

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Third Wednesday in Advent - Vespers**

Text: Luke 2: 22-32

Theme: *The Nunc Dimittis - The Song of Simeon*

Lord, now 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 people. (vs. 30-31)

This evening we come to the third of the songs in Luke's Christmas story to prepare us to receive the Christ child this Christmas. And again, you are invited to consider what we can have to enhance our Christmas preparation for a song. The first two songs we considered these past weeks, the *Magnificat* and the *Gloria in Excelsis* invited us to prepare for the coming of the Christ child by giving us signs by which we may recognize that his arrival is at hand. The song of Mary brought us the combination of the anticipation of God's great work being accomplished in her and from her, coupled with a strong sense the unworthiness of her lowly estate that elicited the great praise and thanksgiving she offered. These are the things that gave her such great joyful anticipation of that first Christmas that would come to her. And for us, we got it all for a song - a song to help us recognize our own lowly estate and the great thing that God has done in her child to be born for us.

And then in the *Gloria in Excelsis*, we received a glimpse of the glory of the Lord as we visited the shepherds in the Christmas story - the glory of the Lord in a song, for a song. It is a song that brings us a dual confession: the confession of our sin - *have mercy upon us*; and the confession of our faith in the *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*. For a song we anticipate the Glory of the risen Christ that we shall partake of in the fullness of time to come - *a glory of the Lord seated at the right hand of God the Father*. For a song we receive these blessings in a world that presents for us fallen creatures just hints of glory amid the fallenness of life. In the darkness of night to shepherds, the Angels lit things up with a hint of that glory, for a song that we continue to sing to this day.

But we wish to see these things also and not just to receive them as promises to be delivered at some time up the way. Think of how long the promise was given before the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham would be sent into the world to provide God's redemptive response to the Devil's spoilage of his creation. Yes, the wait has been long - thousands of years we have waited - from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to David, and from David to the barn in Bethlehem. But in what the Apostle Paul called *the fullness of time*, a devout God-fearing old man named Simeon was granted his wish to see this promised Messiah in flesh and blood. He had lived his whole life, waiting for God to fulfill His promise that He might be able to see his Lord and Savior in the flesh before he died. And at the purification as Jesus was brought to the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon was granted his appearance, and his words of praise

and thanksgiving have become a song in the Church through the ages. In the *Nunc Dimittis* that we sing every Divine Service, we celebrate this appearance to Simeon, but then also something very similar that we are privileged to behold. Simeon as an old man sent a prayer to God that He might now depart from this life in peace having beheld the baby Jesus, the promised Messiah and the glory of Israel. The peace of God had come into the world and he beheld that peace in the Christ child. Simeon also recognized the importance of this child for us Gentiles and that is why we are able to connect with his prayer for a song. The Glory of Israel is also a light to us Gentiles who have sat in the darkness of our sin without having the merciful God as our God. But as we prepare for Christmas we know that we are preparing for the Messiah King who has come also to us that we too might receive Him bodily. Through adoption in our baptism, we have been received into his family as also rightful sons and daughters of Abraham by faith. As Peter told the Gentile churches of Asia Minor: *Once you were no people, but now you have become God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy* (I Peter 2:10).

This Advent Season, we need to remember the song of Simeon is also our song, a song that proclaims boldly that God has sent his Son into the world also for us. God's peace has come to earth among those whom He is well pleased. And He is well pleased with you, and He has sent His Son into the world to be your light to enlighten you concerning His favor and His presence with you as you gather in His Name. It is difficult in the world we live in right now to find this Christmas gift from God. Indeed, even the words Merry Christmas are becoming eclipsed by the empty nebulous sentiment of happy holidays . . . whatever that might mean for whomever cares.

Nevertheless, the *Nunc Dimittis* reminds us of the connection between the Christmas blessing of Simeon and the blessing that we receive continually when we gather in the Name of Christ. Every Divine Service as we come to the Lord's table this Christ is present and revealed to us bodily - not wrapped in swaddling cloths but in bread and wine. He comes to us for our refreshment in the midst of our sins and our existence in this fallen world. He comes so that we also may depart in peace. The peace of God that can only come by embracing the Christ Child as your salvation coming to you in the body and blood that was given and shed for you. Here you behold, yes and more, you eat and drink your salvation and the assurance that each of your days, you live in his peace and on your last day, you, as Simeon will depart this life in His peace. You get it now, you get it each Lord's Day, in a song . . . for a song.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.