

**"Six Divine Songs Of Emmanuel"**  
**"The Nunc Dimittis"**

Luke 2:25-40

December 29, 2002

Christmas 1 B

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

It's over for another year, the celebration of Christmas. After the parties, the food, the gifts and the services, the days after Christmas are characterized by leftovers, crumpled wrapping paper, and a distinct lack of energy on the Sunday after. The holidays are winding down; now comes the rest of a long, cold winter.

Where do you go from here? What do you have planned? Plans aside, what will happen to you as 2003 begins and continues? There may be lots of good in store: Grandchildren, a promotion, true love, stability, graduation. There may be unwanted troubles: strife at work or unemployment, family disagreements, a call from the doctor because he wants to run some more tests.

What will happen to you from here? You have some plans, but you don't know much for sure. So, really, what can you be certain of?

#### I. Simeon

A man of mystery is walking in the temple; I say this because we don't know much about him. We know his name is Simeon, but that's about it. Traditionally, he's pictured as a wizened, elderly man who has led a good life of many years; but we don't know. He could be a nineteen-year-old, still working on a full beard. Is he married? Widowed? Healthy? Ailing? Does he have kids? Grandkids? A good life? Bad? We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. It tells us his name is Simeon.

The Bible also says that Simeon "was just and devout, waiting 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 would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." That's why he's at the temple-he's going to see the Messiah.

Suddenly, He appears. The long-awaited Messiah is there; not just a human being, but the Lord has suddenly come to His temple. The Son of God has become flesh to be the Savior of the world, and He is making His first incarnate visit to His Father's house. The prophecy is fulfilled! The Messiah is on the temple grounds.

And nobody notices. Nobody cares.

Simeon does. He knows, because the Holy Spirit has told him. He confidently walks up to the Messiah and His entourage. He boldly takes hold of the Savior. And there, out in the middle of all the temple activity, he sings so that everyone who hears will know:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

The Lord Himself has come to His temple with salvation; He has come to redeem His people. It is a glorious, divine truth; so Simeon sings the song of praise.

Uninformed by the Holy Spirit, it's quite likely that others think he's nuts. Nuts or blasphemous, take your pick.

Temple-goers have come here to worship the almighty Lord who made the heavens and the earth. There on the grounds, this Simeon is holding a 40-day-old baby in his arms, guarded by the formidable entourage of, well, a poor-looking husband and wife.

Oh, Simeon isn't concerned with the Holy of Holies, where the Lord dwells in His glory. He's peering at the Baby in his arms, and singing the strangest of lullabies: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word..." Like the Baby has words. Like the Baby is in a position to send Simeon along. As if the Baby is the Lord.

We talked about this at Christmas, too: If you go by your eyes alone, you're likely to miss the Savior. Go by what the Holy Spirit says into your ears, and there He is. People who are looking for some glorious display of power to prove the presence of God will hustle by the Baby and keep on looking. But by faith, Simeon knows. The flesh and blood he cradles in his arms is the Son of God incarnate. He is Immanuel, "God with us," present with His people as God and man. He is with His people to bring peace, salvation, light, revelation and glory. Don't let the hairless head and the tiny toes fool you: This is the Lord of heaven and earth. And though that toothless mouth can't form words yet, He has been speaking from eternity. He is there. By faith, Simeon acknowledges His Savior and rejoices in His salvation. He embraces the Word made flesh, and he is forgiven for all of his sins by the Baby Jesus. That's why he can depart in peace.

He departs in peace, and what happens to Simeon then? We're back to, "We don't know," for he disappears from Scripture. Traditionally, we assume that he's an old man who dies and is called to glory soon after. On the other hand, he could have forty years of life left before he dies. Maybe a good life, maybe a terrible one by human standards.

But Simeon departs in peace because God is faithful: He has kept His promises made through the prophets. The Virgin has conceived and borne a Son, and His name is Immanuel. That Lord has come to His temple, where Simeon has held and beheld Him. The prophecies will continue to be fulfilled. The Messiah will make the blind see and the deaf hear, the mute sing and the lame leap for joy. He will be stricken, smitten and afflicted for our iniquities. He will be the cursed man on the tree, His bones out of joint and His robe gambled away. All this will take place so that other promises of God will be kept: Promises of pardon and peace, double helpings of grace for the penitent people of God.

God is faithful, and the promises will be kept; that is why Simeon departs in peace. He doesn't depart to peace; it is not that he faces a rosy, sublime sort of life because he has held the Savior. Whatever other trials lie ahead, he still faces death. He's still in this sinful world. But he is at peace because

God is faithful. He has sent the Savior. He has not forsaken Simeon, but has come to redeem him. Whatever Simeon faces, he is at peace with God. The Lord has kept His promises, and Simeon knows the end of the story.

The end of the story is life everlasting, because the Son has come.

## II. Peace Today and Forever

So, taking stock right now, this is what you know about you. You've made it this far. And you have no idea what is going to happen to you tomorrow; even with all the careful planning, December 30 is still up for grabs. You just don't know.

Not knowing leads to all sorts of temptations. You're tempted to worry; and while a godly concern is good, worry too often turns into doubt of God's will and faithfulness. You're tempted to disappointment when things don't go as you desire; the greater sin here is that you vastly prefer your will over that of the Lord's, who truly works all things for your good. We don't like not knowing, because not knowing means we have to live by trusting. Faith isn't natural; in fact, it's impossible unless it is given by God.

But God gives you faith, faith by and in a blessed truth that you do know. Today, you stand with Simeon because you behold your Savior. The Holy Spirit has revealed this to you—not through some mystical vision or writing in the sky, but by His holy, inspired Word. His Word announces to you that the Baby in Simeon's arms grows up and bears your sins to the cross. That same body is pierced and that blood is shed before He is placed in the tomb. That same Savior, with the same body and blood, is risen again on the third day. And before Jesus ascends into heaven, He speaks to His disciples of teaching and baptizing. He speaks of Word and Sacrament, and promises, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

He is with you in His Word and Sacraments. It was He who washed you clean of sin in the waters of Holy Baptism. It is He, the Word made flesh, who is present in His Word when it is proclaimed. It is He who says to you, "Take and eat, this is My body...take and drink, this is My blood, for the forgiveness of sins." The same body and blood that Simeon held and beheld. And that went to the cross. And rose again. And ascended into heaven.

Like Simeon, you behold your Savior today. You don't see tiny toes and a hairless head; you observe a man preaching and then see bread and wine. But faith tells you this: God keeps His promises. His Son has come, died and risen, as promised. His Son is here, in these means, to forgive, as promised. You know this by faith, not by sight.

It is little wonder, then, that you sing Simeon's hymn near the end of the service. You have heard the Word, and there the Holy Spirit has revealed to you your Savior. You have just received the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, just like Simeon. And just like Simeon, you sing:

"Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word. For Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

You sing with Simeon because the Savior has come to you, too; and then you depart in peace.

You depart in peace, though not necessarily to peace. You stand to face some ridicule along the way. If Simeon looks strange as he sings to the Baby, you'll draw some strange looks for looking for Jesus in, with and under bread and wine, water and Word. Some will tell you that you've lost your religious sanity, if not your salvation. But you know better: Christ is here because He promises, and He always keeps His promises. You have His Word on it, so you depart in peace.

Not that life will be peaceful. No, don't leave here expecting that the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh will go easy on you because you've been in the presence of God. This visit of your Savior only enrages them all the more. Don't hold the Lord to promises He hasn't made, expecting an easy life in this world as His child. His only-begotten Son suffered. You can expect your share of trouble, then; this unholy trinity (the devil, world and sinful flesh) will work their hardest to convince you that the Savior's presence at best does you no good, at worst only leads to trouble for you. They will wield their weapons of worry, guilt, anxiety, sickness, grief and death. They will do their best to crush you. But the truth is that they have been crushed already; crushed by the Son of God whom you behold today. They can make you miserable for a bit, but their days are numbered. In Christ, yours are not. You don't know what chapters life still holds; in Christ, you know the end of the story. And the end of the story is life everlasting. This is why you depart in peace. The One who suffered, died and rose again is with you, to raise you from your sufferings and death to life everlasting.

What does tomorrow hold? You cannot know. We commend tomorrow to the Lord, trusting that He will indeed work all things for our good. He has promised to do so for His servants, even as He promises that His Son has died for you. You don't know much about what lies ahead, but you do know that you are His-and so you know the end of the story. Therefore, even now, you depart in peace: For you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen