

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday after Christmas
Luke 2:22-32
December 30th, 2018

So what did you think about the Christmas gifts you received this year? Did you like them? Do you appreciate them? Or, have you already been to the store to exchange them for something you really want?

What did you think about the Christmas gifts you “gave” this year? Did they “wow” your friends and loved ones? Was it something they really needed? Did they “really” love it?

Maybe with a computer or smartphone at our fingertips and next day delivery to our door, the retrieval of gifts is not that difficult. But we still have a hard time finding the right gift. We might have problems picking out what someone might really need. Still, with how easy shopping could be, we worry about what others will think about the gifts that we give.

So, about the gift that God has given us at Christmas, and this makes God so much different than you and me, God doesn't care what we think. He gives this gift freely according to His will, not ours. He doesn't care what we think because our Lord knows best. And what our Lord knew best is how to give a lasting gift out of complete love and compassion to people who do not deserve it. Dare not even think to exchange the real gift of Christmas.

And as we come to Simeon in the text for today from Luke chapter 2, we see a man who seemed to know a thing or two about gifts. Simeon was one of those fortunate few who had the blessed opportunity to hold in his arms the Savior of the World. As Simeon did so, he sung this song of hope. There was no exchanging the gift that was before him that day. No, Simeon knew what the Christmas gift of a Savior was all about. Now, he could go in peace knowing that God has fulfilled His promise to Him and to the world. The Son was born and brought to the temple. Simeon was not saying this was the end of the fulfillment, he was proclaiming boldly that this was the beginning of what God promised to the world.

But unfortunately, what Simeon realized was the greatest of all gifts, the world did not. It didn't then and it doesn't today. Today, just like any point in history, the gift of Christmas is being exchanged. Our world, and we tend to follow the example of this world we live in, tends to exchange its purposeful celebrations for meaningless ones all the time. This celebration of the birth of Christ has been exchanged for all sorts of different expressions, religious holidays, and reasons to “party” too much. We have “exchanged” Jesus right out of the Christmas occasion. For the most part, the world has forgotten all about the “reason for the season” and we are in danger of following suit. Beloved in the Lord, dare not even think about exchanging the real gift of Christmas.

But even though so many care very little about exchanging Jesus this season, that isn't what Simeon did. Simeon, we are told in our text, saw in Christ the one desired. Simeon realized that by having Christ and peace that the Christ brings, he had all that he wanted...all that he needed for time and for eternity. Simeon wasn't interested in exchanging the gift.

We know so very little about this man who held our Savior. But what we do know about him is important. The words that describe him are so acceptable. He was called righteous, devout, and looking for the consolation of Israel (the Savior). And because these things are true about him, he understood why the gift of Christmas was not to be exchanged. Because of his intimate knowledge of God it didn't strike Simeon at all strange that he should be directed to the temple in

Jerusalem. This was not something particularly unique. Having a man, wife and child present themselves before the Lord in this way was quite common.

You see, Christ was not the only infant brought to the temple by his parents that day. After all, every mother came to the temple 40 days after the birth of a male child for proper ceremonial purification. Although Simeon rejoiced quite boldly over Jesus entering the temple to fulfill what God promised to do, there is great rejoicing every time one of God's own was brought before Him in His house.

And whether it be Simeon or your fellow members at Christ-Parish, the people in this place, are singing praised to the Lord when another child is brought to His House. Yes, we rejoice each time we have the blessed opportunity to witness a Baptism in the place – the place where our Lord marks His name on our heart. But even so, when our young families bring their children here – to this place – to hear the Lord's Prayer – to participate in the Divine Service – to hear God speaking to us through the Gospel – to hear how very much the Lord loves us that He sent His one and only Son to enter that temple – to destroy the temple (Jesus was talking about Himself when Jesus told the people that He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days) and raise it all up again on the third day. This is the gift beyond all gifts given today. Dare not even thinking about exchanging this gift.

This gift has been prepared before the face of all people. You have heard that before. That's Simeon's song that we heard today. But have you accepted such words? You know, only as we appropriate the promise of God – His peace, His lasting and living and loving peace, will we be convinced that the gift that is not to be exchanged is indeed the gift that is to be shared. Have you shared the gift?

It's not too late if you haven't and it's not hard to do. God wants you to have this gift that is given to you and for you to keep it – and use it. What are you doing with God's gift? This is the wonderful thing about this gift. When you share it you will realize that this gift is the only gift that can affect the healing and the helping that the weary and the wayward of this world really needs. And as was indicated before, this world needs that healing and that direction today more than ever before. In this world so dark with sorrow and tragedy and suffering, the gift of light is needed.

Simeon would know that before him was a boy that would change the world forever. And more than a boy – God Himself made flesh – the fulfillment of all that was spoken by the law and the prophets. Jesus the Lord had now made His appearance among the masses to save the world from their sins. He would be the sacrifice for all. He would accomplish the greatest act of love by placing every one of our sins on His shoulders and dying a criminal's death He didn't deserve.

As we are on the heels of a new year, do hold closely to your heart, as a year ends and a year begins, of the greatest gift of all. And if you do have some "gift exchanges" ahead of you – remember – there is one gift you will never ever want to exchange. And preserve that gift. Don't cast it aside. Feed yourself with this gift regularly. Use this gift. Cherish this gift. For our Lord cherishes us enough to come, suffer great persecution and death, so that we might live forever with Him. As a church, we gather each Lord's day and on special occasions like tomorrow night to remember, to celebrate and to receive this gift – that we dare not ever exchange. Amen.

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