

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed, Merry Christmas!

Six days ago, we celebrated the human birth of the Son of God.

This is one of the 3 high festivals of the Christian Church Year as we celebrate the redemptive work of our Triune God.

During the Christmas season, we celebrate with the song of the angels, the *Gloria in Excelsis*,

Glory be to God on high and on earth peace goodwill toward men. Luke 2 & Rite2 Gloria

Jesus was born to make that peace between God and man.

And while the Lord had given His people many prophecies about what this Messiah/Christ would do, all this lay hidden to most people behind the veil of sin's corruption... and eager anticipation.

But not everyone was unaware.

Simeon recognized and prepared Mary for what she would see in her lifetime.

But I wonder if God isn't also preparing us for what we should see in ours.

As follows in Jesus' name:

And [Jesus'] father and His mother marveled at what was said about Him. 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."**

... And coming up at that very hour [Anna] began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

...And the Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Tomorrow, at our 10AM service, we will celebrate Jesus' circumcision and naming... since January 1st is the 8th day after Christmas (the day on which Jewish males were to be circumcised).

Today, however we take a bigger jump forward to the 40th day in the life of Christ.

On this day, Mary and Joseph brought infant Jesus to the temple to **perform everything according to the Law of the Lord.**

It was a month and 10 days later, surely the excitement had died down.

It had been a while since the Bethlehem shepherds popped in **to see this thing that the Lord had made known unto them.**

The townspeople, after hearing the shepherds report that night, maybe came to look, but only saw a regular old baby... nothing really special.

Things were probably back to the new normal with an infant child.

But in the Jewish family, there was now something to do.

Jesus was to be presented to the Lord in the temple.

Joseph was to make an offering on His behalf just as Moses had prescribed 1,400 years earlier.

Of course, it was for this very reason/Child that God had commanded Moses to prescribe it, that the world might see in Jesus the true firstborn, not only of Mary, but of creation, Colossians 1:15 and **the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** John 1:14

I bet Mary and Joseph thought that things would be pretty normal at the temple,
after all, who in that busy temple atmosphere would know or recognize this Child,
just one more child cared for by just another poor family?
But our heavenly Father is proud of His Son,
and not just that, He wants the world to know their long-awaited redemption was near.

And so He first sends Simeon, by the Holy Spirit, to the temple to the holy family.
In great joy, Simeon sings his song, the *Nunc Dimittis*,
proclaiming that he was now ready to depart this life, having now received the fulfillment
of the promise God had made to him: that he would see the Messiah before he died.
But as our text records, Simeon was not done there; he had been given more to say.

Jesus was indeed the Christ-child... the Holy One of Israel... the Son of God.
But this did not mean that His life would be easy or pleasant, in fact, it meant the opposite.
Already He had spilt His first blood under the law at His circumcision.
Already He was keeping the Law perfectly for the entire world.
But there would be more... much, much more to come.

In St. Luke's Gospel, already 3 signs had been given:
The sign of doubting Zacharias: unable to speak until John's circumcision.
The sign of barren Elizabeth: being with child.
And the sign of the Babe, Jesus Himself, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
And now St. Luke records yet another sign: again, Jesus Himself, this time, not wrapped in clothes,
but wrapped in controversy.
There would indeed be some who would believe Him... and believe in Him;
But there would also be some who would oppose Him,
who would reject, not only what He preached, but even He Himself.
As we know the story, they would ultimately bring about the circumstances for His death.
That Mary would see this happen, Simeon foretells.
As the spear pierced through Jesus' side and out came the blood and water of our redemption,
a sword would pierce through Mary's soul as she beheld her Son and Savior die.

But I wonder if that is all that Simeon is speaking about when he prophesied about this sword for Mary.
Yes, Jesus would be the stumbling block, by which the thoughts from many hearts would be revealed,
in other words, what they truly believed would be seen, by how they responded to Him.
We see this plainly in the Pharisees, scribes, and Chief Priests who hated Jesus,
who tried to stone Him, or throw Him off a cliff, or finally brought Him to Pilate for crucifixion.
But Jesus was not only a sign appointed for falling, but also for rising.
That the true children of God would be recognized in their belief of Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior.

Mary herself was such a child of God, as were Joseph, and Simeon, and Anna the daughter of Phanuel.
But I wonder if the sword to pierce Mary's heart, wasn't just the distress she would behold at the cross,
but what she would recognize as her own fault.
After all, Jesus didn't just come to redeem everyone else from the bondage of their sins,
He came to die for her sins as well, as she already had confessed in her Magnificat,

“and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Luke 1:47

What Isaiah foretold of all people, was true for Mary:

**Surely He had borne [her] griefs and carried [her] sorrows,
a Man stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted,
... He was pierced for [her] transgressions;
... upon Him was the chastisement that brought [her] peace.**

...

Simeon's words are no less true today, 2,000 years later.

Jesus is still that Sign, He is still appointed for the fall and rising of many.

It is upon Him that everyone ultimately is judged;

do they believe in Him? Do they confess that He is their Savior – crucified, risen, and ascended?

Or do they not believe in Him, reject Him, hate Him, or falsify Him and His true redemption?

Obviously, we will not see the same scene that Mary saw of her Son hanging on the cross,
but does Jesus' death pierce our own souls as well?

Do you see the burden and heavy load of your guilt and sin upon Jesus?

ELH #297:3

Or, do *you think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great*, as the Lenten hymn leads us to ponder?

It is easy, to let the excitement of the “Christmas spirit” lead us only to think of peace, comfort, and joy,
without the sober reminder of why Jesus came in the first place.

It was for our sin that He came to suffer and die, so that He would atone for the sins of the world,
and not just for the world, but for you... for your sins.

Then again, it might be tempting to lose sight of the Christmas peace, comfort, and joy,
because you have a distressed conscience, or because the circumstances of your life are unbearable.

And it can also happen that what was celebrated just 7 days ago, has now passed and life
is almost back to normal with vacations coming to an end and work and school starting up again.

But watch and pray. Resist these temptations.

Marvel with Joseph and Mary at the words of Simeon and let them carry you through this week.

Jesus is the sign for the falling and rising of many.

If Jesus is only a good feeling during the dark days of December,

then what a feeling of dread and despair you will have on the dark day of Judgment.

If Jesus is merely a joyful distraction for others while you suffer the bitter consequences
of the corruption of sin in this world and in your body,

then what a distraction He will be when all there is to anticipate is an eternity of suffering.

If Jesus is Someone that you can celebrate and then put back into His box until next December,
then what will you celebrate if He returns to judge during the rest of the year?

Jesus is a sign. He is THE Sign that will reveal your heart.

As His baptized child, let Simeon's words pierce your own soul as you see the burden and weight
of your sins rest upon this only-begotten Son of God and firstborn Son of Mary.

Do not see Him only as a 40 day old infant,

but as the Lamb of God presented at the Temple before God for the service of your atonement.

Then marvel at the true peace, administered to you in that Lamb's body and blood,

as you eat and drink at this Christmas feast to your forgiveness and to your eternal health.

Live and rejoice in this Sign of your rising, not just during a season, but each and every week.

He has fulfilled the Law of God perfectly for you.

There is nothing left for you to do for your salvation.

He has made peace between you and God - Marvel... and rejoice, and
after you have partaken of this Christ,

after seeing Him lifted up before you in His true body and blood,
gustily and boldly and joyful sing with Simeon, *"Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace
according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation..."*

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. Luke 2:14

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria