

Simeon gives praise to the infant God, and Joseph and Mary marvel. They marvel not just over how does Simeon know who the Baby is, nor at the boldness of his confession. It is over the things Simeon says. This is not the first time such a reaction occurs in Luke's Gospel in the opening chapters. After John the Baptist is born, and is circumcised and named, his father Zechariah's tongue is finally loosed from its nine month silence, and he breaks forth into praise of God. Those present marvel and wonder what the child John will be. On Christmas, the shepherds, having told all whom they encounter of the announcement of the angel to them, the Child whom they found exactly as had been told them, that they have seen the Savior, Christ the Lord, the source of joy for all people, those whom the shepherds told marveled at what had been told them.

Those in Zechariah's house, and those who encountered the shepherds, there is no surprise that they are filled with wonder at what they see and hear. But Joseph and Mary? Surely they are well acquainted with what is going on. They both have received word from God through an angel about who this Child is. Mary has seen her aged relative, Elizabeth, bear a son, likely was there to hear Zechariah's song of praise. Mary herself has expressed in her own hymn of praise what is going on. She knows because she says that God has finally helped Israel in remembrance of His promises to Abraham and all the patriarchs and prophets, her Child is the One through whom all the world will be blessed, the ruler over the house of Israel, the Messiah and Savior of the world. Joseph and Mary have seen the shepherds come and were the first to hear the recounting of what had happened in the fields outside Bethlehem.

And yet here, forty days out, they are filled with wonder, they marvel. Which is to say, they have reverence. They hear the Word of God given through Simeon, and they respond with faith and adoration. They do not wave their hand casually and say, "Yes, yes, we know all this." They very well do know all this, there is nothing in Simon's words that is news, previously unknown. The angel has told them. Yet they are not tired of it, the newness has not worn off. Their reaction is not what so plagues us; the despising of the old and familiar. Their response is what so many of our hymns and carols for Christmas call us to do: fall on your knees; come adore on bended knee; O come, let us adore Him! Come, friends, lift up your eyes at the Christ Child lying in the manger! Mary, we are told, continually takes all these events and words up and ponders them in her heart, treasures the words and working out of God's Word.

Such it ought to be for us Christian people. The response ought not be, "I know." "I already know the story." The church has long spoken of Seven Deadly Sins – wrath, lust, greed, pride, envy, gluttony, and sloth. Sloth is often simply thought of as laziness, but it is, in fact, a bit more specific. The Latin term used for it is *acedia*, it means "without care." And was particularly used to describe a cold carelessness or indifference to the things of God. It is a particular temptation to the clergy, who are so often dealing with holy things that the sacredness wears off and they start to view and treat it casually.

It can also be a temptation for any Christian. The regular saying of prayers, the consistent pattern of the liturgy, can easily be used by the sinful flesh as an excuse to not pay attention, to not care, to give mere lip service. And particularly at holy Christmas there is a temptation. There is no surprise for the Christian anywhere in the Christmas story, anywhere in the life of our Lord at all. We know it. But Scripture bids us, St. Mary and St. Joseph model for us, the appropriate response to the words and doings of God: reverence, wonder, marveling. Not because we have no idea what He says, what is going on, what He has

done for us, but because we recognize here in these events so long ago, the working out by God the plan of our salvation.

It is easy for us to take for granted, to grow so accustomed to that we assume it, and so miss the eternal significance. Perhaps you have heard Luke 2 in the King's English so many times you whispered it along as it was read on Christmas Eve. You did not need to wonder whether the big four, the essential Christmas Hymns would be sung: Hark the Herald, Joy to the World, Angels We have Heard on High, and O Come All Ye Faithful. And there was no deliberation over whether Silent Night would be sung by candlelight this year.

And we can just as easily recite the Creed, make our way through the whole Divine Service on autopilot. It is good that just about every one of us eventually reaches the point where we can recite the confession of sins or sing the Ordinaries of the liturgy, or quote the Catechism by heart at a rapid pace. That is good, because it means they are a part of us, ingrained, and never to be taken away, not even, in many cases by senility, or cognitive illness.

But we dare not assume them. Do not think that just because you can say them quickly, that means you are saying them, praying them. And though all your favorite hymns might indeed be sung and your nostalgic connection to a childhood long past be made, you must ponder, you need to wonder, that is, to think about in faith and so see and believe in the saving significance of our Lord's birth. That there has been a human child born in history who was, in fact, God Himself, here among us. That He came not for some, or even a majority, but for all people. That here, in this Child was God come to call all humanity, the people of Israel and all the nations, to Himself. To cast away the darkness of sin, death, and the power of the devil. To give to all who believe in Him the confidence that endures even in the face of death, that having Him, knowing and believing in Him, receiving from His hand, we can literally just die, at perfect peace, content and happy.

And all this is set before you to marvel at, to believe and rejoice in, not but once a year, this saving and most glorious truth is present in every Holy Communion. Just as Simeon saw a baby like any other, your eye sees, your tongue tastes but bread and wine, your ears hear but words. It is God's Word and faith which hears and believes that tells you who that Child is, whose body and blood are also present, no less real than the obvious earthly elements, who's word pledges to you the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation, the gift of His very self. That is why the liturgy teaches us to confess Simeon's words as our very own, a regular, weekly occasion to receive the gracious gift of God, our greatest good, and to marvel.