

First Sunday in Christmas/December 30, 2018
Luke 2:22-40/Song of Simeon
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“And the favor of God was upon him.”

How did Simeon know which child was the right one? Surely, over the years as Simeon watched for Messiah to come, he must have seen hundreds upon hundreds of baby boys. How did he know that it was this Child, on this day?

We are not told. In some way, the Spirit revealed the Christ Child to Simeon. Of course if the Spirit had not revealed the holy infant, then Simeon would not have recognized Him. Jesus did not appear any different, no shining halo, no banners waving, and no crowd cheering, certainly no loud fanfare of trumpets to announce His arrival. He appeared ordinary.

Yet Simeon recognized Christ. He discerned this tiny body is God in the flesh. Simeon could have treated Jesus as an object too holy to touch; stood at a distance and groveled in the dust. But no, Simeon took up the Child in his arms. He held the most precious object ever to exist in the universe. He touched the salvation of all mankind.

Simeon in his great humility did not think he was worthy of this precious Child. Yet he also knew this Savior was given as a human being, as one of us, in the flesh. This Savior could be touched and held, since God came as Man. So Simeon received this wonderful privilege, to receive God in his arms.

And Simeon said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

For centuries, we sang this Song of Simeon right after Holy Communion. How appropriate it is we sing these words of Scripture right after we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

But this brings up the question: Like Simeon, how do you recognize where Christ is? It is true Christ is everywhere, since He fills the whole universe with His presence. Many people say, "Look for God in the wonders of nature." Others, "Look for Christ in serving your neighbor." In a sense, Christ is also there. But He is not there bringing you grace, peace and forgiveness. In serving your neighbor, you serve Christ. Yet you cannot earn from Christ eternal life; service is law. You need Christ in His Gospel. Where can you meet Christ to receive His greatest gifts?

The problem is, when Christ appears to you, He appears ordinary. There is no shining halo, no banners waving, no crowd cheering, and no loud fanfare of trumpets to announce His arrival. For He is found in spoken words, in water, in bread and wine. You cannot hear any loud singing of angels when Christ comes among you. Your physical eyes cannot see the shape of the Man from Nazareth. Yet you recognize He is here, nonetheless.

How do you know? How do you discern the presence of Christ? The Spirit reveals Christ to you. For it is the Spirit who gives you faith to believe the promises of God. If the Spirit did not reveal Him to you by faith, then you would think Christ was not here. He would pass you by, unnoticed.

Now Christ, desiring to overflow with grace toward you, comes through different ways and means. The primary way is through the Word. Without the Word, Christ never brings His presence and grace. But Christ especially comes through eating, in the Sacrament of the Altar. When you taste the Bread and Wine, you are tasting the Body and Blood of Christ, given for the remission of your sins. Of

course, it does not taste like body and blood. The mystery of Christ's union with the blessed Bread and Wine goes beyond your senses. He is not given in an obvious, physical way. Yet, you can truthfully say, as Christ said, as you taste them on your tongue, this is His Body, and this is His Blood.

As you consider how holy and awesome the precious presence of Christ is, you might be tempted to treat Him as an object too holy to touch. You might fear the Sacrament, and keep it at a distance, communing rarely, if ever. But I tell you, No. Do this often. At this Altar, you can taste the most precious thing ever to exist in the universe. You are invited by Christ to touch the salvation of mankind, in His Body and Blood.

Of course, do not do this lightly, as if you were worthy of this precious Meal. Come in humility, knowing how great your sins are. You are the opposite of Christ's Body and Blood. He is perfect and holy, absolutely sinless and glorious. You are imperfect and unrighteous. According to your sinful nature, even your good works are but filthy rags.

It ought to be horrible blasphemy for any one of our sorry race to touch this most holy Sacrament. The instant you touched it, an angel with a flaming sword should strike you down for your arrogant presumption in daring to defile this precious Body and Blood by laying filthy, sinful hands upon it. But that does not happen, since Christ Himself invites you to eat and drink. He willingly gives Himself here, and even commands you to partake. For this Savior gave Himself as a human being, as one of you, in the flesh. He came as a Savior to be touched and held, since He came as Man.

So you approach this Altar with reverence. Bowing are appropriate here, for here is God in bodily form. Repentance and confession are needful, for no one must approach here who does not desire the

remission of their sins. There is no greater moment in your worship. There is no greater moment in your life. As you recognize whose Body and Blood this is, you should be like Simeon, full of joy and amazement at the wonderful privilege God has given you, to touch the Messiah.

After this incredible moment, you are ready to depart in peace. There is nothing better you could ever do in your life, so if you died a moment after tasting Christ's Body and Blood, what a way to go! Passing from this glory to the glory above, from this Presence to that Presence.

Now, in this Body and Blood, you have peace. You are declared by God to be His blessed servant. His salvation has been poured out to all people who sit here today. For this Gospel of forgiveness is not only for His people, the Jews or not only for "good" people. It is for all. He died for all; He carried all sins. His Blood, full of the unquenchable Light of the eternal Godhead, shined into the darkness of your soul. He has covered your shame with His everlasting glory.

He has even been pleased to make Himself one with you. He took on your human body. He took on your sins. He exchanged them for His own righteousness. Now He dwells with you. You are His Body, joined to Him in mystic, sweet communion. More than that, you are His Temple. The Temple of God is where His presence dwells, and that's you. You are where His glory lives. Simeon came to an earthly Temple built with human hands. But you are a heavenly Temple built by God, with Christ as the Great Cornerstone. In this Temple, the Blood of the Holy Lamb of God has been sprinkled. Therefore, everything here is perfect and sinless, cleansed and pure, and shining out with the very Majesty of the Most High God. That is what you are, and shall remain forever, through Jesus Christ your Lord. Deo Gratis! Thanks be to God!