

**“SIMEON’S CHRISTMAS GIFT:  
GOD’S PROMISE IN THE FLESH”**  
**Text: Lk 2:22-40; Ex 13:1–3a, 11–15; Col 3:12-17**

**What do you want for Christmas?** How many times did that question get asked this past month? And in how many different ways was it answered? We ask for toys, gadgets, clothes, and all sorts of things we think will bring us happiness. We make our lists, we check them twice. But sometimes, the most precious gifts are the ones we never even thought to ask for. The ones that come as a complete surprise. That’s what happened in the temple when Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus...

This Christmas story, about Jesus being presented in the temple, reminds us that the greatest gifts aren’t the ones we can wrap in paper and put under a tree.

Today I want to think about this: not how you answered that question, but how would Simeon have answered that question? The righteous and devout man we heard about in the Gospel today. This man ***waiting for the consolation of Israel***. What did he want for Christmas? We might have asked for the latest gadget or the trendiest toy. His desire wasn’t for something material or fleeting.

He wanted to die. Not out of despair, but out of a deep and abiding hope. Because, he’d been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Imagine the emotion, the anticipation that must have filled his heart. He longed to see the one who would bring salvation and hope to a broken world. So Simeon wanted to die, because that would mean this incredible moment had finally come. He would have seen the Lord’s Christ, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world – his Savior.

So that day, the 40th day after Jesus’ birth, when Joseph and Mary came into the Temple to do for Jesus according to the custom of the Law, Simeon received his gift. Not a wrapped box or a shiny trinket, but something far more precious. Time seemed to stand still for Simeon. The moment he had longed for, the moment that meant he could now die in peace, had arrived. His wish came true. He held in his very arms the fulfillment of God’s promise—a small child, entrusted to his care for just a moment—the Messiah, the Savior, God himself in human form.

Joseph and Mary came to present Jesus to the Lord, as it had been written in the Law since the day God brought His people out of Egypt in the Exodus. They came to give, but it was Simeon who received the gift. What a twist! They came to offer their child, but God had a gift waiting for Simeon. And that’s why he bursts out in joy, as we often do when receiving a special and much-wanted gift. It wasn’t wrapped in paper and tied with a bow, but it was the greatest gift of all. And so Simeon proclaims in joy, with his gift in his arms, ***“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.”*** He was ready to die. Gift received.

We don’t know when Simeon died, whether it was soon after this day or many years later. In fact, we don’t even know that he was an old man. Just because he had the promise that he wouldn’t die before seeing the Christ, doesn’t mean he was an old man. But this is the last we hear of him. But no of that really matters—to us or to him. Because he was safe, forever held in the embrace of the one he now held in his arms. The arms not of a mere baby, but of the Almighty God, Immanuel—God with us, who came in human flesh. This wasn’t just a fleeting moment; it was an eternal embrace. So while this day is called The “Presentation of Our Lord”, maybe we should say that a little differently today, and call it The Present-tation—the day Simeon’s present was given to him, a present or gift that lasts forever.

Of course, Jesus isn’t just Simeon’s present; He is ours as well. Remember how we started, thinking about what we wanted for Christmas? Well, God has given us the greatest gift of all: His Son, Jesus, a gift to the world, to save the world.

That all of us, like Simeon, might depart in peace when it becomes our time to depart this world. And while that means death, it also means **life**. Because of Jesus, death is not the end of us, but the beginning of a new, everlasting life.

And maybe to understand the significance of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the temple, we need to go back to the Exodus, where, as we heard in the Old Testament reading (Exodus 13:1–3a, 11–15), this custom of the Law began. As you remember, Israel had been slaves in Egypt for some 400 years. They had gone down seeking refuge, but they found themselves trapped in brutal slavery. A slavery where even the newborn sons were condemned to death—thrown into the Nile. God intervened with a mighty hand, sending plagues upon Egypt, culminating in the death of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. But God spared the firstborn sons of Israel, marking their homes with blood. This is the origin of the law of redeeming the firstborn, and it's **this very law** that brings Mary and Joseph to the temple with Jesus.

But into this life of misery and death, God came and rescued His people. Long before Simeon, they were the first to “depart in peace”—and joy!—as they departed the misery and death of Egypt for a new life, a life of freedom in the Promised Land. Just as Simeon longed for **the Consolation of Israel**, they longed for deliverance from their suffering. Just as Simeon held the promise of salvation in his arms, they experienced the power of God's saving hand leading them out of slavery.

And now Simeon was following in their footsteps. His Christmas wish wasn't really to die—he was already doing that! We are too! He wanted to truly live. Like Israel wanted to live. Simeon wanted to depart this dying world and enter the new life God prepared for him. So when he talks about what receiving his gift means, he is echoing what Moses told the people of Israel to do so many years before. Because Moses said, as we heard earlier: **“When your children ask you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall tell them, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”** So Simeon is proclaiming what Jesus in the Temple means. It means that Jesus, as the Lord's strong hand—now in the form of a tiny baby—is doing it again, rescuing his people, bringing us out of slavery to sin and death into eternal life. What He did for Israel in Egypt, He is doing again . . . only on a much larger scale, for all people, for all time.

So that's our Christmas gift, too. Not just a baby, not just a Savior, but life—a life lived in the freedom of forgiveness, a life without the ultimate sting of death, a life without the suffocating fear of what tomorrow might bring. Like Simeon, we're all aware of our mortality. We see it in the news, in our communities, and sometimes in our own bodies. But because of Jesus, we don't have to live in fear. We can live in hope, knowing that even in death, we aren't alone. Because of Jesus, we have the promise of eternal life.

So Jesus is born to give us just that: life. Simeon had his promise. And so do we. Many promises, actually. Like this one: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** So when Jesus comes to us, just as he came to Simeon that day, and we receive him—not in our physical arms, but in our very being as we receive his Body and Blood—we proclaim what this means: life! We don't just remember Simeon's words; we make them our own, singing from the depths of our hearts: **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.”**

And since we can now depart in peace, knowing we're held in God's loving hands, we can also live in peace. Not in fear of condemnation, not in fear of death, but truly alive in Jesus. Transformed by his love, we can live the kind of life St. Paul described in the Epistle today: a life where the peace of Christ rules in our hearts. A peace that overflows into forgiveness, love, and thanksgiving. Lives marked by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. All of this is possible because of our Christmas gift: Jesus, and his life. The life he freely gave for us on the cross, and the glorious resurrection he promised us in his own rising from the dead.

And that's your Christmas gift, too. That you can depart in peace, and therefore, that you can truly live in peace. Maybe sometimes we get caught up in the excitement of other Christmas gifts, thinking they hold more importance. If that's the case, we're invited to turn back, to re-center our focus on the true gift. Repentance is simply opening our hands to receive the far greater gift that is already offered to us. And if you find yourself not living that new life Paul described—if fear, not peace, dominates your days—then take Jesus' words and promises to heart again. Hear them, speak them, and with the people of Israel and with Simeon, rejoice in them! Because this is the gift Jesus has for you: a new life in him. So after we receive the Lord's Body and Blood today, let's sing Simeon's words again, and sing them with the same joy and conviction he felt: "Lord, you've done it! And I, I can depart in peace, according to Your Word." Gift presented. Gift received. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.