

## Sermon for Christmass I – Luke 2:33-40

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

The Holy Child, rejected by the innkeeper, hunted by Herod, is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel. Everything will be measured by this standard. He is all that matters. Many will reject Him. Thoughts from many hearts will be revealed.

And this is frightening news to us whose hearts are full of pride. We are self-centered. Gossip and slander ache to move up to our lips. God's Law rightfully crushes and slays us. In mercy, our old nature is drowned with Christ and buried in Holy Baptism. We rise from the watery grave, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to life. If we live, we live in that Baptism or not at all.

But the Old Adam is in us, fighting for supremacy again and again. He tallies old grudges. He complains about the slightest inconvenience. Day by day, constantly, again and again, he must be drowned by sorrow over sin and repentance. And so we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses," and the new man is raised. He is revived in Holy Absolution. He is fed and nourished in Holy Communion. He is seen in the Word and revealed as the Lord's own man.

We are broken but mended. We are fallen but risen. We are dead but alive. That's what the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator* means. At the same time a sinner; at the same time a saint. We are repentant saints, which is the only kind of saint there is. The old thoughts are purged out of our black hearts, and the thoughts of Christ's pure heart are placed there. We are righteous because He is righteous. We bear His name. We belong to Him.

This is how we Christians are to live on this side of glory. Simeon said of Mary, "... A sword will pierce through your own soul also ..." and this is true of us as well. Our hearts are sword-pierced and broken. Sin hurts. Breaking God's law never benefits anyone. We know in our hearts that it's our selfish thoughts that sent the Christ to suffer. We are the cause of the terrible cost that He paid. Our lust for more drove Him out of Bethlehem. When we slander and gossip—it's always ultimately against Him. We crucified Him. And if that's not enough to break your heart, nothing is.

Yet when we look to the Word today, we see also another cause of Christ's suffering and death, an even stronger reason. The prophetess Anna announced it in her thanks to God for the Christ who is the redemption of Israel. God willed His Son to die for you. He desired to win you back. He counted you worthy of the cost. He wanted you. And He holds no grudge. He loves you. And this is how He loves you: the death of Jesus. Christ's unjust condemnation and His innocent suffering are the cost of God's love for you.

This Child we adore during Christmas is the beloved Son of the Father. But He's also "a sign that is opposed," or a figure who is spoken against. The suffering that He endured to purify and cleanse us, He asks us also to endure in some measure. So we, too, as Christians are signs spoken against. First and foremost, we speak against ourselves. We are sinners. We do not deserve God's pity. We wish we could do better.

But we also are a sign spoken against in this way: we face ridicule and shame in this world. Speak up in the work place about abortion being murder; speak up at the family reunion about the immorality of homosexuality; speak up about the depravity of transgenderism and the lie of evolution in school, and you'll know what it is to be a sign spoken against.

Now the hardships we face in this life don't cover our sins. We don't earn anything toward our salvation. We don't do it to work something off. Christ has paid our entire debt. There is no punishment for sins. He has borne it all. Certainly, our sorrows are not in any way the price of years off an imaginary purgatory.

So why do we suffer? Why is our name spoken against? Why is our reputation defamed for speaking God's Word and the truth about His creation? Why? Because we are the Lord's disciples. He places a cross of discipline upon us. As His disciples, we are to put our hand to the plow and not look back. As His disciples, we are to pick up our cross, and if need be, to suffer the loss of friends and family, and to gain the shame and scorn of righteousness.

Mercifully, God also burdens us with the inability to enjoy our sins. He weighs on us the need to return again and again to His house. We come back to be cleansed and fully restored to Him. We utterly depend on Him. We live for His Holy Word and Sacraments and count all else as nothing for the salvation we have. Christ's life, death, and resurrection are the cause of our own life, death, and resurrection. Nothing else matters. Nothing else satisfies. We learn through our crosses and sufferings that He is all that matters. A sword will pierce our hearts. He takes away all our hiding places and our excuses. He exposes the thoughts of our hearts so that we might learn again that there is no other place to turn, so that we might learn again that there is no other hope. We can't hide in our hearts. We can't hide in our thoughts. We can't hide in our deeds. So cry out for mercy; call out for forgiveness. You are cleansed in the blood of Christ. You are spared and God is pleased.

So now we kneel today before His Body and Blood. We are united to Him who is perfect in His Body and Blood. We hear His voice and His Word and we know the truth: In Christ, you are free. He will never leave you or forsake you. Amen.

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