

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. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss<sup>a</sup> your servant in peace.  
<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:25-40 NIV2011)

### **Depart in Peace**

For many Christmas is done. And if not yet, it will be soon. Family returns home. Leftovers are almost gone. Presents have been opened and the novelty wearing off. All good things must come to an end. For others, they couldn't wait for Christmas to end. Christmas is a sad reminder of loneliness, disappointment, and failure. Interestingly, it seems to me that this year many were looking past Christmas even before the day arrived. If there was a year we are happy to see depart, it's 2020. This year felt like we were waiting and waiting for some good news, some clarification, something better to happen, something to turn around. There's this hope that 2021 will finally be it. Close the door on 2020 and open up to a better, brighter, future in 2021. But what if it isn't? It's not being pessimistic. It's not that I'm being grumpy. It's the simple truth: there's nothing that guarantees 2021 will be better. And still, as we wait, we can depart in peace.

For those who knew Simeon, here's a good guy. He's known as being righteous. In other words, you couldn't say a bad thing about the guy. He was a walking saint. Oh, you know, no one is perfect. But he was just a good guy. And it wasn't for his own personal benefit either. He's devout, God-fearing. That means he loves his Lord and willingly shows it. There was something else special about him too. God had given Simeon a special spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit was on him. And this Simeon was waiting.

If you do a quick Google search for Simeon, most of the images that I had pop up show an old man. However, nowhere in the Bible does it tell us whether he is old or young. Maybe that's so you can see him as yourself and whatever age you might be. Because, like Simeon, you are waiting. You are waiting for the many annoyances and frustrations in life to end. There are pains and sickness in your

heart, soul, and mind that you are waiting to be finished with. You may be waiting for relief. You might be waiting to be better appreciated by mom and dad. You may be waiting to see more appreciation from your children. You might be fine with waiting and wish time would slow down so this good thing in life might never end.

But what are you going to do when that thing you are waiting for doesn't happen? You will hear someone say, "Don't worry, it will get better soon." Or when life keeps beating you up when you are already down in the dumps, "There's always a calm after the storm." Or, "God has something better planned for you. You might need to suffer now and later on he will fix it." When that good thing is coming to an end, "It will just make next time even better!" But as much as you think you are helping someone by saying that, how is it actually helping? You can't make promises like that! God never does. Yes, he says he works things all for your good. But good doesn't equal easier, successful, or comfort. Yes, God does have a plan for your life. But nowhere does he promise that means he's taking all the suffering and frustrations away. Quite the opposite. And so we must wait.

One thing we are all waiting for is death. The sad truth is that we are born to die. From the moment of conception your life's clock was wound with an end time. You know this. You know that at some point you will depart from this world. We know and say how we need to make the most of the time we have because our time is short. You try to fill in that time of waiting until the end. You do what you can to leave some type of good impression on other people. But then as you look ahead to that inevitable departure you may begin wonder, did I do enough? Will it mean anything? What will happen to my loved ones once I am gone? What will I do when they are no longer with me? What if I'm left waiting longer after they depart? Hardly sounds like something you want to hear just a couple of days after Christmas. It sounds so morbid and downright depressing. But that's the reality that we must come to grips with for ourselves, our loved ones, our children. You have an end date because you do not fill that time perfectly. The most you make of it, life still comes up short. You doing right in other people's sight won't be right enough with God. Your fearing of God is stained. This is the curse of sin. This is what we are by nature. We are ticking time bombs waiting for the clock to strike when we must depart from this world. We are born to die because we are born dead in sin.

Like you are, Simeon knew that he wasn't righteous enough. He knew no matter how hard he tried he did not fear God above all things. So he waits for the consolation of Israel: the one who would bring comfort and relief. And while he waits the Holy Spirit assures him that death would not come for him until he saw

the Lord's Messiah, his chosen one who do just that. And so Simeon waits. How many years went by, we don't know. What happens during that time we aren't sure. But Simeon waits. One day, while he is waiting, in some miraculous way the Holy Spirit leads Simeon to go to the temple courts. We aren't sure if Simeon knows what he is looking for; maybe he's just waiting. Then he sees them. No one else seems to notice. Why should they? It's pretty obvious here are first time parents with very little money. They are just another nervous young mom and dad trying to make sure they are doing what they are supposed to do as good Jewish parents. The baby looks so tiny being only 40 days old. Sure he's cute. But just looking at this new mom and dad with their little son wouldn't tell you a whole lot of anything.

But Simeon knows. God opens his eyes to see. I wonder how nervously he approached these strangers asking them, "Can I hold your baby?" And when he holds that little-over-one-month-old child in his arms he can't help but praise God. The waiting was done. "Lord, according to your word, you may now dismiss your servant in peace." Simeon isn't saying, "Okay, Lord, I'm ready to go back home and get supper doing for tonight." He's saying, "Lord, I'm ready to die. I can die in peace. Your promise is fulfilled for me and for all people." He knows what this child will do: cause the rising and falling of many in Israel. He knows that when this baby grows up many will refuse to see him as their Savior. This baby will grow up to cause so much pain for his mom it will feel like a sword is piercing her soul as she watches her son suffer and die. At the same time, Simeon sees with his own eyes and holds with his own hands the one who came to save. Here's the one who will bring consolation and relief for all who never will be or can be righteous or God-fearing enough on their own, for all people. Here is the Lord's chosen one who will deliver His people from their sins, from Satan's grip, from death itself. And that's all he needs. Simeon was waiting and by God's grace he sees. So he is ready to depart in peace.

Unless Christ comes first, we are left waiting. And by God's grace we see. There it is in the manger. There he is 40 days old in the temple. This child will grow as human flesh and blood children do. He will get smarter. He will mature. Like you he will face temptation. He will endure waiting. At the same time, he will do it perfectly. He is not just man but also true God. His desire will always be according to Father's desire. For Jesus is the salvation God prepared for all his waiting people. In Jesus, God's plan from the beginning will come to fruition.

But to live is not enough for us. No, this baby held in Simeon's arms, like you, is born to die. Not because of any sin that he had or would commit, but for your sins and mine he will die. Jesus becomes sin for us so that the Father will not turn his

face from you. Jesus is punished for us so that we are not. He sheds his blood to deliver you from slavery to sin. With his crushing of Satan's head, Jesus releases you from Satan's grip. And we know that the Father accepts his perfect life and innocent death because on Easter morning Jesus lives.

Unlike Simeon, you don't have to wait to see God's salvation. It might have been through your mom and dad who brought you as a baby to God's house where he baptized you with water and the Word. It may have been through a friend who invited you to come along with them. It maybe was through a pastor who spoke to you. It may have been through something else entirely. In some shape or form the Holy Spirit worked through the Word to shine the light so that you might see the gift of God's Son. With eyes of faith you see him here with us today and hear his voice speak through his Word. You see it there in the Lord's Supper where you hold the flesh and blood Jesus in with and under the bread and wine. By God's grace you see him who was born to die so that you might live. And one day with your own two eyes you will see that your Redeemer lives. In the flesh you will see God because this baby who was born to die grows up to live and die for you so you might live forever with him.

And so, with Simeon we can say, "Lord, I am ready to depart in peace." Not just leaving this building after the service. Not just depart in peace to the next year. But depart in peace from this life. In peace because with sins forgiven all is well between you and God. Peace because whatever we are waiting for in life today and whatever happens, whether good or bad, God is with us. We have peace even in the face of death because God prepared salvation for you in his Son. There is nothing more for you to do. Jesus did it all. He gives it to you. It's yours through faith he works in your heart. And so there is nothing left for us to do except wait. And while we wait, be like Simeon and Anna and praise God. Serve him by serving your neighbor. Encourage others as they too are waiting. Proclaim the Good News that God is with us and death is not the end for His people. And with quite confident defiance in the face of the unknown and death we pray, "Lord, according to you promise, dismiss me in peace." Amen.