

Sermon for Christmass 1 – Luke 2:33-40

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many...” This was no ordinary infant. Joseph and Mary knew this already, but Simeon reinforced that this was not your typical baby. It was revealed to them that the fullness of the Godhead lives in bodily form in this tiny child, who was not yet six weeks old! This little weakling is He whom the Prophet Isaiah called, “... Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” even as He rests in His mother’s arms. He is true God, begotten of His Father from all eternity, and true man born of the Virgin Mary. He is eternal, unchangeable, almighty, all-knowing, and present everywhere. He forgives, creates, preserves, and judges—all with a human body, soul, and feelings, but He remains sinless. His human and Divine nature are united forever. And it has to be so. Only a true man could act in our place under the law. Only a true man could suffer and die for our sin and guilt. And only as true God could He fulfill the Law, be a sufficient ransom for us and all people, and overcome death and the devil for us.

Simeon, that aged saint who awaited the coming of the Lord, had been promised in a revelation from the Holy Spirit “that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” This Simeon now blesses the tiny Savior’s earthly parents, and Mary in particular, with a strange blessing. “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword with pierce through you own soul also), so that the thoughts from any hearts may be revealed.”

What an odd blessing! We imagine blessings usually to follow in the line of bestowing safety, a long and healthy life, favorable weather, but this!?! “...the fall...of many in Israel...a sign that is opposed...the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed...” and the clincher, “(a sword will pierce through your own soul also)”! If this is the blessing, one trembles to ask, “What is the curse?!?” All this is reminiscent of the tough Proverb of blessing quoted by the author of the letter to the Hebrews: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.”

It cannot be denied: There will be struggling around Mary’s Son. So much so, that a sword would pierce even through her soul as well. But that’s the kind of strange blessing that comes through our Savior. He will be the Dividing Factor. He stands there like a rock, forcing the river to divide. “From [the Son of Man’s] mouth came a sharp two-edged sword,” “for the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” The coming of our Lord is not always the pleasant assurance that everything will be fine. It’s a cry that says, “God’s kingdom is near! Now is the day of salvation!

Help is here! This is the only salvation that makes it possible for all to be saved from wickedness!”

Many thoughts of the heart are revealed here. The appeased, the contented, and the self-righteous – we’re offended; He’s a stumbling block to us. Many thoughts of our hearts are revealed through our Lord in His Word. What is revealed in our hearts when we stand before Him? First off, there are several things that have little to do with Him, but are very important to us. They have filled our days and our hearts. I think you know what I’m talking about... To some extent, it’s relatively easy to hide our grudges, our true intentions, and our resentment of others from those around us. We can fabricate pious reasons and concoct stories to cover up our sins of thought, word, and deed. But many of these things are bitter and painful. We don’t like them. But we cling tightly to them. We have no power over them. We think of them when we’re awake. They keep us from sleep. And we can hide them from man, but never from God. He cuts through them. Own up to your sins. Repent.

The thoughts of many hearts are revealed here. The poor, the hungry, the unfortunate, the exposed, and the destitute—we also come with amazement and thankfulness that forgiveness is possible. There is only One who has power over our sins. The Christ! When He speaks to us His Word of forgiveness, then everything else has to get out of the way! An unfathomable gift is ours here! We are helpless otherwise!

There is another temple character, besides Simeon, who shows up in today’s Gospel. She is a widow named Anna. She is Phanuel’s daughter, of the Israelite tribe of Asher. She was one of the devout adherents to the Old Covenant who had insight into the ways of God. Anna understood the signs of the times and could interpret what was happening. Like Simeon, she also spoke of a peculiar blessing. She embodied it. She was one of the world’s most fortunate people, which was really unbelievable. She married in her youth, like most in Israel at that time, then she was widowed after seven years. After that, she voluntarily spent her long life as a widow. She lived in the temple. She literally lived there, probably in some little closet she was allowed to have to herself. She had few needs. She fasted for long periods of time. She lived only to be near God in His temple. This, too, can be a mission in life: to witness to the joy of believing in God and knowing that you are His. This is a treasure that makes it possible to exist with nothing else and never to miss anything else. She belonged to those who were still waiting, and yet she was so joyful to see the Christ that she was radiant. And we? We who are living in the fulfillment of time? What she saw a glimpse of in her 84 years has filled our life since childhood! Our Lord Jesus in the flesh! How much more joyful, then, should we be?!? How much have we learned from those who waited in joy, because it was God they waited for?!? And the wait is no longer. Your Lord took on flesh for you! He forgives your sins! Your joy is full. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠