

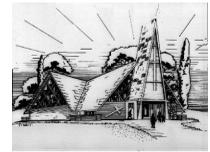


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon for Sunday after Christmas (Proper C)

Joy and suffering in Christ!

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 2, 22-40:

- ESV** 22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord
- 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")
 - 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons."
 - 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
 - 26 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.
 - 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,
 - 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,
 - 29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;
 - 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation
 - 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
 - 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."
 - 33 And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him.
 - 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed
 - 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."
 - 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,
 - 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.
 - 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.
 - 39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the

Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

- 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.

- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, enlighten our minds and fill our hearts with God's Salvation! Amen.*

- **Dear Citizens of God's Israël!**

- As we noticed on the Fourth Sunday of Advent already, the conception and birth of Jesus is surrounded with hymns of joy, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Mary sings, Zechariah sings, the angels sing, the shepherds and then Simeon sort of prophesies the closing hymn for that stage of Jesus' life. The Israël of old rejoices with the birth of its newborn King!

- And merged in between the hymns we find witnesses of fulfilments of the Law of Moses and God, by Jesus, as baby already. He was circumcised on the eighth day according to the Law. Forty days after His birth Jesus was presented in the temple according to the Law of Moses by Mary and Joseph. Whatever Law of Moses Jesus keeps is fulfilled by Him. The Law reaches it's purpose in Him!

- All of these Laws of God Jesus kept and fulfilled for all the sinners He came to save, like you and me!

- Why was it necessary that He be circumcised? He was not a sinner! He was born by the holy Spirit! Why was it necessary that He be presented to God in the temple? He always was and has been God's only begotten Son. Jesus was born under the Law to take our place. Since His lowly birth He was under the joke of the Law for our sakes.

- And so, amongst the hymns of joy we find these prophecies concerning the coming Cross for this Word- become- flesh. Jesus is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israël and for a sign that is *opposed*. A sword will pierce through Mary's heart, pointing forward to the Cross of Christ. So, we see, that right from the very beginning we have this joy being expressed about the birth of Israël's redeemer, but at the same time the Cross is waiting on the horizon.

- We can say, Christmas joy mixed with the reality of suffering. The reason being, that God's Way of salvation includes the cross. In fact it is fulfilled on the cross, in

suffering. And isn't this a very realistic way of how we experience Christmas? As Christians we have all reason to be filled with joy in our hearts, but there is always suffering, either in our own lives or in the lives of others, mixed into our joy. As long as we are in this valley of tears we will always have this joy as well as suffering. We will never escape suffering completely.

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not some naive idealistic goody- goody, lovie dovie wishful thinking kind of opium for the faint-hearted, far removed from the evil of this world. It is also not a lawless solution. No. Jesus Christ, since birth, goes under the Law of God, and takes on the worst of evil by suffering and absorbing evil done to Him. Furthermore, even absorbing the wrath of God as He became sin for us. He was not born for a walk in the park so to speak. He was born to deal with the real issues of our world in the only effective way! All other solutions and saving actions for the world, have been too naive and far too idealistic, and always will be, because they are in denial about the core problem of this world.

- They don't realistically reckon with the depth of the human problem. The real problem sits deeply embedded in the core of my being! So, in Christ, we have both together, the highest joy because of the forgiveness and life he brings contrasted with the deepest suffering He willingly endured to give us all those wonderful gifts. Christ embraces the whole of the human experience here on earth!

- This is very realistic. This is a fact of our baptised Christian existence. This is sober-mindedly the truth for all of us! This is where the "prosperity gospel" and "word-faith" movement forks away from the path of God, because they claim that as a Christian suffering should be over. Amongst them it is claimed that God will even reserve the best parking spot in the mall for you- never mind the pensioner behind you who must be content with the second best. This is a dangerous heresy which causes many Christians to fall into despair once they do experience serious afflictions in their lives. And they will, because God's way of salvation always takes you through the cross.

- But now, does this mean that God's path of salvation, including the cross, is less fulfilling? What does someone like Simeon say about this, inspired by the Holy

Spirit, what does he sing? We know it as the “nunc demittis” sung after the Lord’s Supper [29-32]: *“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.”*

• Simeon can go into death in peace now. His life is fulfilled here on earth, because he has seen God’s salvation, namely the baby Jesus, just as the word proclaimed to him. What all the prophets, and the angels for such a long time longed and waited to see, he had seen. He had seen the light which came into the world to reveal God’s salvation even to the gentiles. And this light is the source of the glory of Israel. Jesus came to comfort Israel and to be the glory of God’s nation. Simeon can depart in peace and he speaks for the whole of the OT Israel.

• Do you notice that he does not evaluate the fulfilment of his life in worldly terms, not in material terms, not in health terms, not even in family terms. He waited all the time to see the salvation of God. When he had seen Him, he evaluated that as fulfilment of his whole life! Now he can sober-mindedly face death.

• There is a good reason why we sing this hymn before the Lord’s Supper. In the properly administered Lord’s Supper we also, like Simeon, embrace and experience the Lord’s Body under the bread and His blood under the wine, in faith! This fulfils our life here on earth! After the Lord’s Supper we are fully prepared, by God Himself, to depart in peace, from this earth!

• The Lord’s salvation in person, Christ, fulfils our life and this includes suffering! The suffering is part and parcel of our fulfilment! Suffering does not throw us back, as we might feel or think according to the world’s ideologies! If anything, as Christians, it drives us toward the crucified Christ and His Salvation. This increases the depth of the Gospel and Grace of God’s Way of Salvation, so that we realise, this is our fulfilment! Glory be to God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

• *“Grace be with all of you!” Amen.*

[^{ESV} Heb 13,25]