

First Sunday after Christmas 2015
Pastor James Preus
Trinity Lutheran Church
December 27, 2015
Luke 2:22-40
Jesus our Champion

Simeon is waiting for the consolation of Israel. What does that mean? He is waiting for God to console Israel; to comfort his people. Simeon himself needs to be comforted. He needs a Savior. He cannot save himself. Yet he believes in God's promise to save him. Yet, generation after generation returns to the dust without seeing God's promised Christ, the appointed champion of God's people. Simeon's greatest fear is that he will die without seeing his champion, who comes to comfort his people. And God promised Simeon that he would not see death until he saw the Lord's Christ.

When Simeon sees Mary and Joseph come to the temple to present Jesus, he runs to them and takes the Christ child in his arms. At last, he has seen the Lord's Christ, the one who comes to console Israel. He has seen his *champion*, who will defeat sin, death, and the devil for a people unable to fight for themselves. Simeon is so overjoyed and filled with the Holy Spirit blesses God and says:

Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

For my eyes have seen your salvation

That you have prepared before the face of all peoples

A light for revelation to the Gentiles

And for the glory of your people Israel.

Simeon confesses to God that by seeing this little infant, he was seeing his very salvation. The infant Jesus is his Champion, appointed by God. He has no need to be

afraid of death anymore. He can die in peace. Death has become sleep to him. He can die, knowing that God has kept his promise.

Simeon is not naïve. He does not imagine this child will grow up to be a great military general, who will overthrow the Romans. He knows that this child is not chosen by God to establish an earthly kingdom. He knows what this child must do to defeat the powers of hell and set his people free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Simeon speaks in the Spirit to Mary, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Simeon wouldn't be the most popular Christmas preacher. Yet, his sermon to the holy family needs to be heard by all. Baby Jesus is the one long appointed by God to save many, yet to be a stumbling block to others. He is appointed by God to be a sign of salvation to sinners longing for forgiveness, yet he will be opposed by the impenitent, the proud, and all sorts of religious people. By the preaching of Christ the thoughts of many will be revealed, either to be faithless or faithful. And Mary will witness the great controversial event. Her eyes will not be spared the gruesome sight. A sword will pierce through her soul even as her boy's hands, feet, and side are pierced with nail and spear.

When Simeon looks at the baby Jesus, he sees the one who will die for his sins. That is what we should see too. Simeon doesn't preach empty fluff about peace on earth, without preaching of the battle, which must be won first. Jesus must die. If he does not die, then our sins are not paid for and he is not our champion. A champion fights for those who can't fight for themselves. Jesus does even more. He dies for them.

He will be a sign that is opposed. The word literally means spoken against. This is a very important lesson for us to learn. Jesus and his victory over sin will be spoken against. If you want to find the true Christ, to identify his true teaching, you have to find a Christ who is opposed. They will speak against his person, like the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Muslims, who deny that he is the only begotten Son of the Father. They will speak against his work, like the many who deny that his death is sufficient to take away all our sins and earn for us heaven, without our works. They will speak against his teaching and deny that his Baptism forgives our sins or that his body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper, like nearly every Protestant church in this city. They will deny that they need him, but rather cling to their own works, their own knowledge, their own source of comfort, but not the comfort of the cross.

To find Jesus, you need to find the sign, which is opposed, the cross of Christ. You need to find that God man condemned to death. You need to find the one who gives you his body and blood to drink, which he gave as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. You need to find the man, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. You need to find the one who sends his Holy Spirit to change out your evil heart and give you a new one through repentance and forgiveness. Because only there will you find your champion. Only there will you find true comfort.

There will be others who will promise comfort. They'll promise comfort by forgetting about your sins (not putting them on Christ, but simply putting them out of your own memory). They will promise comfort by telling you that you really are a good person, who doesn't need to be saved. They'll promise comfort in an array of ways, that

don't actually bring any comfort. The only true comfort is that, which forgives sins and gives eternal life.

I've heard it more times than I can recall. "I just don't know how people deal with death without faith." We all wonder it don't we? Every funeral of a faithful Christian, we comfort ourselves, "Well, he had faith in Christ, so we know he is in heaven." But what of those who do not have that comfort! What of those who do not have faith in Christ? How do they see death? What will happen to them? Death must be terrifying. And it should be. Death is the end of the road. There is no chance of repentance and believing after death. There is no chance of comfort. And so, masses of people must be terrified of death. Perhaps they find comfort the same way they find comfort for their sins. Ignore it or find some sort of false comfort. But there is only one true comfort in the face of death. There is only one comfort that can turn the slip into death as a fall into peaceful sleep. That is Christ Jesus. The Appointed one. The Opposed one. Our Champion.

When you have faith in Christ Jesus, you know that he has championed your cause. He has paid for your sins, so that they cannot trouble your soul, not even before your heavenly God and judge. He crushed Satan's head, so that he has no right to disturb you. He even conquered death by rising from the dead. Your faith receives every benefit of the consolation of Israel. With such faith even death can no longer harm you. It becomes rather a gentle sleep, which you can look forward to. As the Apostle Paul writes, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21

You might have found Simeon's blessing familiar. "Lord, now let your servant go in peace." We sing Simeon's song, the *Nunc Dimittis*, every Divine Service after we receive the Lord's Supper. This is very intentional. When we receive the bread and the

wine in the Lord's Supper, our faith believes that we have received Christ's body and blood; the same body and blood, which was given and shed on the cross on Good Friday; the same body and blood Simeon held in his arms as he first sang that song.

Many other people saw baby Jesus with his parents as they entered the temple. They didn't think anything of it. Just another young woman presenting her firstborn son. He was common in the eyes of the people. Yet he was still the Christ, the appointed consoler of Israel. He didn't stop being Christ when the people didn't recognize him as such. Yet when Simeon saw Jesus, he saw him for who he is: the Champion of his soul. So when we see that same Christ, believing what he has done for us, we sing Simeon's song. Because now that we have seen the Lord's Christ, and tasted his forgiveness, we can depart in peace. We can die without worry. When you sing the Nunc Dimittis after receiving the Lord's Supper, you are proclaiming that you are ready to die. To die for you is gain, because your champion Jesus has given you everything you need to enter eternal life. You lack *nothing*.

A sword pierced through Mary's soul too. She witnessed her son's murder. Mary also represents the Church. A sword pierces through Christ's Church as well. Just as Jesus is opposed, so is his Church. And the world will attack the Christians inside it with lies, temptation to accept and promote perverse sins, and even death. People even say, "Who would want to bring a child into this evil world?" And part of this sentiment is why we gladly sing the Nunc Dimittis as we wait to escape this evil world. Yet God himself sent his Son into this evil world. And he suffered worse from this world than any of our children ever could. And as long as Jesus' word and sacraments are purely preached and administered to the faithful, your children will have comfort. Although Christian children

must be raised in this wicked world, which opposes the Lord's anointed, these children also have a Champion. So when we die in peace, we can also rest knowing that our children we leave behind in this wicked world still have their champion. They can still sing that sweet song of Simeon, "Lord now let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of every people."

Amen.