

Advent 4
December 23, 2007
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Simeon

Though Roman troops and tax collectors caused many people living in Palestine deep despair, there were those faithful people who believed that God would come to deliver them. Among that number was a saintly old man named Simeon. Simeon found comfort in God's promise of a deliverer. That Messiah was to bring peace to the people of Israel. Simeon kept the faith. He daily attended to his prayers through the trials of life. When the Messiah did appear Simeon was one of the few who recognized Jesus for who he was.

The day Mary and Joseph stopped to present Jesus at the Temple and to perform the purification rite for Mary following child birth, Simeon was there praying expectantly. As soon as he saw the baby in his mother's arms, Simeon knew the promise had been fulfilled.

Listen as Simeon speaks of his experience:

Enter Simeon

Perhaps you have read or heard about the times in which we live. The tyranny of the Roman Empire, the burden of taxation, the poverty of so many people impacted the lives of everyone. Let me tell about our religion. The Shema proclaims: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord." This one God had been revealed to us through the Law of Moses and the words of the prophets.

Most of our prophets were not popular men in their time. The message was one of judgment as they urged people to be faithful. The Law had been so elaborated upon by our learned rabbis that we had laws to govern every move of our lives. Our learned ones had taken God's law and made it an oppressive set of rules and rituals.

Let me give you an example, the Law says, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." Our religious leaders translated that into a man shall do no work on the Sabbath. They drew that out into silly interpretations. If a man had a needle stuck in his cloak, that was a sign of work, forbidden on the

Sabbath. If one was assisting his neighbor to carry a mattress that was bearing a burden, which was forbidden on the Sabbath. If one plucked corn and rubbed it between his hands, that was reaping and thrashing, forbidden. Maybe you recall from your Scriptures what Jesus thought of that one. He and his disciples plucked some corn and ate it on the Sabbath. Our Pharisees attacked him, incensed by what they were doing. Not as incensed as they were when he declared himself Lord of the Sabbath. Add to these rules the rivalry greed and corruption of our priestly class and you get some idea of the state of religion in our time.

Most of our people were good people. They tried very hard to live a good life. All the rules of traditionalism became a burden difficult to bear. It is no wonder they flocked to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist. Even in this time of Roman occupation, dreaded religious obligations, and oppression there were those of us who recalled the words of the prophets. We looked hopefully for the coming of the Messiah.

There arose among the people a group of zealots who roamed the hills waging warfare against the Romans. They expected the Messiah to be a warrior king who would come to lead them in battle. To hasten that day, they raised their own warfare.

The Essenes set themselves apart from society. They thought that if they acted like the Kingdom of God they would assist the Messiah by guaranteeing the establishment of the kingdom. They looked for a Messiah who was a king like the great King David and a spiritual leader. Obviously you know they both got it wrong. That was not God's way of entering human life.

There were others who looked for the Messiah by simply keeping the faith. I was among those who refused to speculate on how and when the Messiah might come. I looked simply for the consolation of Israel. How we needed the Messiah to come.

What do you know about me from reading your Bible? Anyone know how old I was, where I lived, how I made a living? All you know is my name Simeon. God had revealed to me that I should not die before I saw the Lord's Christ. With that knowledge I greeted each day expectantly. Each day I went to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray. Eagerly I awaited that which God had promised a Messiah.

One day I saw a young couple enter the Temple carrying a child. It was obviously that this was a newborn and they had come for purification rites for the mother. Our religious laws declared a woman unclean after child birth until the proper rituals were performed. The young man changed some Roman money into Temple money at the desk of the moneychanger. The law required the sacrifice of a lamb for the woman's purification and a dove for the presentation of the child. If you were poor you could offer two doves. The man purchased two doves to present to the priest.

Following the purification rite the young woman stood on the top of the steps leading to the Court of Israel. There she presented her child to the priest. At that very moment I looked up. When I saw the baby I knew the promise of God had been fulfilled. Can you imagine my wonder and awe?

I suppose you know that I went over to where the child was and prayed, "Lord you can now allow your servant to die in peace for my eyes have seen the Savior, a light to enlighten your people."

The couple seemed shocked that I knew this child was the Messiah. I took the child in my arms for just a moment. As I handed him back to his mother I said, "This child is destined to make many fall and many rise in Israel. As for you Mary, a sword will pierce your soul also."

Mary did not know what I was talking about. Thirty three years later she stood beneath the cross of her son and she remembered what I had said.

After the couple left the Temple I did not know where they went. I did know that with my eyes I had seen the Savior. In my arms I held the Messiah, the Savior for all the world not just my people. Because of him I could rest in peace. Because of him, people down through the ages can rest in peace.

God gave all of us a gift in his Son. Through his Son all of us know God's love that enfolds us for eternity. God's Advent is what gives your life an Easter. That is a wonderful gift.

Your celebration of the Messiah's birth should be a reminder to you of how God loves you. Each day I encourage you to give thanks to God and pray:

"Lord you can let your servant, all servants everywhere depart in peace as you promise for your promise of a Messiah has been fulfilled for all the world to see, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and your people Israel."