

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9

"Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. 5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

"The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts"

As I have often done, this afternoon I want to focus on the account of Simeon which we read responsively: The occasion of Simeon's prayer and the content of his prayer has much to teach us as we seek to serve the Lord of Glory in the 21st Century.

- Lessons I have summarized in three words I trust you will remember...
Hope-Contentment-Vision!

And of course all three are confirmed by the glorious passage I read as our text, which concluded with this powerful promise:

- The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Now before I dig into Simeon's prayer and those important lessons, I want to take the opportunity of the New Year to remind us about why we have three places in our order of worship where we sing the same things week after week: Our opening hymn of adoration, O Worship the King, the Apostle Creed as we approach the Table and the singing of Simeon's simple prayer as part of our commissioning!

Obviously, each of these remind all of us about some very important truths, but they are kept constant to help us teach our children the importance of being involved in the worship service.

Our young children can quickly be taught the first verse of O Worship the King, and the rotating second verses will come quickly as well.

The singing of the Apostle Creed before communion comes with more lines, but the ability of children to memorize things is quite amazing!

- Parents if you have them memorize it at home they will be able to sing it each week in church!

And finally we have Simeon's prayer which we will study this afternoon and again if they learn it at home they can sing it with all of us each week.

- This assumes of course that parents, and all of us, expect them to participate in worship!
- It also assumes that each of us are setting a good example for them!
- If your children have not been focused to worship in this way,
this is one of the best New Year's Resolutions a parent could make.

Now let me turn to the lessons about hope – contentment – and vision!

God had proclaimed through the Prophet Isaiah that a child would be born and now Jesus has been born and he is brought as an infant to the Temple by his parents as required in the Law of God.

The first born male was dedicated to God to remind them how God had purchased the first born of Israel for Himself when the death angel passed over the homes that had blood on the door posts:

It is at this point we are introduced to Simeon, who is we are told “just & devout waiting for the consolation of Israel.”

- One who is waiting for the promised Messiah!
- A faithful Saint who the Holy Spirit had comforted with a special promise & guided to the Temple on this very day.

When he sees the baby Jesus Luke tells us that he, “took Him up in his arms and blessed God.”

Simeon’s actions reflect what we will see in Simeon’s prayer:

- Simeon had hope!
- Simeon had contentment!
- Simeon had a vision of the future!

These are the lessons that Simeon and his prayer can teach us and our church in the hustle & bustle of the 21st Century...

Hope, contentment, and vision are things the world today searches for in vain, expending vast sums of time & riches trying to find them.

- Simeon had hope because he lived as a just and devout member of God’s Covenant people believing the promises that God had made down through history.
- Simeon was content because we are told that he was “waiting” for the “Consolation of Israel.” – the coming of Messiah!
- And Simeon had a great vision of the future, believing that God would show him the Messiah and that this Messiah would be the light of the whole world!

Simeon then prays a simple prayer that has been repeated and sung by the Saints for almost two thousand years:

Holding that tiny weeks old baby in his arms, Simeon prays, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word.”

“For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel”

What we see again in this simple prayer is Simeon’s hope, his contentment, & his vision:

- Simeon sees his hope fulfilled as he is allowed to hold the baby Jesus, knowing that He is the promised Messiah.

His hope was in the promise of God,

as it must be with us: This is why we baptize our covenant Children, finding our hope in God’s promise for them and why we are sent forth with the Great Commission believing that the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the earth!

Simeon is content with what little God allows him to see, knowing that he held the Savior of the world in his hands. Simeon knows that God's Messiah would suffer and go on to reign, but those are things he would not see!

- We are to be content with where God has placed us, based on the hope that we have in His promises!

Finally, Simeon reveals his vision of the future when he prays, "Your Salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles."

Here is one 'just and devout' Jew who held no station that we know of, holding an infant son of a poor family that could not even afford the sacrificial lamb!

As he does so he is believing that this infant was the light which God had promised to the whole world.

As we read from Isaiah, "2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined."

- The Jews at that time had become a selfish, self-centered people with no desire to be a blessing to the nations of the earth as God had promised Abraham:

What Simeon said about the Gentiles would have been shocking to those leaders of Israel, as we often see in the ministry of Jesus and the Book of Acts when Gentiles are ever mentioned!

But Simeon was a faithful man who believed the promises that God had made and knew that God's salvation would include the Gentiles just as the Prophets had foretold:

Isaiah 42: "1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!

I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles...

6 "I, Jehovah, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house."

We see the same at Isaiah 49: "6 Indeed [Jehovah] says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

And finally, at Isaiah 60:1 "Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of Jehovah is risen upon you. 2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But Jehovah will arise over you, & His glory will be seen upon you. 3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, & kings to the brightness of your rising."

Now one could certainly wonder how all the religious leaders of that day could have missed what seems to be so clear about salvation going to the Gentiles...

- It is not unlike those in the Church today that question the history of the early chapters of Genesis or who cannot seem to find ANY condemnation of abortion or sodomy in the Bible!
- The greater example we have is Simeon, who believed God's Word and God's promises! Thus we see him as a Saint with great hope,
a Saint who was content with his station in life and a Saint who had a very clear vision of the future.

That is the example he should be to us today as individuals and as a Church.

With anything less we are just "playing church" and will risk being as blind as the religious leaders of that very day who missed Jesus when He was in their very midst of the Temple on that day.

As with Simeon, our hope must be in the promises of God: His sure Word, which is why we must be very serious about a New Year's resolve to be men & woman, boys & girls of the Word.

People of the Word in our private devotions, our family devotions and in our regular attendance at Worship. We must be a people that are content with where God has placed us:

- We are to be a thankful people & not those who complain and worry!

We must see ourselves as blessed to be in God's Covenant, Baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one of His children: Having the hope of seeing Jesus, not as a new born child, but as the Lord of Glory now seated at the Father's right hand!

In our broken world we must also rest in God's providence when we face trials of death or separation, avoiding anxiety over time or money.

- Believing that God's great promise of salvation is unto us and our children!

Young people believing that God's promise of life as a result of obedience to their parents is a REAL promise that bears much fruit, including a godly spouse if you are to be married.

As a local church, we must believe that we are part the Body of Christ and that EACH & EVERY member has an important role to play.

- Again, we must rest in God's providence as we see new members join with us and when some members leave us as well.

As we learn to be content in the hope that God has given us, we will also be a people of great vision:

- Believing that God has brought light to the Gentiles and that the Gospel will impact all the nations!

The coming of Jesus has brought joy to the world and peace on earth, but we often struggle with being content to let God bring that Joy and Peace as He sees fit. We must believe His promise and be ready to do our part!

Today it seems like an impossible task with all the divisions and problems that we have in our world, but as we saw from Daniel's interpretation of the King's dream, God will fill the world with the Kingdom of Jesus.

P.J. O'Rourke famously said, that everyone wants to save the world, but no one wants to wash the dishes.

- God will save the world, we just need to remember to wash the dishes: to be content while doing them!

Our desire should be to live the "just and devout" life that Simeon gives us an example of? We should desire to be a people filled with real hope, content with where God has placed us and a people consumed with God's vision of His Kingdom filling the whole earth?

January returns us the reading of Proverbs in our church calendar, and we can find much wisdom there for learning to be such people!

King Solomon is instructing his son about the ways of righteousness so he can be 'just and devout' like Simeon.

We find him using the familiar theme of light contrasting it with darkness:

Proverbs 4:18 "The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. 20 My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

21 Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; 22 For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. 23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. 24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you. 25 Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. 26 Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established.

27 Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.”

- Do you want to be “just & devout” – Knowing the hope, the contentment and the vision of someone like Simeon?
- Then commit anew to study these Books of Wisdom!

That is wise counsel for anyone who wants to be a part of the fulfillment of Simeon’s prayer!

- Then we will be able to truly share the message of Christmas: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son!

Remembering this glorious promise given so many years ago:

**7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.**

- The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.”

Communion Meditation:

Hebrews 12:1-3

“1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”