

Christmas 1  
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We Have Seen His Salvation!

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Luke 2:25-50

Christmas is finally over. How do you feel? All the hectic running around, all the hype -- it's finally over. You're probably still unwinding a bit from all the activity. Your pocket book is probably also still recovering. But now that the climax of the season has passed, and now that you're not being distracted by all the preparations that go along with Christmas, I'd like you to take a moment now and reflect with uncluttered minds and focussed attention on the true meaning of Christmas. Friends, with Christmas done, and a new year fast approaching, don't ever lose sight of the fact that by God's grace this season, we, like Simeon whom we have just read about, **have seen His Salvation!** We are reminded that because God kept his promise of a Savior, we respond with praise, and like Simeon, we may depart in peace.

You know, Simeon seemed to be a rather interesting person. We're told Simeon was a devout believer. He must have known his Bible well, because he was eagerly looking forward to the Messiah who was going to redeem Israel. A couple nights ago, children probably received the promise that they wouldn't go to sleep that night before they had opened their presents. You know how children act when they know the time to open presents is near. Simeon had also received a promise that he would receive a great present before he died. God revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. Imagine how he must have eagerly looked forward to each new day, wondering if he would see the Christ that day!

Well, one day, he was moved by the Spirit to go into the temple. The day was finally at hand when he would see the promised Messiah! Looking around the temple, Simeon caught sight of baby Jesus and his parents. Now note Simeon's reaction. Just look at what he did! Our Bibles say "Simeon took Jesus in his arms." The original Greek language better conveys the idea that Simeon went over to them and HE took the baby in his arms. In his excitement, he didn't ask the parents if he could please hold the baby. In his joy, he took hold of the Savior of the world in his arms. And then what happened? Simeon praised God. He praised God for keeping his promise. He praised God for sending the Salvation of the world. And he did this even though he was only holding a little, defenseless newborn in his arms. Simeon wasn't offended at the humbleness of the little baby. He praised God because through the eyes of faith he knew he was holding the Savior of the world in his arms.

By God's grace, this Christmas we also have seen God's salvation. And like Simeon, our response is one of praise. Now what is "praise?" How do you define praise? Lutherans have often been accused of having a lack of emotion in their services. Perhaps you've heard this story. I'm not sure if it's true or not, but I think it could be. A woman once visited a Lutheran church, and she was used to going to vocal, charismatic churches. During the Pastor's sermon, when he proclaimed a particularly comforting Gospel truth, she stood up and cried out, "Hallelujah!" People turned around and stared at her. A few minutes later, she stood up again and said, "Praise the Lord!" The same thing continued to happen. Finally, an usher walked over to the woman, placed his hand on her shoulder and said, "Ma'am, please sit quietly. We don't 'Praise the Lord!' in the Lutheran church." Now while Lutherans do tend to have quieter, reflective church services, that usher certainly wasn't accurate in saying Lutherans don't praise the Lord.

But it does raise the question as to how one does praise the Lord. What is involved in praising the Lord? Contrary to what many people believe, praising God is something that doesn't depend on our feelings. Often times praising God does result from joy and happiness, but praise

can be done even when we aren't feeling happy and joyful. Praise simply means speaking well of someone. When you praise a co-worker for a job well done, you are speaking well of him or her. When you praise your children for something, you are speaking well of them. That's what praise is.

God also wants to hear our praise. God loves to be praised. Why? God has a number of reasons why he wants us to praise him. First of all, praise is necessary to fully enjoy the object being praised. [Repeat] If you want proof of that, the next time your favorite team is on in football, try watching a game without praise. When you see a great play made, just sit there without saying anything. Do you think you would enjoy the game as much? Praise is a big part in enjoying a sporting event. For that matter, go on a nature hike with someone who doesn't appreciate nature. You'll see beautiful scenery, and you'll want to speak well about it with someone, but the person next to you doesn't really appreciate the scenery. Yes, when we praise someone or something, we more fully enjoy the object being praised. When we praise God we more fully enjoy Him and what he's done for us.

Another reason God wants us to praise him is that our praise magnifies him. Binoculars magnify whatever you're looking at. They make the object large. When we praise God, we make him look large, both to ourselves and to others. And in making God large, can you see another result of praising God? What happens to us? It makes us look smaller. Therefore praise also modifies our estimation of ourself. Note how Simeon addressed God. "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your **SERVANT** in peace." The Greek word meaning really is closer to slave. Praise humbles us to realize we are but slaves and God is our master. Praise, then, enables us to see ourselves as God sees us -- as totally dependent, helpless, objects of love.

God also wants us to praise him because our words and actions of praise show devotion to Christ. Anyone listening to Simeon in that temple wouldn't have wondered who his faith was in. No one would have been curious as to why Simeon was praising God. His praise showed a firm faith and devotion to Christ. His praise was a witness to everyone that his only hope, his only salvation, was Jesus. Our praise also witnesses to our family, friends and neighbors our devotion and faith in Christ.

Another reason God wants our praise. Praising God motivates us to holy living. Friends, when you praise God, you can't help but better understand God's absolute holiness. You can't help but better understand God's absolute love and mercy. When you praise God for his holiness and justice and love and mercy, the natural result in your life will be a greater desire to live your life as your heavenly father would want you to.

As I was trying to think of an example of a person who praised God, I couldn't help but remember Anna. I'm not talking about the Anna we read about in the Gospel reading, although I'd imagine that's who she was named after. I'm talking about the Anna I met at a nursing home. I was conducting a brief worship service at a nursing home a couple years ago. After the service, a very old lady caught my attention. I went over to her and sat down beside her. She put her hand on my arm and asked with an eager smile, "Do you think Jesus will come again soon?" I told her I really hoped so. With a big smile on her face she said, "I do too. I hope he comes real soon. I can't wait to go to heaven and be with Jesus." These words of faith and praise came from

a woman in a nursing home, confined to a wheel chair. If you'd expect anyone not to have words of praise for God, it would be someone in that situation. I had gone to the nursing home to give a sermon, I ended up receiving one that I'll never forget. Anna spoke well of God. Her attitude of praise was that of a model Christian.

Seeing the Savior had another big impact on Simeon. Having seen the Savior he said he could now depart this world in peace. Peace is something that is really lacking in this world in which we live, isn't it? Turn on the evening news, and you'll see a disturbing lack of peace. Wars and civil wars rage on; violence grows and worsens in our cities. There is even an evident lack of peace in the way most people deal with each other. Divorce is common place, child and spouse abuse incidents are frequent. Yes, fewer and fewer people are experiencing peace in their lives. Sometimes we may even want to throw our hands up in despair.

However, in the midst of all this unrest and lack of peace, we as Christians can truly have peace. We can have peace because we, like Simeon, have seen our Salvation. We enjoy peace because first of all, God prepared our salvation in plain sight for everyone to see. I suppose God could have worked out his plan of salvation in heaven somehow. He then could have let us know that our we had been saved from our sins by something that had taken place in the farthest corners of heaven. But God has blessed us by making his Salvation take place on earth, before all people, so there could be no doubt whether or not it happened. There can be no doubt that Jesus lived a perfect life on earth about 2,000 years ago. It was widely observed and recorded that he suffered and died on the cross. He appeared to hundreds of people to prove his resurrection. Yes, God prepared and revealed our salvation in the sight of all people.

But what does this all mean? How does this give us peace? Simeon received peace and we receive peace because the result of Jesus' work is that God has given us eternal life. I think we often think of eternal life as something abstract that we'll receive sometime in the future. But Scriptures tell us that we have eternal life NOW! In John 3:36 it says, "Whoever believes in the Son **HAS** eternal life." Note it doesn't say, "Will have," or "has eternal life when he dies," but whoever believes in the Son has eternal life... right now! Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians in a little bit different way, "God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." Having eternal life now means in reality we are already seated with Christ in heaven. Can any earthly problem strip you of the peace you possess in Christ? It most certainly cannot, because through faith your existence isn't on this earth. Through faith in Christ, you are already sitting in heaven. You already have eternal life.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with hurricanes and what they look like. They are giant circling winds blowing over 75 mph. Usually they're accompanied by torrential rains, lightening and flooding. But in the midst of this storm, there is something known as the eye of the hurricane. In the dead center of this raging, destructive storm there is total calmness. There is no wind whatsoever. There is peace. With the Lord as the center of your life, you are an island, an oasis of calmness and peace. Even if the storms of life on a sinful earth toss around, inside us can be peace because of who we are in Christ Jesus.

Our peace comes from knowing our standing with God. I knew a man who claimed to be a devout Christian. He was a firm Roman Catholic and had the equivalent of a master's degree in Catholic Theology. We got to talking once about eternal life. I asked him, "Are you absolutely certain of your salvation -- are you positive you will be in heaven when you die?" He said, "Certainly not! You can never be sure of your salvation! We are always working toward that!" I

suddenly realized with great sadness that this man didn't truly know Jesus. This man had no real peace. He wasn't even sure he would be in heaven.

Thank God we have seen His salvation. We have seen and we know Jesus Christ as the Son of God who suffered and died on the cross paying the full debt of sin for mankind. We know we will be in heaven when we die. We know we have eternal life now.

Like Simeon, we even have peace in the face of death. There was a man named Eric Barker from Great Britain who spent over 50 years in Portugal as a missionary. During WWII, the situation became so critical that he took the advice to send his wife and eight children to England for safety. His sister and her three children also left on the same ship. The Sunday after Barker's loved ones left, he stood before his congregation and said, "I've just received word that all my family have arrived safely home." He proceeded with the Sunday service as usual. A short time later the congregation found out the man had received a wire just before the service, informing him that a German submarine had torpedoed the ship, and there were no survivors. His family had arrived home safely. That is peace. That is the peace we have.

Christmas has once again come and gone, but the impact of that first Christmas will never be forgotten. We have seen God's Salvation! May it move us to praise him daily and fill us with peace until we depart this world.

And if you want to know how to praise God, I would suggest you turn to the Psalms.