

# **The People of Christmas**

## **Simeon's Song**

*Luke 2:29-32*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

December 26, 2010

# Simeon's Song<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

Who is your favorite person in the Christmas story?

Most of you would probably say “Jesus.” Of course, we would not have a Christmas story if Jesus had not been born. And he is the central person in the entire story.

But, apart from Jesus, who is your favorite person in the Christmas story?

Is it Mary? Joseph? The angels? The shepherds? The wise men? Gabriel? Any one of these—or someone not yet mentioned—could be your favorite person (or persons) in the Christmas story.

Today, however, I would like to draw your attention to another one of “The People of Christmas,” the title for this short series of Advent and Christmas messages. The person I want to draw your attention to is a somewhat obscure character who had great faith in God’s coming Messiah. His name is Simeon, and we read about him in Luke’s gospel.

I am going to read the entire account of Simeon’s meeting with Jesus at the temple in Luke 2:22-35, but I am only going to preach on Simeon’s Song in Luke 2:29-32.

So, let’s read Luke 2:22-35, keeping in mind that today’s text is Luke 2:29-32:

<sup>22</sup> 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 <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material for this message is from James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of Christmas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 147-156.

was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

<sup>29</sup> **“Lord, now you are letting your servant  
depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation  
<sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence  
of all peoples,  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”**

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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 <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:29–32)

## Introduction

We know very little about Simeon.

We don't know where Simeon was born. We don't know who Simeon's relatives were. We don't know what Simeon did for a living. We don't know what Simeon's house looked like. We don't know if Simeon was rich or poor. We don't know what other people thought of Simeon.

Of course, at the end of the day it does not matter what other people think of us; what matters is what God thinks of us. We are told that Simeon was “righteous and devout,” and that he was “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (2:25).

But more than that we are told that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (2:25) and that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spi-

rit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Pastor and author James Montgomery Boice says "that means that [Simeon] was somewhat of a sentinel, for he had been placed in Israel to point out the Christ when he came."<sup>2</sup>

And then he gives the following illustration from classical drama:

In the play *Agamemnon* there is a scene in which a sentinel is perched on a hill to watch for the fire that will signal the destruction of Troy. When Troy fell, a fire was to be lit that could be seen by a sentinel stationed on a hill a reasonable distance away. He in turn was to light another fire that would be seen by another sentinel still farther away who would light a fire, and so on, fire after fire, until the message finally came all the way around the Aegean Sea to the palace of Agamemnon in the lower part of Greece. At the beginning of the play the sentinel is standing on his hill, the fire has not yet come, and he is bemoaning the captivity that is his by reason of assignment. He says that the fall of Troy and the imprisonment of its people will mean his freedom. While he is giving this speech, the fire appears, and he is released. The drama was set in motion.<sup>3</sup>

Simeon was God's sentinel. He was looking for God to send the Christ, the Messiah, the One who would deliver his people from their sin. I can picture him going to the temple every day to look for the Lord's Christ. He would look at every Jew and ask the Lord if this one was the Christ.

One day as Simeon walked into the temple he saw a poor couple. Let me just mention that the word for "temple" that Luke uses here refers to the sanctuary itself as well as its different courtyards. You may recall that there was the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of Israel, and the Court of Priests. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus (who was forty days old) were in the Court of Women because that is as far as women were allowed to

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of Christmas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 149.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of Christmas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 149-150.

go. And as soon as Simeon saw them, the Spirit of God confirmed to his spirit that Jesus was the one for whom he was looking.

Simeon walked over to the trio and introduced himself. He told them that God had revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. I imagine that Mary and Joseph were a little taken aback, but then they would have recalled the unexpected visit of the shepherds several weeks earlier on the day of Jesus' birth. The shepherds said that an angel had told them about the birth of Jesus, and that they had come to see the baby for themselves.

So, Simeon's explanation for meeting with them was not so unexpected anymore. Simeon then asked if he could hold the baby. He took Jesus up in his arms and blessed God, and then he began to speak the words of his inspired song (in Luke 2:29-32):

“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.”

By the way, in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* this song is known as the *Nunc Dimittis*, which is from the first two words in the Latin version of Simeon's Song.

## Lesson

Simeon's Song is short. Today, I want to highlight just three truths that testify to the understanding that Simeon had of Jesus.

### I. Jesus Is God's Salvation (2:30-31)

First, Simeon understood that Jesus is God's salvation. Luke said in Luke 2:30–31: “**For my eyes have seen your**

**salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.”**

Simeon recognized that he was looking at the **salvation** that God had **prepared in the presence of all peoples**. James Montgomery Boice points out that the word translated as **salvation** means “one fitted to save.”<sup>4</sup> That is a somewhat quaint way of saying that Jesus is the one who is “able to save” in a way that no one else could.

In what way was Jesus able to save?

A. *Jesus Is God*

First, Jesus was able to save because he is God.

It was important that Jesus be God so that, as the *Westminster Larger Catechism* puts it, “he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death, give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession; and to satisfy God’s justice, procure his favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.”<sup>5</sup>

B. *Jesus Is Man*

Second, Jesus was able to save because he is man.

It was also important that Jesus be man so that, as the *Westminster Larger Catechism* puts it, “he might advance our nature, perform obedience to the law, suffer and make intercession for us in our nature, have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; that we might receive the adoption of sons, and have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of Christmas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 151.

<sup>5</sup> *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

*C. Jesus Is Sinless*

Third, Jesus was able to save because he is sinless.

Imagine if a truly wonderful person offered to pay for the sin of someone else. We might admire that person's magnanimous offer, but God would not be able to accept it. Why not? Because the truly wonderful person is still a sinner himself.

Every single person in the world is a sinner. And so each person must pay for his or her own sin. We are not in a position to act as a substitute for someone else's sin.

However, Jesus is sinless. Therefore, he is able to become a substitute for someone else's sin. And because he is the infinite God, he is able to pay the penalty for sin for an infinite number of sinners. In other words, he is able to pay for all sinners.

*D. Jesus Is Love*

And fourth, Jesus was able to save because he is love.

This is also important. Imagine if Jesus was God, and he was man, and he was also sinless, but he was unwilling to die because he did not care for sinners and did not want to save us. God has no obligation to save us. We have no claim upon him. He does not need us. And yet, we know that Jesus loves us because he said, "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34b). And so Jesus is able to save us because he loves us.

So, when Simeon held Jesus in his arms and said, "**For my eyes have seen your salvation,**" he was saying, "Here is the one, the only one, who is able to save in a way that no one else could or can." Jesus is God. He is man. He is sinless. And he is love.

So, first, Simeon understood that Jesus is God's salvation.

**II. Jesus Is a Light for Revelation to the Gentiles (2:32a)**

Second, Simeon understood that Jesus is a light for revelation

to the Gentiles.

Luke said in Luke 2:32a that Jesus is **“a light for revelation to the Gentiles.”**

This is really interesting. Simeon is saying that the Gentiles of that day—and, in fact, a large number of Jews too—were living in spiritual darkness.

If one had gone to the Roman Governor and asked, “Are Romans living in spiritual darkness?” he would have said, “Of course not! Rome has brought light to a barbaric world. The world is no longer in darkness.”

Or if one had gone to the Greek philosophers and asked them the same question, they would have said, “Of course not! We have our philosophers. We have Plato and Socrates and all the other philosophers who have brought light into the dark world.”

But if one were to ask God’s view, one would discover that God said that all people were living in darkness. The apostle Paul states it in Romans 1. There Paul says that the problem is not that light is not available but rather that people have repressed the light and so have brought on their own darkness. God had revealed himself in nature. But because people did not like the God who revealed himself in nature, they repressed that knowledge and turned their backs on him. And instead of progressing toward the light, all people in fact regress further into darkness. This is how Paul put it in Romans 1:21–23, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were *darkened*. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

But Jesus came to bring salvation to anyone who would receive it, and to bring us from the darkness into the light. As the apostle Peter said of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of *darkness* into his marvelous *light*.”



We live in a world that is still filled with darkness. And frankly, that darkness is growing. The United States of America once had the great light of gospel shining brightly in many peoples' lives. This country has a godly heritage. But, let's be frank about it: America is increasingly rejecting the light of the gospel. There is a growing spiritual darkness in this country. Let me give you just a few examples.

This past week the President signed into law a repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. (I want to commend to you Joe Burns' article in next month's *Trumpet* on this subject.) Now, with the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, homosexuals are allowed to serve openly in the military. And while homosexuality might be legalized in this country, the Bible still calls homosexuality a sin. We should never confuse something that is *legal* with something that is *sinful*.

Another example of the growing spiritual darkness in this country is the "holiday" wish from the Office of the President. The email had a photo of what I would call a "Christmas" tree, but instead it was referred to as a "Military Appreciation" tree. What was interesting to me was that in the entire "holiday" greeting, not once was Christ or Christmas mentioned. This is just another not-so-subtle way of downplaying the historicity of the birth of Jesus.

So, first, Simeon understood that Jesus is God's salvation. Second, Simeon understood that Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles.

### **III. Jesus Is Glory to God's People (2:32b)**

And third, Simeon understood that Jesus is glory to God's people.

Luke said in Luke 2:32b that Jesus is **"for glory to your people Israel."**

This statement was especially meaningful to the people of Israel. The word **glory** relates to the Old Testament "Shekinah glory." That is the visible presence of God himself. And Simeon

knew that God himself had come to the people of Israel in the visible person of Jesus. Jesus had come to bring joy and peace to a people who were dwelling in a land of darkness.

Leigh C. Bishop, a psychiatrist and military reservist, was stationed at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan on Christmas Eve 2008. In the dim light of dusk, he watched as a procession of military vehicles approached the airfield, came to a stop, and carefully unloaded a flag-draped steel casket. He knew that somewhere in the U.S., a family was going to suffer a Christmas homecoming that no one wanted. It was a heartbreaking scene for Bishop to take in—and one all-too-familiar in war.

But then, another scene from that Christmas Eve.

In an article for *Christianity Today* magazine titled “Christmas in Afghanistan,” Bishop writes:

[After watching the casket be unloaded from the military vehicle], I find myself walking along . . . the main avenue of Bagram Airfield. All is different. . . . Soldiers holding candles are belting out Christmas carols with gusto. Down the street, luminaries brighten the walkway into the clamshell-shaped auditorium, where cheerful groups of uniformed men and women enter for a Christmas concert. Two blocks away, the chapel is filling for the six o’clock Christmas Eve service.

War, writes C.S. Lewis in the essay “Learning in War-Time,” reveals a hunger in human beings for joy and meaning that will not be set aside for even the most difficult of circumstances. . . .

Jesus did not come just to provide an occasion to sing carols, drink toasts, feast, and exchange gifts. But we are right to do these things, even as soldiers die and families grieve, because he came. And in his coming, he brought joy and peace—the joy that overcomes our sorrows, and the only kind of peace that ultimately matters. It’s the peace of which the end of all wars, terrible as they are, is merely one token. It’s the peace that means the long war between the heart and its Maker is over. It’s a peace treaty offered in Bethlehem and signed, in blood, on Calvary.

Bishop concludes: “So joy to the world, and to every celebrating or grieving or hurting soul in it. The Lord has come. Let heaven and nature—and even those who stand watch with lighted candles in the land of the shadow of death—sing.”<sup>7</sup>

So, first, Simeon understood that Jesus is God’s salvation. Second, Simeon understood that Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles. And third, Simeon understood that Jesus is glory to God’s people.

### Conclusion

I would like to close with a question.

*Who is Jesus to you?* This is an important question. Is Jesus your salvation? Is he your light? Is he your glory? You might not be sure. And you might wonder how you could be sure. If Jesus is your salvation, light, and glory, then you will think about him, talk about him, and tell others about him. People who have a personal relationship with Jesus think about him, talk about him, and tell others about him. He is as real to them as the most precious human relationship they have.

Think about this way. Let’s say that you have recently become engaged to the most wonderful person in the world. You will spend a lot of your time thinking about that person, talking about that person, and even telling others about that person. In fact, if you never thought about that person, talked about that person, or told others about that person, then people might rightly wonder what kind of relationship you really have with that person.

In a similar way, when a person receives Jesus as Savior, then he enters into a personal relationship with Jesus. He has passed from darkness to light. He has had his sins forgiven. He has made peace with God. He has discovered that his life is completely transformed. And so he naturally thinks about Jesus, talks about Jesus, and tells others about Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Leigh C. Bishop, “Christmas in Afghanistan,” *Christianity Today* magazine (December 2009), 36-37.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
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## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAAYER:**

Our Father in heaven, thank you for the birth of Jesus Christ a little over 2,000 years ago. Thank you for Simeon's Song when he met Jesus at the temple when Jesus was barely 6 weeks old. Thank you that Jesus is our salvation, light, and glory.

If there is anyone here today who does not know Jesus personally, I invite you to ask Jesus to become your salvation, light, and glory. Ask him to forgive you sin. Ask him to help you trust in him alone for the gift of salvation.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.