

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas  
Luke 2:22-40  
December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019

I'm sure you have seen that cartoon that makes its appearance about this time each year. It depicts the present year as a tired old man, trudging to the end of his course where he greets the New Year portrayed as a chubby little baby with a top hat and sash that shows the numbers 2020. It's a somber moment as well as a light one. It is an end and a beginning – something both sad and joyous – a consummation as well as the hope of tomorrow. That, perhaps, is the picture we get when we hear today's Gospel reading. The very old is meeting the very new – an end and a beginning. However, it's so much more than that, of course. The way we view Mary's babe in arms is really a matter of death and life.

Certainly that was the way that Simeon and Anna looked upon the Christ Child. The scene is the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was only 40 days old. Joseph and Mary had come to perform two Old Testament rites – purification and the sacrifice required for all firstborn sons. No doubt there were others in the Court of the Women (where this would have taken place) that day doing the same thing. Yet it was to this family that the old man named Simeon, of whom we know very little about, walked, asking to hold the baby. What a touching scene – the old man asking to hold the brand new baby. His time coming to an end and the precious baby, the Lord Himself, just beginning a narrative that would change the world. How like the picture of Old Man Time and Baby New Year.

But there is more to this amazing story than the old passing away and the new to come. To their amazement, the old fellow broke forth into song. It was a heartfelt hymn of thanks for this Child. Simeon was overcome with joy and jubilation. Why? Because his eyes beheld God's "salvation." God is here. He is with them in the flesh and this child means the salvation of the world. How could one not get excited about that?

And then there's Anna, an old woman in the temple. Like most widows, Anna was quite poor. She depended on the alms and generosity of those who would visit temple (which happened to be her home). She chanced to come by at the moment that Simeon was singing. Like a flash and with a newfound spring in her step she hurried to spread the good news of what was happening.

Think of it, the hope of meeting the King of kings was the focus of their entire life. Simeon and Anna were one of the few left who had really and rightly understood and believed the Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah. Most people were looking for the wrong kind of Messiah in all the wrong places. They wanted the earthly kind... the one who would lead the people forth in battle against their enemies... the one who would rule from a throne with a crown. They wanted a "civil" king. Yet in some unknown way, these two would know that the boy presented there in the temple that day was the one to come – THE Messiah. Simeon has no choice but to break forth in song, "*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.*" It's as if he was saying, "Master, You may release Your slave. I'm ready, dear Lord, for whatever comes next."

Many people get depressed about this time of year. They look forward to Christmas and now that Christmas is over, they feel let down and empty. Yet, Christmas isn't over. We are still smack-dab in the middle of it. We don't have a brief or fleeting happiness but rather a lasting one because we have a King who comes to us and still comes to us. This is actually the beginning of our "gift" celebration. Jesus is the gift and we continue to enjoy him again and again. Simeon and

Anna knew what kind of gift this Jesus was for the sake of the people. Simeon knows this is a beginning type of gift. He has come... and many things will happen with this child... the rise and fall of many... but the best thing that will happen is that Jesus has come to save His people.

Christians are all too guilty of not grasping the bigger, more important, picture of why the church celebrates what we celebrate. The big attractions to things like Christmas are the presents yet to be opened and the feast yet to be devoured. A few, perhaps, are touched by the quaint "legend" about a cuddly baby laid in a manger. But one week later the thrill is gone, the baby is forgotten and the only interest and prospect now is the bottle of champagne to be opened at the New Year's Eve bash. Let's face it and be honest, many Christians treat the Son of God with little more than harmless, sweet affection and passing interest at Christmas. Each of us do in one way or another. Afterwards, we pack them away just like the figures in the nativity scene.

But Christmas is so much more than a one-day sweetness type of holiday. It's real life, and actually, it's a matter of life and death. Even in the midst of all his joy, Simeon realized that all too keenly. He knew that this man would stand as a stumbling block for those who refused to believe. He knew that Jesus would be denied by some and that judgment to eternal death would be theirs. He also said that Mary's own heart would be pierced with sorrow over her Son and His mission. Surely as she watched Jesus die on Good Friday, Simeon's words came back with a vengeance.

Now, it's nice to sing Christmas hymns, hold candles at the candlelight service, and celebrate here with friends. But if that's all your Christmas is about, then you've missed the point. But then, by virtue of the fact that you are here today, it seems apparent you already know that. What remains for us is to learn anew the lesson of Simeon and Anna.

With Simeon we learn that having Christ in our lives brings lasting hope, joy and freedom – even when such things seem so far away. God is our whole life, reminds Simeon. We have all we need and we have it all.

From Anna we learn the lasting joy of rendering service to God, of living in God's temple and worshiping regularly. Here we feast on the Bread of Life in our life with God – His Word and Sacrament. From here we receive the motivation to join Anna in spreading the news of the Christmas Baby to others. We Christians need to tell and show others, perhaps especially our children, that Jesus is for the entire year.

Simeon and Anna preach a powerful sermon to us today. Knowing, believing, loving, and serving Jesus as Savior is a matter of life and death. Maybe it would be better to say, Jesus IS a matter FOR life – every day of every year of life – and FORE death, One who was born to die so we can have confidence of eternal life even in the face of death.

Soon that bouncing, top-hatted, sashed baby boy named 2020 will crawl into our lives. Once again it will be the passing away of the old and the beginning of the new – a moment of sorrow and a time of joy – the end and the beginning. My prayer for all of us is that we, like Simeon and Anna, greet the future with the joy and hope of Christmas fixed in our hearts. Then let us love and live with abandon for God, for surely that will make this a "Happy New Year," regardless of what may come. Amen

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