

Simeon's Song

The Jews fervently believed God would bring them to the pinnacle of power and greatness in this world. They looked for a greater kingdom than their King David's



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through a miraculous intervention of God in history. After their long and varied history, including sinful rebellion, exile, wars and restoration, they anticipated the prophets' declarations and God's promises would come true.

Not all Jews anticipated a war and political dominance as God's plan. Some hoped for the day when God would clearly rule the world and his people would study his Word, live by his Law and experience freedom in faith. Simeon, a "righteous and devout" man, "eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel" (v. 25).

I suspect that when Luke was organizing his research material he could not resist including this colorful holy man to whom the Holy Spirit revealed he would not die until "he had seen the Lord's Christ" (v. 26). Remember that Luke is writing after the dramatic outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, so he makes the connection of God's promise to its fulfillment in a man who looks and sounds like an Old Testament prophet. Anticipation has become reality. Simeon says his faith has become sight!

Joseph and Mary have brought the baby Jesus to the Temple for the customary dedication and offering, when this strange old man surprises them with the announcement that he can now die because he has seen God's salvation (v.30)! The experience must have been frightening, but Mary and Joseph had already been startled by many experiences beyond human explanation.

Examine how Simeon describes God's salvation: "You (God) prepared

this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel" (v. 32). The Savior comes for all people, non-Jews as well as Jews, an idea that would not be welcomed by many in the upper-class Jews of Roman Palestine. Simeon was probably tolerated as a religious eccentric, an old man whose mind was cluttered with odd religious ideas and out of touch with political and social realities. There is an unsettling comparison here to our day.

Some faith voices today promote ideas of military might, separation of non-Christians from "Christian" nations, preparing for Christ's second advent when he will destroy all our enemies and give us "our" kingdom. Human nature tends toward winning, celebrating the punishment of evil people and proving we are right.

These are extremes that I am hearing voiced on television and reading in newspapers. I am not espousing a gospel that gets everyone to heaven in the end or that good and evil can be reclassified as we might prefer. But I am thinking about how I see people and how I understand God.

This strange little man who sees clearly the baby in Mary's arms is the promised Christ is showing us that Jesus will change everything, that God is offering life-changing hope to all the world. "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." And Simeon warns Mary: "A sword will pierce your innermost being too" (v. 35).

I know no more hopeful way to live than by grace, but it is also the most challenging way! Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God's grace, but his closest disciples still had difficulty understanding and living accordingly. We learn as we study the Bible, as we examine the actions and

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words of Jesus and as we mark the mistakes and successes of the early church. Following Jesus is a learning experience that has no ending.

Verse 28 offers us a sound basis for living as God's grace people: "Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God." Hard as we try, we can never reduce God to our full understanding. It has been so from the Garden of Eden. We learn much from the Old Testament stories and the Law, but we struggle because God is so beyond our capacity to fully understand.

On the day Mary and Joseph offered a sacrifice in the Temple for their baby boy, Simeon, a man of amazing spiritual perception, saw God, his Savior (v. 30). Paul describes Jesus as "the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation" and "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15,19-20a, NASV).

Advent, including the feast of Christmas, begins the church calendar because our understanding of God truly comes when we first see Jesus through the eyes of Simeon. What we know about secular Christmas is the work of preparation, the frantic schedule and exhaustive aftermath. But when we pause to see and hear this strange old man who "sees God's salvation" in the newborn Jesus, we can begin to experience God's love, to live with hope and to change our world each day.

Christmas is not the conclusion; it is the beginning. Have you seen the Lord's Christ?

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