

SERMON FOR SUN. DEC. 26, 2021

Christmas 1C Luke 2:22-40 “Everlasting Christmas Joy.”

Dear fellow redeemed of the Christ-child, as you drove around Beloit the last few weeks, you’ve probably seen a lot of Christmas decorations lighting up the night.

You know, all those large inflatable figures, of all kinds of people and animals and snowmen and cartoon characters, that people have anchored on lawns in front of their home.

But by now, for the most part, those figures lie dead on the ground, lifeless lumps of deflated plastic testifying that Christmas is over. Ho ho ho.

But if you had been in Jerusalem, right after that first Christmas, and especially that day 40 days after Christmas when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple, you would have seen the exact opposite happening!

On that day, not a *deflating*, but an *inflating* took place to a man named Simeon. We’re not told much about him. He probably went unnoticed by most people in their day-to-day lives. He was just another man blending in with the crowd.

We are told that he was a man of faith, righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And then this also: the Holy Spirit was with him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

And this day, Simeon had had been led into the Temple.

Now the Temple was a busy place, with lots of hustle and bustle. So, a man and a woman and a newborn child, entering the Temple, wouldn’t have attracted much attention.

They were, after all, doing what all devout, law-keeping parents did - bringing the mother 40 days after her delivery to the Temple for her purification and bringing their firstborn son to be presented to the Lord.

And so it was a day just like any other day. A man praying. A father, mother, and child come to offer a sacrifice; just like any other day *until* their paths crossed.

And then suddenly, Simeon was inflated with Christmas joy! Filled with the Holy Spirit, he announces to all that God has kept His Word of promise and sent a Savior.

Mary and Joseph, who had seen a lifetime of wonders the past year, now see another, as Simeon takes Jesus up in his arms and rejoices.

Simeon's words that seem to dance off his lips reveal a joy in his heart that couldn't be contained.

This was no rehearsed speech, but the Word of God given to Simeon to speak. His words overflow from the joy that filled his heart, the joy that comes with receiving the greatest gift of all.

And I wonder if Mary smiled just a bit because she too knew this joy.

It was the same joy that overflowed from her own heart, which moved her to say: **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

God had looked on the humble estate of another person, just as with her. This child born was to bring joy to the world.

And so now Simeon needs nothing more. His eyes have been opened to see this child who would one day soon open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf.

Now Simeon can **depart** this world **in peace** because the Word and promise of God have been fulfilled; His Word and promise to us all, to send a Savior.

Simeon can depart this world in peace, and so can we, ***because this child would not depart in peace.***

This child who would be **a light for the Gentiles** and **the glory of Israel** would reign not from a throne not of gold but of wood, where He would hang amidst hatred, mockery and death; but in so doing, He would make peace between God and man. Peace in the forgiveness of our sins.

And of this work, Simeon speaks as well, for He says that this child will **cause the rising and falling of many**; that **He will be opposed**; that He will cause **Mary's own heart and soul to be pierced**; that He will **reveal the thoughts and desires** of our hearts.

But this too is the reason for our Christmas joy. This is not bad news, but good news!

For the killing of our sinful old man is for the rising of a new man, a death and resurrection which takes place for us in Holy Baptism.

Jesus was opposed and crucified in our place, that our Father in heaven may welcome us.

Mary's heart and soul, which would be pierced as she witnessed her son's brutal death will be healed with the joy of the resurrection.

And the revealing of the thoughts and desires of our hearts is the work of the Law, that thus revealed, our sins may be confessed and removed, forgiven by the blood of this child, shed for us.

And it would not take long for these things to begin. For when King Herod found out about this child, he did not rejoice, but set in motion a bloody slaughter, killing all the boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding region, that in this sweeping holocaust he might kill off this rival baby king.

But Herod's plot failed because it was not yet time for this child to die.

In fact, no one could take Jesus' life from Him - He came to lay it down of His own accord, to give His life for the life of the world, even for you and me.

That was His joy and what brought Him here on Christmas.

Well, having thus spoken, Simeon disappears from the scene. **We never hear of him or from him again.**

Yet one thing, I think, we can be sure of - his Christmas joy was never deflated!

Whenever he did depart, it was in the peace of which he spoke - the peace of the Spirit, the peace of forgiveness, **the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.**

Luke then goes on to tell us also of Anna, a prophetess who lived day and night in the Temple. Like Simeon we know very little about her, but her witness is essential as well, for she was the second witness required by the Law.

And being from the tribe of Asher, she was a representative from the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

You see, Jesus had come for all of Israel - indeed, for all the world. And perhaps her witness foreshadows what was going to happen some 33 years later, when a few other women would also testify of Jesus - **the resurrected Jesus**, after the joy of seeing the empty tomb.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

They went home. That's it? After such a joyous, yet mysterious time in the Temple? That seems rather anti-climactic, doesn't it?

Sort of like all those holiday figures now lying dead on the ground around my neighborhood, all the air, all the spirit, taken out of them.

But there is joy here too in this, for Jesus lives as we live, though without sin. In His life He fulfills every jot and tittle of the Law that we have broken, in our place.

He experiences all that we do, and so knows what you are going through in your life.

And the favor of God was upon Him, that it may now be upon us. All that He did was to inflate us with the joy of the Spirit. To give life to us who were dead in our sins. To raise us up to a new life that will never end.

And so Simeon's Christmas joy is our joy as well. This is why we sing Simeon's song not just at Christmas, but each time we too take up the body and blood of this child

not in our arms, but in our mouths, as we eat His body and drink His blood, **given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins.**

Given and shed for us who need consolation - consolation from the sin and hurt in this world that is inflicted upon us; and from the sin and hurt that we inflict upon others.

Consolation from the despair and doubt we feel in our hearts.

Consolation from the disappointments and pains of life.

Consolation from the fear and worry that sometimes consumes us. But in Christ, even in the midst of all this, we too have peace and joy.

The peace and joy of sins forgiven. The peace and joy of our enemies - Satan and death - defeated.

The peace and joy of the Spirit, who has inflated us with life both now and forever.

The peace and joy which surpass all understanding.

Yes, Simeon's Christmas joy is our joy as well. And so, like Simeon, we are ready to **depart in peace**. Whenever and however our departing from this world takes place.

For we too have been given the greatest gift of all - **for to us a child is born, to us a Son is given**. God kept His Word to Simeon, and He has kept Word to us. AMEN