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Sermon Notes

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## **Simeon's Vigil and Ours**

**Luke 2:21-35**

The word that captivates my mind tonight is vigil... a vigil is a patient watchfulness, waiting for something to come.

Tonight, of course, is Christmas Eve... so all over the world, Christians are on a form of a vigil, waiting for tomorrow's celebration of the birth of Christ.

Vigils are all about eagerness, anticipation, waiting for something you expect, something delightful, something you yearn for

The children of the world who know what is likely to happen tomorrow are alive with the sparkling anticipation of Christmas and all its delights. As the song says, they will find it hard to sleep tonight. They expect all their Christmas dreams to come true with the gifts and sweets and love they will discover tomorrow.

In our brief devotional tonight, we are focusing our minds on a fascinating person, a man who spent the last portion of his entire life in a faith-filled vigil, eagerly watching and waiting for the Christ to be born. That man is Simeon, and we are going to learn from his faith-filled vigil and its marvelous fulfillment.

But Simeon's experience was part of the overall ministry of the Holy Spirit to REVEAL Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Without the Spirit's work of REVELATION, we will never see Christ by faith or receive his salvation.

So, from the moment of the fall in the Garden of Eden, the Holy Spirit began revealing a Messiah, a Savior, who would come in the future. Any believer who understood the words God spoke in the Garden, they would begin their VIGIL for the “seed of the woman” who would one day come to crush the serpent’s head and bring salvation to Adam’s doomed children.

As history unfolded, the Spirit began to reveal Christ more and more to God’s faithful people. His revelations fueled that eager watchfulness that is the essence of the VIGIL I am describing tonight. The Spirit promises Christ, believers hear, understand and wait... and WATCH.

As Jewish history unfolded, the Spirit revealed more and more of the details of Christ’s saving work. God called a pagan named Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and led him on a lifelong pilgrimage of faith. As he called him, he spoke an amazing promise to him: “Through your offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed.” Abraham eventually taught his family that promise, and all who believed it began a VIGIL for Abraham’s seed who would bless all the tribes and languages and peoples and nations of the earth.

When God founded the Jewish nation, he established laws by which his people were to live. At the center of those laws was the pattern of redemption, of the forgiveness of sins by the payment of a blood sacrifice. But the sacrificial system could not truly cleanse sinners from guilt. It created an expectation of a perfect and final sacrifice by which all sins would be forgiven. All believers waited in VIGIL for that Savior to come.

Then, in the course of time, God raised up a king, a righteous man after his own heart, King David. David wanted to build a house for God... a temple. But God said “I will build a house for you” and he promised that a son from his own body would rule forever... the Son of David who would reign on David’s throne from that time on and forever. This was the Anointed One, the Messiah. And all believers began a VIGIL... waiting for him to come.

Centuries passed. When the time had almost fully come, the Spirit chose a godly man named Simeon... devout, God-fearing... he worked a deep sense of expectation in him anyway – he was WAITING FOR THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL... this is the language of the Messiah. But the Spirit had a special revelation to this one man...

One day, he promised Simeon that he would not die before he'd seen the Messiah. That was unique! It was true of everyone that was alive that special day in the Temple, but it was only REVEALED by the Spirit to Simone. To him ALONE! That began Simeon's unique VIGIL. Waiting with more eagerness than any of his fellow Jews... his heart glowing with the promise from the Lord.

Our text tonight reveals the special moment that promise was fulfilled. I don't imagine Simeon knew exactly the moment that Jesus was born in Bethlehem... maybe, maybe not. But Simeon did not make the pilgrimage down to nearby Bethlehem. So it seems he did not know that exact moment... Mary gave birth to her firstborn, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the inn.

But Joseph and Mary were law abiding Jews. And there are two powerful ways that God leads his believing people in this world... by his WORD, and by inner promptings of his SPIRIT. Those two came together:

***Luke 2:21-24 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. <sup>22</sup>When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."***

This was the beginning of Jesus' life "under the law", for Galatians 4 tells us

***Galatians 4:4-5 when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law***

Jesus was circumcised into the covenant of Moses... to live his whole life under the Laws of Moses... the only perfect law-abiding Jewish man in all of history.

At that moment, Simeon made his appearance:

***Luke 2:25-28 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God***

Obedience to the word of God led Joseph and Mary to the Temple

Obedience to the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the Temple

What a day for Simeon... FIRST it been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ

NOW... it had been further revealed to him that he would not GO TO BED TONIGHT before he had seen the Lord's Christ!

Led by the Spirit, moved by the Spirit... these godly people came together around this little baby... the Savior of the world. Simeon's VIGIL had come to a delightful and fulfilling end.

So, he took the baby in his arms. All he saw was a precious little baby and two poor Jewish parents. But Simeon saw with eyes of faith. Only by faith can we see in this ordinary looking baby the glorious salvation God intends for the world.

So it is for you tonight. You will only see in Jesus the Savior of the world if the Spirit reveals him to the eyes of your heart – your spiritual sight... your FAITH.

Then, Simeon spoke amazing words of prophecy over Jesus:

***Luke 2:28-32 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: <sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all people, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."***

First, he celebrated God's specific faithfulness to him personally...

"Lord, you promised... I waited in vigil. Now you have fulfilled your promise to me!"

"Dismiss your servant in peace": my life's purpose is fulfilled!! I have held the baby in my arms.

But more significantly, Simeon saw beyond this simple moment:

"My eyes have seen your SALVATION..." The work of the holy God in freeing his people from the ravages of sin and death. Salvation from sin... and from all that sin has done to us and to this world.

This is a salvation which God had been PREPARING for all the world from before the foundation of the world.

As God promised to Abraham, this salvation would be worked in the sight of the entire world...

Simeon then quoted Isaiah 49:6

***Isaiah 49:6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

This baby, the Son of God, could not only be the glory of Israel... the pinnacle of Jewish history... that is TOO SMALL A THING!

No, this baby is the LIGHT OF REVELATION FOR THE GENTILES

What does that mean "light of revelation?"

The light is because sin has put the world in darkness... Jesus is the light of the world, not just of Israel

***Isaiah 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.***

So, when the Spirit REVEALS Jesus to the Gentiles, they find salvation in this baby, this man, this Savior, Jesus Christ... and they come out of darkness into Christ's perfect light.

Joseph and Mary were astonished:

***Luke 2:33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.***

But then, the Holy Spirit moved Simeon to speak further revelation about what would happen to this baby:

***Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."***

This is a clear prediction of the suffering Mary would go through when she would see the perfect baby, her perfect son, be despised and rejected by the Jewish nation, condemned to death by both Jews and Gentiles, and then crucified. Jesus was DESTINED for this, Simeon said... this is the PLAN LAID OUT by God from before the foundation of the world. It will cause you, Mary, immense pain. But it will cause Jesus infinitely more... because Jesus was destined to be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities... to atone for our sins that God's wrath would be turned away.

Jesus would therefore cause the FALLING and RISING of many in Israel... and indeed, to the ends of the earth.

Falling... because he is the judge of all the earth and by his words will sinners be eternally condemned.

Rising... because he is the Savior of all the earth, and by him will all his people be raised to live eternally.

So... this is the special moment of Simeon... the ending of his vigil.

Now, dear friends, here at FBC DURHAM for your Christmas Eve service... if you are a believer in Christ, you have your own vigil.

Not ultimately the Christmas celebration you will enjoy tomorrow... I mean the vigil of waiting for your own final salvation in Christ... and waiting for Christ himself to come again.

That is the vigil of faith now... looking ahead to making progress day by day in Christlike holiness... and looking ahead to your own resurrection from the dead at the moment you see Christ with your own eyes.

So... we will now celebrate the Lord's Supper as a picture of that vigil, for the text says we do so in anticipation of the Lord's Second Coming:

***1 Corinthians 11:26 or whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***