boy is the Creator! What eyes of faith Simeon had! Imagine it. That little baby, cradled in His mother’s arms, was the same one responsible for creating everything in the universe, was even responsible for upholding all of creation, supporting everything. Simeon took the child from His mother, and there in his hands, he held his Creator and Redeemer and God! Right in his arms was the incredible miracle of God Incarnate, come to save us. With the child in his arms, he blessed God and sang his song that we know in our liturgy as the *Nunc Dimittis*.

How does it begin? “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace.” He could indeed depart in peace, could he not? God had fulfilled His Word and Simeon had seen His salvation. He knew in the most tangible way possible that God had kept His promise and that salvation was at hand – God was doing it! True peace between God and man was about to be accomplished. Simeon could then depart from the Temple in Peace – peace of mind, for receiving the very thing he had been longing for his entire life, and also the true peace His Messiah and Savior was about to accomplish for him!

Years ago – as the story goes – someone was going door-to-door, seeking contributions for a Christian orphanage. The solicitor approached one exasperated mother and asked, "Would you like to give a donation to the Lutheran Children's Orphanage?" The man was surprised when the woman said, "Yes, wait a minute, and I'll get them – they're ages two and four!"

This mother didn't really want to give up her kids, she just wanted some peace. Don't we all need it! The true peace and rest from the spiritual conflict caused by our own sin and the sins of others. Jesus not only brings that peace, He *is* that peace. He is the peace that passes understanding.

For Simeon in today's pericope, true peace was at hand. But, he realized that this peace would come at a price, for he knew from the Word and Spirit that this little baby, this precious Messiah, this infinite infant, was indeed born under the Law, and was therefore born to die. A sword would pierce Him. Though He was the embodiment of eternal life, He would be handed over to death to pay the price of sin for all mankind – that includes yours and mine! – for death is what we deserve on account of our sins. The infant Messiah was brought to the place of sacrifice that day, foreshadowing the purpose for which He was born – to be sacrificed for sin and guilt once and for all. He had been born to shed His blood upon the altar of the cross.

But this sacrifice – though it does cause us sorrow – also causes us to rejoice, for by it our salvation was accomplished. We can join with Simeon in singing the *Nunc Dimittis* – for we too have seen our salvation before our very eyes right here in the Lord's Supper.



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Indeed, we too can depart today in peace, for we will have both seen and tasted our salvation! We'll have taken the very body and blood of Jesus into our own bodies! In Holy Communion, God removes our separation from Him in the most intimate way possible, for He makes Himself one with us, that we may have true peace of heart and life.

We can also rejoice to sing the *Nunc Dimittis* as we look forward to the final, eternal feast of the Lamb that we will enjoy at our entry into His presence, whether that's by our death or by His final return in glory, when we will enjoy everlasting peace without interruption forever without end. With that hope ever before you, you can depart this "temple" today in peace! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen