

Today, we gather in the presence of the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth on the last day of 2023. Our focus today is on ending the year reflecting on all the places the Lord has journeyed with his people, but also waiting expectantly for what he has for us in the new Year that lies ahead. Our old Testament passage was from Psalm 148, a beautiful hymn of praise that calls all creation to join in glorifying the Lord.

We see in this Psalm a summoning of all of creation to sing praise to the Lord. From the celestial heights to the depths of the earth, every element of creation is called to acknowledge the greatness of God. The psalmist emphasizes that praise is not just for humans but extends to all beings, celestial and earthly alike.

As part of God's creation, we are reminded of our responsibility to join this universal chorus of praise. Too often we may become bogged down with negativity and the burdens of life.

How often do we actually take time to appreciate the beauty of the world around us and give thanks for the wonders of creation? Let us cultivate a spirit of gratitude for the Creator who has made all things.

The psalmist further elaborates on the specific elements of creation that praise the Lord. From sea creatures to fire and hail, from mountains to trees, each element obeys the command to praise its Creator. The psalm paints a vivid picture of a harmonious and obedient creation, acknowledging God's sovereignty.

In a world filled with horrific images, war, death and suffering-- all too often we forget to focus on God's greatness. Rather than centering our thoughts on how chaotic and divided humanity is and the brokenness that surrounds us, the natural world serves as a reminder of God's order and design. As stewards of the earth, we are called to reflect the obedience of nature in our own lives. How can we align our actions with God's design for creation, contributing to the flourishing of the world God has entrusted to us?

Do you remember where we left off last Sunday, on Christmas Eve? We were rejoicing with God's gift to humanity, come to earth to be born amongst the livestock, in the animal feed.

Fast forward several months and we arrive to the temple with Jesus being brought by his parents. They encounter in the Temple, two elderly people. While more information is given about Simeon than Anna, these two people shared two important characteristics: they had exemplary faith and they were old. Sometimes when we approach the end of our lives we may wonder whether our best days are behind us. And the reality is this: the Lord has ordered our days and predestined our relationships. Our faith and what we accomplish are all pre-ordained. God's not through with any of his children. If we are still drawing breath, the Lord has work for us to do.

Anna was a prophetess of advanced age who dedicated herself to fasting and prayer at the temple. Since becoming a widow, Anna had spent her days worshipping the Lord and being in the Temple. Anna recognized the infant Jesus as the redemption of Jerusalem and began to spread the word about Him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.

Anna's life of devotion and her immediate response to encountering the Messiah challenge us to consider the ways we can fervently and joyfully share the good news of Jesus with those around us. In our daily lives, are we proclaiming the redemption found in Christ?

According to the narrative in Luke 2:25-32, Simeon was a devout Jew who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.

According to Jewish tradition, a mother underwent a period of purification after giving birth. Mary and Joseph, being obedient to the law, brought Jesus to the temple, emphasizing their commitment to fulfilling God's commandments. This act foreshadows Jesus' role in fulfilling the entire law and ushering in a new covenant.

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for the ceremony of redemption of the firstborn son (after the time of Mary's purification: at least 40 days after the birth, and thus distinct from the circumcision), Simeon was there.

On this last day of 2023, I would encourage you to take a moment and reflect on what the Lord holds for you in 2024. I do not know what God has in store for you or for me, but I can promise you this - it's going to be wonderful.

Simeon was described as a righteous and devout man, was promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Messiah. Filled with the Spirit, Simeon entered the temple and took the baby Jesus in his arms, proclaiming, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30, ESV)

In these words, we witness the culmination of a lifetime of waiting and anticipation. Simeon who is both faithful and patient, has finally seen the promised Messiah. This baby is to be the light to enlighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of Israel.

Simeon realizes with this visitation, his soul may now rest in peace, for the fulfillment of God's promise stands before him. His patience has been rewarded. He has waited with hope, trusting in God's promise.

Many times we are left to wait in our own lives. The Song of Simeon can serve as an encouragement as we wait with expectant hearts, knowing that God's timing is perfect.

Simeon recognizes the salvation of God in the infant Jesus. Our salvation is not merely a theological concept but a person, Jesus Christ. Like Simeon, we must be attuned to recognize the presence of God's salvation in our lives and in the world around us.

Simeon knows this visit in the temple is the culmination of his life. The phrase "let your servant depart in peace" echoes a deep sense of fulfillment and tranquility. Simeon's life finds its purpose and completeness in encountering the Messiah. Similarly, we find true peace and fulfillment when we encounter Jesus and surrender our lives to His purpose.

The Song of Simeon reminds us that Jesus is not only the Savior of Israel but also the light to the Gentiles. This inclusivity challenges us to embrace a global perspective, recognizing the universal reach of God's redemptive love.

Simeon's song is a special prayer called the Nunc Dimittis which translates from Latin to English: as an exclamation of having one's life mission fulfilled and having realized the pinnacle of his life.

Simeon's song is both a melody of gratitude and fulfillment.

As we meditate on Simeon's song on this last morning of 2023, may it inspire us to live lives of patient expectation, recognizing and embracing God's salvation in Jesus Christ. May we, like Simeon, find peace and fulfillment in the presence of our Savior, the light of the world.

Consider the profound faith and patience displayed by Simeon. How often do we, like Simeon, wait expectantly for God's promises to be fulfilled in our lives? Simeon teaches us the importance of patience, faith, and unwavering trust in God's timing.

As we reflect on the presentation of Jesus at the temple, let us be inspired by the obedience of Mary and Joseph, the faith of Simeon, and the devotion of Anna. This passage reminds us that God is faithful to fulfill His promises, and our patient waiting is not in vain.

May we, like Simeon, eagerly anticipate and embrace the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. May we, like Anna, be devoted witnesses, proclaiming the redemptive power of our Lord to a world in need. And may the presentation of Jesus at the temple be a reminder to us that God's promises are always fulfilled in His perfect time.

Looking back at Psalm 148, we see that it concludes by declaring that the praise of the Lord is not only universal but also eternal. The name of the Lord is exalted, and His glory is above the earth and heavens. The psalmist emphasizes that God has raised up a horn for His people, a symbol of strength and salvation.

As believers, we find our ultimate source of strength and salvation in the Lord. The eternal nature of God's praise calls us to a steadfast faith, grounded in the unchanging character of our Creator. In times of uncertainty, let us turn to the One whose glory surpasses all, finding refuge and hope in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 148 paints a magnificent portrait of creation's response to its Creator. As we reflect on this psalm and the lives of God's faithful servants, exemplified by Anna

and Simeon, let us renew our commitment to join the cosmic symphony of praise. May we live lives of patience; may our lives be a testimony to the greatness of our God, and may we find comfort and courage in the unchanging nature of His love.

As we experience the closing moments of this year, I hope and pray they are filled with gratitude for the joys experienced, the lessons learned, and the growth achieved. As you step into the unknown of the new year, may we carry the wisdom of the past and the anticipation of the future. May each of our hearts be open to love and our minds receptive to knowledge. I hope and pray your spirits are resilient in the face of challenges. May the Lord use each of us as instruments of kindness, agents of positive change, and bearers of light in the world. May the coming year be a journey of discovery, joy, and fulfillment for us all.

Benediction:

As you go forth, may you find strength in times of challenge, comfort in times of sorrow, and joy in times of celebration. May your journey be marked by compassion, understanding, and a deepening faith.

As the clock strikes midnight, may you feel the embrace of God's everlasting arms, knowing that you are held in His love. May the coming year be filled with hope, peace, and abundant blessings. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.