

Luke 2:30 – “*Seeing Salvation*”  
1st Sunday after Christmas – December 31, 2017



Do you remember this image? It's an optical illusion. When you look at it you either see a series of reddish-brown unrelated figures or else you clearly see in white the name of our Lord and Savior. When Jesus was presented at the temple forty days after His birth Simeon and Anna immediately and clearly, without illusion, recognized Him for who He was – the promised Messiah. We don't stop to think how amazing that was. The Judean Shepherds were given an obvious sign by the angel who told them of the Savior's birth, "*You will find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" But Anna and Simeon were given no such advance information. Luke doesn't tell us that the angels appeared again forty days later at the temple in Jerusalem. There was probably no glowing halo hovering above the head of the infant Savior that day. He looked like any ordinary baby. In all likelihood He shared a birthday with some other Jewish boy, and thus might not have been the only firstborn presented at the Temple that day. So how did Simeon and Anna know for sure that this was the Messiah? Why could Simeon say so unhesitatingly, "*My eyes have seen your salvation which You prepared in the presence of all people?*" Simply put, Simeon and Anna saw Jesus through the eyes of faith. Do we? Sadly, not always.

Instead of seeing salvation through the eyes of faith, we want physical evidence. We want tangible proof of God's love for us in our life. Simeon and Anna would be different from many of their contemporaries in that regard. Most 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish people would have been looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from earthly evil. Their imagined Messiah would destroy the enemies of Israel, cause their crops to flourish, their livestock to thrive, and bring health and wellness to them and their families. Doesn't that sound familiar? The present-day purveyors of the so-called Prosperity Gospel (which is no Gospel at all) follow the same tactic, and it works because it is appealing. Who of us, after all, wants to have a miserable life? Don't we all like to be free from trouble and heartache? Isn't it a lot easier to say, "*God has really blessed me,*" when you have good health rather than a terminal illness; when you have financial security instead of financial uncertainty; or when you have a full-time job with nice benefits than when you are unemployed? But all of those things are an illusion. It's like seeing the unrelated figures in this image rather than the letters which spell our Lord's name. We don't see salvation in the circumstance of our life. We see salvation at the cross. There are so many Bible passages that come to mind in this regard. Hebrews 12:2 is a necessary exhortation when it directs us to "*fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.*" St. Paul says, "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" And our Lord Himself told His disciples after His resurrection, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

Even though Simeon saw Jesus with physical eyes and held the child-Savior in His physical arms, it still took faith to make his confession. As you know, the words He uttered have an important place in the liturgical life of God's people through the centuries. They are used in the service of Compline, prayer at the close of the day; as we leave the altar after receiving the body and blood of the Lord, and at funeral services. There is a lesson in these words. The assumption is that Simeon was an old man when he uttered them, and that he died shortly thereafter. Certainly, this could have been the case, but we have no Biblical evidence which says that. An ancient tradition held that Simeon was one of the 70 men who worked on the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament begun in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and completed about 132 B.C. According to the legend, Simeon was agonizing over Isaiah 7:14, "*a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,*" when an angel told him he wouldn't die until he saw this prophecy fulfilled. That would have made him over 200 years old at Christ's presentation.

What matters more than if Simeon was a double-centenarian, an octogenarian like Anna, or a young man with a wife and young children was that the Holy Spirit made him a believer in the Christ. His Spirit-inspired words apply to us at every moment of life because they confess the truth of who Jesus is and what He does for us. We sing Simeon's words when we address our Savior and say, "*Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace.*" And we think of departing as going away or leaving the altar, leaving a long day, or leaving life in general. But the word *depart* literally means *set free*, which has deeper significance. Through the work of Jesus, we are set free from our sins. They are dismissed from our record. He first shed His blood on our behalf at His circumcision on the 8<sup>th</sup> day to fulfill the Law. On this 40<sup>th</sup> day, His parents presented Him at the Temple. They brought a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. They didn't bring a lamb not just because they were poor, but because three decades after this He would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world when He shed His blood on the cross. Simeon was waiting for *The Consolation of Israel*; the One who would fulfill Isaiah's words, "*Comfort, Comfort ye my people; speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*"

Simeon received that, and so do we in Jesus. We can close our eyes at the end of a day, at the end of a year like tonight, or at the end of a life, and have the peace that comes from Jesus. We see Him already now, not as a baby in our arms, but hidden under the water of baptism; under the bread and wine of His Supper; under simple but profound words of Absolution. But we shall see Him then face to face forever. That is our Consolation, our peace, our salvation. That's not an illusion, but a reality. Amen.

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