

*22When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”*

*25Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 29“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 30for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” 33And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” 36There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing or come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are complete. If she bears a female child she shall be unclean two weeks; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days. When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. He shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood. If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.

Only to one people had the Lord, the creator of all given such directions – to the people of Israel. Of all the nations on the earth they were the ones chosen to be a people dedicated to God – holy. When Jesus was born Mary

and Joseph followed these directions exactly. On the eighth day the newborn child was circumcised and given the name Jesus. And then after thirty-three days Mary and Joseph came to the temple in Jerusalem with their child and offered what was prescribed for the woman who could not afford a lamb – a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Mary and Joseph were poor – still they offered what God’s law required. Some may think of doing what God requires as a burden, but God’s people Israel found it to be an honor and privilege and delight. It is like buying Christmas presents, I suppose. For one buying presents are an obligation to be suffered – to another a joy and a privilege, a way to bring delight to one that is loved. Some get up on a Sunday morning with skip in their step and a song on their lips – they will be singing God’s praises in the presence of God’s people this day. For others it is just the opposite – they come to church to endure an hour of obligation. I cannot understand why we all cannot have the same sort of joy but we do not. Still God wants all of us to gather each week, those who come in joy and those who come out of obligation. We are one people in Christ. Who knows what God may be doing in any one of us at any moment of time? Luther said God can be anywhere, can act anywhere. but that we should gather where God has promised to be present – in the Word and in the sacraments.

At the temple Mary and Joseph encountered Simeon – Luke tells us that he was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit brought him to the temple that day – revealed to him that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. When he saw Jesus he burst into song: “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Many saw Jesus that day. For most he was just another child. But to Simeon and to the prophet Anna God revealed that Jesus was the Messiah. Both had been waiting a long time for this moment – a lifetime. They had come to the temple week after week, decade after decade, just to see this moment. We may think that the great moment of revelation comes first – I have this great spiritual moment and then ever after I just want to be with God’s people to sing the praises of Jesus. But for Simeon and Anna it was not like that. They trusted God’s word; they

lived by God's word knowing that the one for whom they hoped had not yet come. While they waited they lived as they understood God wanted them to live. Finally they saw Jesus.

What did they see? A baby. Like any other baby. God revealed to them that this was the Messiah and yet nothing that was promised when the Messiah came had happened. The enemies of God and of God's people were still strong. They still oppressed the poor, oppressed God's people. In a number of decades Jerusalem would be destroyed by Roman armies, the temple burned down. Still Simeon sang because God gave him the gift of faith – eyes to see what only faith can see.

Simeon said to Mary: “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many hearts will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul, also.”

Years later this baby would be condemned to die on a cross. Many would see only a man suffering there. Some would mock him, others watched Jesus dying in sorrow. Yet the eyes of faith see God's own Son giving himself on that cross, in his dying winning forgiveness, defeating death, gaining salvation for all who believe. Only those given the gift of faith know it is so..

One day the song Simeon sang will be true for all. One day all eyes will see God's salvation – Jesus – the glory of God's people Israel. One day every enemy of God will lie in the dust and death itself will be condemned to death.

Until that day we live by faith. Amen.