

"The LORD Comes to His Temple"
Sermon #7
"Behold the LORD Whom You Seek"
Luke 2:25-38
29 December Anno Domini 2002
Christmas 1 B

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

The sermon text for the first Sunday after Christmas is from the Gospel Reading. Please listen to Luke 2:25-38 and ...

... Behold the LORD Whom You Seek

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Thy people Israel.' And His father and His mother marveled at what was said about Him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of Him to all who were looking for the Redemption of Israel."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

So, you are here once again - here in this holy place in time and space. Good. However, before I give you the narrative report of the thing which has been accomplished among us, just as it has been delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, you need to ponder a revelation. This is in order "that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

It is important for you to consider your own personal, individual reasons for being here. Why are

you here? What do you seek? That's important because a pilgrim could come here for the wrong reason, or because a seeker, whose particular wants and desires are contrary to God's will and Word, journeys to this place. Examples of such sinful contrariness? Certainly. To try to impress God in how holy you are. To try to impress your neighbor in how pious you are. To proceed impenitently through the Divine drama of the liturgy with the highest desire being that you will have got that done on your checklist for the day. To forgive God for something that happened in your life. To build up Divine rapid reward points for the number of trips you've made across the land to be here. To seek to staunch the breach of God's wrath upon sin with what you perceive to be a host of good works on your part. To gain a leverage against God that you will pull out as a trump card on Judgment Day. Enough? One more - to hear these examples in a sermon and think that you are exempt from such natural inclinations of your old sinful heart and from such unchristian thoughts in your head.

Why are you here? And what do you seek? Consider what is God-pleasing as the report is given to you. Take a look at the others who have come to this holy place throughout the years. Do you see them? Husbands and wives - families - singles - widows - a baby - newlyweds - new parents. Why have they come here and what do they seek?

Consider that widow here; her name is Anna. A faithful, 84-year-old woman who hangs around the temple day and night. She's quite remarkable in that she's one among only a few. She's one of the few of the ten lost tribes of Israel - the tribe of Asher. Why is she here in the temple? What is she seeking here? Well, the beloved physician, St. Luke, reports that she is one of the remnant in Israel looking for the Redemption of Jerusalem. Anna's hope is in the LORD God and she awaits Him in the place where He has promised to be found in His grace and mercy, for He has said through the mouth of His prophet, "Behold, the LORD Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple" (Malachi 3:1). Anna worships "with fasting and prayer night and day." Thus Anna abides in the temple awaiting the Advent of the world's Redeemer, just as one of the faithful might enter a room like this awaiting the real Presence of the LORD in Word and Sacrament.

Do you see them? Husbands and wives - families - singles - widows - a baby - newlyweds - new parents. Why have they come here and what do they seek?

Consider that man over there; his name is Simeon. While I do not include in my report whether he is young or old, or whether he is clergy or laity, I tell you this much. He is devout and righteous for God the Holy Spirit has worked faith in his heart. Why is Simeon here in the temple? And what does he seek? Well, dear friend of God, Simeon is looking for the consolation of Israel ... for the hope and comfort of the Church. Indeed, in a wonderful promise that is marvelous in our eyes and symphonic to our ears, "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Thus, this day, "inspired by the Spirit," Simeon "came into the temple." Why the temple? Because the Holy Spirit said through the mouth of Malachi, "Behold, the LORD Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple."

Look at the others here. Husbands and wives - families - singles - widows - a baby - newlyweds - new parents. Why have they come here and what do they seek?

Mary is here. She is a wife, married a year or so. She is a mom, having given birth to her firstborn, a son born forty days ago in the little town of Bethlehem. Why is she here and what does she seek? Mary is here for her purification according to the Law. Mary needs a sin offering to be made for her so that she might be clean. "This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. And if

she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean" (Leviticus 12:8). This she gladly and willingly receives this Word of the LORD and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior.

Joseph is here. He is a husband, married to Mary. He is a dad, having been entrusted with a son not from his loins, but rather the Son of God incarnate of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Joseph is the baby's legal father. On the eighth day when the Infant was circumcised according to the Law, Joseph names Him Jesus. Now Joseph has brought his family from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem. Why is he here and what does he seek? As the pious head of the holy family, he sought to do what was good and right and according to the Law for his wife and her firstborn Son. Joseph and Mary "brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'" (Luke 2:22-24).

Remarkable! Absolutely astounding when you realize what this means! Because of the Passover when the firstborn sons were spared by the blood of the lamb, all such sons belong to the Lord. A firstborn son could be bought back by bringing an offering of a lamb, or a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. Joseph and Mary have the offering necessary to redeem the Redeemer! Let it be so for now, for Jesus is already redeeming them. They bring, not a lamb, but rather, the offering of the poor - two turtledoves. Thus, into the temple Joseph and Mary carry the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. And the Word of the Lord has come to pass that is written, "The Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant in Whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1b).

Jesus is here. He is the firstborn Son of Mary and the Son of the Most High. The Savior is here and He is Holy to the LORD. At eight days Jesus shed His first Blood for the world. At forty days Jesus is still an infant. Why has He come? He has not come for Himself, but rather, His Advent is for us. For Himself He needs no purification ... no redemption. The Incarnation of the Son of God is for sins of the world. His way of the cross which will lead to His sin-atonement death is for the life of the world. For "when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus has come to His temple on our behalf and to be Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

What does He seek? The little Lord Jesus seeks to be present with His Church in the temple, and He was and is and ever shall be. The Christ seeks to be in the midst of His people who "come into His Presence with singing" ... who "enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise" (Psalm 100), and He was and is and ever shall be. Here the LORD God Almighty has His little congregation ... His family, a widow, a man, young and old, husband and wife, mother and father, carpenter and housewife. Here, forty days after the Birth of the Christ what began as an assembly of the Old Testament Christian Church became the first congregating of the New Testament Church. "Behold, the LORD Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple," and He was and is and ever shall be.

What happens as a result? A widow remains in the holy place and tells the Good News of Jesus to all who were looking for the Redeemer. A man may commend himself into the hands of God, saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word." A father and mother

now marvel at this Word that tells them of the Savior of the world and of their Savior. Husband and wife may now go home, living their lives and carrying out their responsibilities one to the other, submitting to one another, living in the Presence of Jesus.

Indeed, the LORD God is present with His people in the holy place and sanctifies them with His Word of forgiveness of sins, of peace among us, of hope that doesn't disappoint and of life in His Name. His cleansing Word is "by the washing of regeneration and a renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 2:5b). This Manna from above feeds His Church Himself and those who are prepared eat the Passover every eighth day. Why only those prepared? Because everyone who wishes to be a Christian and go to the Sacrament should be familiar with God's Word regarding this Communion. As such, "we do not intend to admit to the sacrament and administer it to those who do not know what they seek or why they come" (Large Catechism).

But be assured of this: Whether you commune at the Sacrament of the Altar or you don't, that through faith in Jesus ... the Incarnate Son of God ... the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world ... you may depart in peace according to God's Word. For truly, you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized: Behold the LORD Whom you seek. Amen.