

Historic Christmas Carol

The Homily

Christmas Eve

24 December AD2017
Christ The King Lutheran Church
Los Lunas} New Mexico

First Sunday After Christmas
31 December AD2017
Grace Lutheran Church
Albuquerque} New Mexico

Luke 2:25-38

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 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 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.

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Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. (2d John 1;3) Amen.

Society and our culture was on a Christmas countdown. Radio, TV, shopping malls have stopped singing Christmas carols and gone back to other matters. But the Holy Christian Church has only just begun her high celebrations. The Twelve Days of Christmas begins with all the feasts connected with the Nativity of Our Lord themselves, and extends to the Epiphany of Our Lord, 6 January. It includes 26 December – Saint Stephen, the First Martyr, 27 December – Saint John, Apostle, 28 and 29 December – The Holy Innocents, 31 December and 1 January – The Circumcision and The Name of Jesus, and 6 January – The Epiphany of Our Lord. The Holy Christian Church continues to sing Christmas carols throughout these special days of joy and gladness.

When we think of Christmas carols, we most likely are drawn to the great and popular songs. Some are cultural songs such as “Jingle Bells”} “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas”} and “Rudolph,

the Red Nosed Reindeer”. Other songs speak to Christ’s birth} such as “Joy to the World”} “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and “Silent Night”. Still others emphasize fine Christian virtues. They tell a story of Christ} and His example of loving and caring for others} such as ..

Good King Wenceslas Looked Out On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about} Deep and crisp and even.

Brightly shown the moon that night, Tho’ the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight} Gathering winter fuel.

"Hither} page} and stand by me, If you know it} telling,
Yonder peasant} who is he? Where and what his dwelling?"

"Sire, he lives a good league hence, Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence} By Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me food and bring me wine} Bring me pine logs hither.

You and I will see him dine When we bear them thither."

Page and monarch, forth they went, Forth the'jwent together}
Through the cold wind's wild lament And the bitter weather.

"Sire, the night is darker now, And the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart} I know not how} I can go no longer."

"Mark my footsteps} my good page; Tread now in them boldly}
You shall find the winter's rage Freeze your blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod, Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod Which the saint had printed.

Therefore} Christian men} be sure} Wealth or rank possessing}
You who now will bless the poor Shall yourselves find blessing.

There is a very large number of such songs. Some are very familiar.
Other songs} such as the one I just sung} are less well known. In the
Liturgy of the Divine Service, we sing the Gloria in Excelsis - "Glory

~ Be to God on High". It is the song the Holy Angels sang at the Birth of
Jesus. (Luke 2:14) We feebly join the Holy Angels in the beginning
of the Divine Service with their Heavenly Christmas Carol, as it were.

Today's text comes to us by inspiration of God by the pen of
Saint Luke. In Colossians 4: 14, we learn that Saint Luke was a
medical doctor. If your doctor is like mine, you know that medical
doctors are meticulous. They are sticklers for details. Some things
we think are important they might not concentrate upon. Other
things which we ignore, or wish to forget they focus upon with great
seriousness.

Saint Luke begins by saying "Behold". If he were speaking to us
in today's language, he would say, "listen up!" or "heads up!"
Something out of the ordinary is about to be reported. In Verse 25
he says, "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". Other than
this, we know nothing else about Simeon. We do not know where he
lived, who he was related to, or any other background information.

What we do know is noteworthy. We know that his heart, his mind, and his behaviour was God pleasing. We know that unlike the general population, he looked for the Eternal Savior Who had been foretold by the Prophets.

Through history, the people of God had all too often turned away from the true promises of God and the true worship of God. Great sorrow came to the people of Israel as a result of these, and similar acts of unfaithfulness and disobedience. Simeon knew this history. The Book of Numbers Chapter 13 and 14 outlines the sad report of disobedience and unbelief on the part of the Israelites. After they had been delivered from Egyptian captivity, the people turned away from the Lord. The people of Israel were obliged to wander forty years in the wilderness as a result. None of that

~ generation entered the Promised Land.

Even among the religious leadership, wickedness was present.

Simeon knew about~sad history **of** these religious leaders. Aaron, who, as is written in Exodus Chapter 32, yielded to the will of wicked people and participated in the adoration of the golden cow. Aaron had two sons, Nadab and Abihu. It is written in Leviticus Chapter 10 that these two men "offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not." Sadly, Nadab and Abihu were consumed through fire as a result of their misbehaviour.

Through the history of the people of Israel there are many more examples. Disobedience, unfaithfulness and unbelief, was, and still is, common place among all nations. Simeon witnessed these kinds of sorrows in his lifetime. So do we in our day. But Simeon waited for the relief, the eternal comfort and consolation that was continually promised to all who would fear, love, and trust in God above all things. The Holy Ghost was upon Him, as the Word of promise filled Simeon's heart.

"And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." (Vs. 26).
"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, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God and said,

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word:

For mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation,

Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel"

This, the Song of Simeon, which he sang on the 40th day after the birth of Our Lord, has been a part of the Divine Liturgy of the

Church since the earliest of days. This song may rightly be considered a Historic Christmas Carol. Although our society and culture was on a Christmas countdown} the Holy Christian Church will continue to sing this Historic Christmas Carol in her Eucharistic celebrations. I was recently told by a beloved church musician that the Song of Simeon is increasingly being requested at funerals of the Saints. This is good and right. The Prince of Peace brings peace to the troubled sinner. This is the peace which passes all understanding. Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, is the Savior from sin and hell. This Child is the mighty God who conquers death. This world is enthralled with dazzling lights, glitze and glamour. This is but a disguise. The world in which we live is in reality darkened by sin and the devil's malicious activity. This new born Baby, born in a barn} is the Light to the benighted world. Riots} murder, wars} rapes, and strange doctrines becloud everyday life. The frightening and divisive chant of "Blood and Soil!" "Blood and Soil!" creates fear in the streets of our communities. But when Simeon held the Baby Jesus in his arms, He sang that Historic Christmas Carol that we sing every time we receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. Jesus gives us courage to face our future journey through this vale of tears, this darkened sinful Earth. We face this uncertainty without fear or despair.

Simeon blesses Joseph and the Virgin. The blessing he gives them is tempered with the prophecy of the reality that they would face. Addressing Mary His Mother} Simeon says} "Behold [or, listen up!] this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which be spoken against; yea} a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. " (Vss 34,35) We recognise, that very soon after this event,

, , - Joseph had to take Mary and

Jesus into Egypt. There, the Holy Family would hide for roughly two years. Herod the Great sent murderers to kill all baby boys under two years of age, who were in the area of Bethlehem. Every year} on

"—, December 28, the Church observes the tragedy of Holy Innocents Day.

Some time later after Saint Joseph died, Mary had to endure more sorrow. Mary's other children joined in with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in mocking their half-brother Jesus. As difficult a time this was for the Holy Family, today's text also points to Good Friday. Mary endured tremendous pain and sorrow as she watched her Special Child, Jesus, crucified and dying on the Cross.

Weaved in this is a central Christian, Christmas message.

Simeon said, "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel. (vss. 30,31). In an age of division, this is noteworthy. We live in an era in which people take sides. There are liberals versus conservatives, haves versus have nots, east versus west, one race versus another race. So-called culture wars over what is right versus what is wrong is a way of life. Christmas brings an entirely different message. The Baby Jesus has come to solve a universal problem. The problem which unifies us all is sin. Romans 3:23 teaches, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Our mad divisions are nothing more than a manifestation of sin that infests each and everyone of us, regardless of our differences. It is none other than the devil who would tempt us to change the subject. Only the Baby, whom Simeon held in his arms, can solve the problem. Only the Baby Jesus, conceived by God the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary who lived a sinless life, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and died on the cross can take upon Himself the sin of the world. We will soon sing, "Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us." The message of universal mercy, available to all nations, Jew and Gentiles, is at the heart of the Historic Christmas Carol.

Finally, the good doctor Saint Luke introduces us to another

person. It strikes me that we learn more about her than about Simeon. Her name was Anna. She was a prophetess, the daughter of a certain Phanuel, of the Tribe of Asher. She was a widow of 84 years of age. She lived with her husband seven years before he died. She, like Simeon, knew her history. Asher was one of the northern tribes - some call them the 10 lost tribes of Israel - because most of the population of that region were long ago taken into the captivity by the Assyrians in 720BCE, and thus dispersed. But some of them, during the time of good King Hezekiah, were given opportunity to live in Jerusalem and worship the true God. Anna's people were some of that remnant which took advantage of that opportunity, as it is written in 2d Chronicles 30, especially verse 11,12. Faithful to her heritage, Anna spent her days worshipping by fasting, praying, and serving the true God, even into her old age. She joined Simeon giving praise to God for sending Christ the Redeemer, the Newborn King, the only Hope for sinners. Anna spoke of these things to all who would listen. What an example for many of us. As some of us advance in years, Anna teaches us all that we are never too old to proclaim Christ. We are never too old, too insignificant, too feeble to

thank the Lord, and sing His praise, tell everyone what He has done
Let everyone who seeks the Lord rejoice and proudly bear His Name,
He recalls His promises and leads His people forth in joy

with shouts of thanksgiving.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Blessed New Year of Our Lord, 2018! In the Name of Jesus.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Rev. John Timothy Plump, Emeritus
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