

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel. Luke 2:30-32 Light for the Nations

Dear friends in Christ, did you watch any Hallmark Christmas movies this year. Maybe Matchmaker Santa, A Boyfriend for Christmas, or My Christmas Love? Even those without romance in the title, like Broadcasting Christmas, seem to follow the same pattern - a woman whose focus elsewhere - on jobs or children or responsibilities - unexpectedly - for her, not for the audience - finds the Christmas spirit and her true love. I did not see any this year - I don't seek them out, my taste tends to run toward the Boris Karloff Grinch when flipping stations - but I get the attraction. It might feel old or cliched, but I get how they come out with close to the same movie each year. We do feel burdened by responsibilities, and it is good too see someone find hope and love and Christmas. If we can feel with that couple on TV that love and hope is possible, maybe it is a little less beyond our reach. Maybe it can come to us too, even within our marriages and families.

It is not easy to think of Christmas in our passage today. Simeon's song, spoken when Jesus first appears at the temple, contains themes that come up in passion week - of Christ's body being given for us and his blood being shed on the cross, of departure in peace, and so we use it when we remember Christ's passion and presence in the Lord's supper. And this is intentional. Simeon and Anna close out the Christmas birth story in Luke, but God also uses them to introduce the continuing good news of Christ. So Simeon speaks of the sword.

Yet this is not merely a prelude to the passion. The Christ Simeon sees is not crucified but a newborn infant, the salvation he sees is not yet the cross but God in the flesh. This is a Christmas story, but a Christmas story in a larger context.

God told a particular story. God became in particular infant, born in a stable, who was given the name Jesus. God visited Mary, a particular young girl in the middle of nowhere Galilee, and gives her the gift of a son. He make her the mother of God. God visits with Joseph, a particular minor descendant of David with an apparently broken marriage, and heals his loss and gives Joseph the gift of God's son. All very particular, and very different and holy. Not that these people are different, but what happens is so strange, so unique, that we see they are set apart - there is something Holy there. Mary is called blessed, and the night is sung of as a holy night. We might fear to approach, like Moses, lest our feet touch holy ground.

There are more common ways to for men to reach out to God. Men had been trying to find their own way to God for ages - from the fruit in to the tower of babel to idols and golden calves to mighty empires whose leader is called a god. The problem is these all fail and give no hope. They lead to death - Adam and eve died and babel was abandoned and idols cannot save and each Emperor died and their empires crumbled. Even human reason fails Socrates and the philosophers die as we,, We also work to make our own way by our strength or reason or might, making and sustaining food and shelter, echoing God's work of creation in a small way that looks all the more pitiful in comparison. We need God to act.

And when God acts, he acts in and for Mary and Joseph and Jesus. Yet when God embraces human flesh in the person of Jesus, when he draw Mary and Joseph close and brings them into his family, when he works for particular flesh, the eternal and omnipresent God works in all flesh. When the babe takes on human flesh, God says man has not fallen so far that God can not redeem him. God takes on flesh, and man dwells with God and is not consumed. God is born of Mary, and she lives. There is a happy ending.

And Simeon explains this for us, that the particular means something for even the nations, for everyone. God's salvation is shown in Mary and Joseph, and most particularly Jesus, but this is the redemption and glory of Israel. The whole people can glory and hope, for God visit his people. And the nations, the gentiles, you and me, we too share the flesh God embraced. The hope of redemption in Jesus is a story for us as well, and tells us even we are not beyond God's reach. WE have better hope than the Christmas spirit and the possibility of romance. Our flesh is redeemed and we, even we gentiles of the nations, are brought into the family of God.

So sing with Simeon, give praise with Anna. You to may depart in peace, for Christ has come to you. He has redeemed you in the flesh and mended your relationship with him and other, he has brought peace to earth, and brought you into the family of God. You have seen his salvation. Go in peace.