

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christmas has come and gone. As one pastor put it, *“The ‘hoopla’ has come and gone and now is the time to unwind and watch the bills come in.”*

We get a different picture of Mary and Joseph. Christmas was over, however, eight days later they were in Jerusalem fulfilling the Law of Moses. Every firstborn boy had to be presented at the temple and a sacrifice offered to the Lord to redeem him. Then there was Simeon and Anna to believers who didn't even know that Christmas had come and gone. They were in the Temple worshiping and waiting for the coming of the Christ. They were overjoyed when they saw Jesus.

We will look at what was happening and what was said. We see that these people far from being down or empty were filled with peace after Christmas. They lived joyfully with peace that came from knowing the Christ child.

As we leave the old year and enter the new we borrow words from Simeon and say, **“Lord, Let Your Servant Live in Peace.”** I can do this now and in the New Year, because **“my eyes have seen your salvation.”**

## **1. Our peace is found in that Child**

Many baby boys were brought to the temple. In the midst of the noise and the many people moving about, Simeon noticed this one family. He went straight for Mary's boy. Why? Simeon knew that this child would bring him peace with God. We can be as thrilled as Simeon when we see the infant Jesus at the Temple. Our peace is found in that Child.

A. Simeon tells us something about this this Child. He is the Savior who sets us free so that we can have peace with God.

1. Listen to Simeon's words again, **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.”** The word **“dismiss”** as the idea in the original language of *“releasing, setting free.”* This is what Simeon wanted more than anything else in his life.

2. What did he want to be set free from? It was his sin, his guilt. We hear about Simeon that he was **“righteous and devout.”** We might say, *“How is that this guy was feeling guilty?”* Being righteous and devout does not mean that he was perfect. Rather it means that he went to church and he paid attention to God's word.

One of the things God's word does it calls on us to be perfect. We are to be without any stain of sin in our life. In Leviticus 19:2 the Lord says to Moses, **"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'"** Leviticus 19:2 (NIV84) St. Peter writing to Christians repeats this thought in the New Testament, **"14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as [God] who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"** 1 Peter 1:14–16 (NIV84)

How many of us accomplished perfect holiness in 2017? If your thinking, *"None of us did"*, you are correct. Simeon knew that he couldn't just sweep his guilt into a plastic kitchen garbage bag and throw it in the trash. He had to answer to the Lord God for his guilt. The only thing that kept Simeon going in life was a promise. The Lord had promised him a Savior.

3. Now Simeon looks on this child and he is thrilled. The baby Jesus, in Mary's arms, is his Savior. Right at that moment Jesus was doing something for Simeon. He was keeping God's law perfectly. The Jews were commanded to bring their first born baby boys in on the eighth day to the temple and offer a sacrifice for them. Mary and Joseph were doing this for Jesus. We are told they did everything required by the Law of Moses. In his youth and throughout life Jesus did everything that God requires of us. He was perfect as he served.

4. We also note the words of Simeon to Mary that *Jesus was destined to cause the rising and falling of many*. He told Mary that *a sword would pierce her soul*. Some people would believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior others would reject him and even hurt him. Mary would suffer agonizing pain when she saw the rejection, especially in Jesus' crucifixion. Here is the other reason this Child brings peace. Later, he suffered greatly to take away humanity's sin and guilt. God's Christmas gift of salvation to humanity came at a great cost.

B. Lets go back to Simeon's words about being dismissed in peace. This Child was his peace and he is our peace.

1. After Christmas there can be a let down. After Christmas it is back to everyday life. After Christmas we have to deal with the problems or issues that were put on the "back burner" during the holidays. Very often the problems we have come from our sins. If we neglect bills or chores, they have piled up and we have a headache. We indulged too much, we have to

lose weight. If we ran ourselves ragged, we may have to deal with a cold or flu. If we didn't go to worship or listen to the Christmas message, we may feel empty and "blue."

Jesus is our peace because he didn't neglect his chores, eat too much or invest too much energy in worldly celebrating. He always listened to his Father's word. This wasn't only good for him. His perfection is ours. Because we sin we need his payment for sin. His death on the cross provided our forgiveness and righteousness. Through Jesus we have peace with God. This is why Simeon was so happy! This is why you and I can be happy and at peace. Jesus, our Savior, is God's Christmas gift and he is our peace.

2. Let's not miss the words of Simeon that this Child is a light for the Gentiles. This wasn't just for the people of Palestine. God's gift was for all people. No one is excluded from having peace in the Christ child. That means that God cares just about you and me as he did for the people of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. He promises that he will be with all of his children in the New Year, 2018. That includes you and me.

## **2. Our peace moves us to worship and praise.**

Simeon disappears from the pages of the Bible after this brief encounter with the Baby Jesus. A person might wonder, "*What happened to him?*" We don't know, but we can be sure that as he continued to live, he was doing what he did that day in the temple, he was worshiping and praising the Lord. A. The important question is what will you and I be doing in the New Year and for the rest of our lives?

Like Simeon, worship should be an important part of our lives. One thing we can do in the New Year is plan to worship. Some people don't always plan to go to church. If you come to church tired, you won't get much out of it. If you are very busy with the things of this life, you may come to church, but be so distracted that you don't get anything out of it. There are some parts of Scripture that pastor covers that are less well known than others. We might easily get bored.

Worship is more than just showing up on Sunday. Meaningful worship means preparing body, mind and soul. Get enough rest ahead of time. Spend time in Scriptures. As we do we will think about our relationship to God and how he blesses us. We are reminded of our need for forgiveness which is in the word and Sacraments. Then we know we need to go to church and participate. As we connect with Jesus and his grace, we are filled with joy

and peace. We will feel like our worship is very worthwhile.

B. There is one other person that we don't want to forget, the elderly lady, the prophetess Anna. She saw what was going on with Simeon and Mary, Joseph and the child. When she realized this was her Savior, her peace, she began telling others about him.

The reason the Holy Spirit included this in the narrative is so that we are reminded that once we have seen the Christ child, who is our peace, we have an important purpose. We need to share the good news of his love and peace with others.

The number of people who go to church regularly in our country remains low. The number of people who are interested in spiritual things remains high. In the New Year, there are people that we meet who are looking for peace, who are looking for salvation. We have the answer. Having this purpose and mission in life also gives us joy after Christmas.

Conclusion: Usually around the beginning of the new year there are predictions of what will happen in the world. One news headline already proclaimed, "2018 the Year of North Korea." That doesn't sound good. People guess about politics and war, about the financial markets and the social scene, etc. This does not give them peace. They really don't know what the future holds.

You and I know something about the future. We have peace with Jesus. This peace runs like a huge river through our life. It calms us, it reminds us of who we are, the children of God, and it guides us as we live. The peace of Jesus will bring you joy and strength, no matter what happens, as we leave the old year and enter the New Year 2018. You will have a blessed New Year. Amen.

The First Lesson—Isaiah 40:20-25

20 “Gather together and come;  
assemble, you fugitives from the nations.

Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood,  
who pray to gods that cannot save.

21 Declare what is to be, present it—  
let them take counsel together.

Who foretold this long ago,  
who declared it from the distant past?

Was it not I, the Lord?

And there is no God apart from me,  
a righteous God and a Savior;  
there is none but me.

22 “Turn to me and be saved,  
all you ends of the earth;  
for I am God, and there is no other.

23 By myself I have sworn,  
my mouth has uttered in all integrity  
a word that will not be revoked:

Before me every knee will bow;  
by me every tongue will swear.

24 They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone  
are deliverance and strength.’”

All who have raged against him  
will come to him and be put to shame.

25 But all the descendants of Israel  
will find deliverance in the Lord  
and will make their boast in him.

The Second Lesson— Colossians 3:12-17

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body

you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Verse of the Day

Alleluia. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Alleluia. (Colossians 3:15a)

The Gospel – Luke 2:25-40

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."

33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the

Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.