

The Light At the End of the Tunnel

by Mark Jarvinen

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ 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. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.

²⁷ 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. **(Luke 2:22-40)**

Today's text describes what happened the day Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple when he was 40 days old. The Old Testament Law said that a mother who had given birth to a male baby was "**unclean**" for 40 days after giving birth (60 days after the birth of a girl). Bringing the baby to the temple was, therefore, in part for the ceremonial purification of the mother. But in addition, the law commanded that the child be presented to the Lord, in an acknowledgment of His ownership, and as a first-born son, that he be dedicated to the Lord's service. Thus, an animal sacrifice was offered on behalf of Mary and the child. Typically it would have been a lamb or goat, but if the parents were poor, as in the case of Mary and Joseph, two pigeons would suffice.

Today, our focus will be on the two **senior saints** in this passage - **Simeon** and **Anna**. Sadly, our youth-oriented culture tends to ignore and marginalize the old and the frail. We tend to value energy and excitement over wisdom and experience. One thing we learn from the example of older folks is the patience and grace found in waiting. Seniors seem to do a lot of waiting. Many wait for rides. They wait for the mail to come, for the family to call, or friends to drop by. If they are sick, they wait in doctor's offices for a diagnosis, and then they wait some more for a prescription to be filled or a surgery to be scheduled. Then they wait for healing to come. Some are placed on waiting lists for nursing home care. Unfortunately, some end up waiting to die.

Simeon and **Anna** knew about waiting too. This elderly pair had waited long years for God to fulfill His promise to Israel concerning the Messiah. They were both regulars at the temple, and being elderly,

had both lived for some time in the shadow of death. But even so, the light of hope still burned brightly in their hearts as they awaited God's promise.

Luke describes old **Simeon** as a **“righteous and devout man,”** meaning that he trusted in God's promise of a coming salvation, and lived in that trust. The Holy Spirit was upon him and he had been told by the Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. What an honor! What a hope!

But it's not easy to live day in and day out trusting a promise. Imagine going to the temple day after day with the morning and evening sacrifices and the ceaseless prayers. Every day Simeon waited and watched. Would this be the day? More sacrifices and prayers. Another day. Still nothing. Each day ended with Simeon thinking, **“Perhaps tomorrow.”** We don't know how long Simeon waited, but we surmise it was many years. We can almost hear the relief in his voice mingled with his joy, when after seeing the baby Jesus he said, **“Now let your servant depart in peace.”** We've heard it said that **“seeing is believing.”** In the case of Simeon, believing allowed him to see. For him, and for us, believing is seeing.

Imagine the excitement of old Simeon on the day Mary and Joseph showed up at the temple with their precious bundle. What a marvelous moment it must have been for Simeon to hold in his arms the fulfillment of God's promise. Imagine the rapture as he hoisted the baby heavenward and sang out the glorious song that no doubt echoed throughout the temple courts:

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
You now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
Which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
A light for revelation to the Gentiles
And for glory to your people Israel.

It is a joyful song, not a sigh of resignation. There is triumph in Simeon's words. I'll bet he sounded confident, bold, and liberated. You see, **everything else in life pales in comparison with seeing and knowing Jesus.** Simeon had no need to cling to this world – He had seen the Messiah. Though now free to die, he had never felt more alive. His trust had been vindicated. He had beheld the Savior.

Simeon said, **“My eyes have seen your salvation.”** What did he see? On the surface, he saw nothing more than the shepherds saw when they peered into stable on the night of the baby's birth. Or what the wise men of the east would see a bit later. Simeon saw a baby boy, who looked just like any other baby; and his poor, tired parents, who no doubt looked worn out, after living out of a suitcase since leaving Nazareth for Bethlehem, before the baby was even born. There was no angel chorus this time - no halos over their heads. But the Spirit of God helped Simeon see something more in the face of Mary and Joseph's baby boy. The Spirit of God revealed to him **“This is the child you've been waiting to see.”** Several years ago a pro-life bumper sticker said, **“Every baby is a sign that God hasn't given up on the world yet.”** Not only is this true in a general way, it is most certainly true when it comes to the child that Simeon held in his arms in the temple that day. Through this child, God would fulfill His redemptive purpose.

In the child, Simeon saw God's salvation. Notice that what he saw was not only his own salvation, but the salvation of the **whole world**. Simeon didn't praise God because **he** was saved. He praised God because now there was hope for the salvation of **all** people, both Jew and Gentile. According to Simeon's song, the child was to become **"a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for your people Israel."** For Simeon and Anna too, after a lifetime of waiting, there was **a light at the end of the tunnel** – and that light was **Jesus, the Messiah – the Savior of the world**. Simeon and Anna had lived faithful and dedicated lives in service to God, but they were not narrow and selfish in their dedication. In other words, Jesus was not only **their** personal Savior, but the Savior of the **universe**. The Roman, Greek, Jewish, and barbarian worlds at the time of Christ's birth were in dire need of light. All peoples were sitting in a pitch dark tunnel of hopelessness, helplessness, and sin. The religions of the Romans, Greeks, and barbarians had created gods by the thousands, but none of them offered any real hope to broken and sinful hearts. The Jews, who had been called by God to be the salt and light of the world, had become salt without savor and a lamp with a dim and flickering wick. To this setting the Messiah was born. The text says of the elderly prophetess, **Anna**, in v. 38, that after seeing the baby Jesus, she **"spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."** There's an evangelistic dimension, **a light that shines**, in the lives of all who understand God's heart for the world, and we certainly see that light burning brightly in the life of Anna.

Simeon and Anna said some pretty wonderful things about the baby that showed up at the temple that day. **Verse 33** tells us that even Mary and Joseph marveled at the things that were said about Jesus. Some observers that day may have questioned Simeon's sanity. Anna might have been regarded by some as a heretic or a fool. How could such infinitely wonderful things be said about a tiny, helpless baby? Our saviors are supposed to be larger than life, strong and mighty. Our lights are neon and laser. For us, glory is glitter and gold, not the face of a child. The child appeared so helpless and weak. Our enemies loom so large next to Him – sin, disease, violence, guilt, evil, death. If our Savior is this child, then it's Gideon's army of 300 against the Midianites, and David's slingshot against Goliath's sword, all over again.

Is this little child strong enough? Is His light bright enough? Some aren't sure. The gods of our age are tough competition. Should we try to help him? Prop him up? Make him more marketable and meaningful? Defend Him? Give Him a new look? Crank up the volume? Turn up the hype? Should we seek to make this baby more presentable in public? Should we wrap Him in a modern blanket or an antique one? Contemporary or traditional? **Shame on us if we bicker about the blanket and ignore the baby.** May we not forget that the Child who showed up at the temple that day is the God whose power is made perfect in weakness, who hides his riches under poverty, His strength under weakness, His glory under a cross. Simeon said to Mary, **“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”**

It sounds like through this child, God provided for us what we need the most. Even at the age of 40 days, the cross casts its shadow over the child. **Years later, Mary's heart would be pierced as she watched her precious son be crucified. But through that death, would rise forth the opportunity of new life for the world.** Where Christ looks most helpless and weak, there He is most our Savior, most our light, most our glory, most the Son of God. In the manger, in the arms of Simeon, and on the cross Jesus appears weak, but precisely then, when viewed through the eyes of faith, He is strongest.

In the temple that day we have **Simeon, Anna, Mary and Joseph.** And there, in the middle of it all, **a tiny 40 day old baby. It is a little congregation.** Everyone is represented. The young and old, the married, the single, the widowed – all gathered around the Christ child. People like us, who live in the shadow of death, can now die in the light of life cast by the Christ child who went to a cross on our behalf. **There is a light at the end of the tunnel.** It was embodied in the baby Simeon held in his arms and in the child of whom Anna spoke. **Jesus was worth the wait. He was the light at the end of the tunnel.** The salvation Simeon and Anna beheld in the face of the Christ Child is ours as well. His salvation is real. We receive it by faith. Today, because of Jesus, we too can depart from this place in peace. Praise His Name!

A-men.