

## Depart in Peace

**Luke 2:22-40** 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 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." <sup>36</sup> 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, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Did any Christmas gifts you received prepare you to die? That question hardly seems worthy of being asked. Even if someone had gotten you a funeral package or paid your life insurance premium, that wouldn't have prepared you for death, just others around you for your death. How in the world would a gift prepare you for death? In fact, gifts seem to do quite the opposite. A good gift makes you enjoy life. It draws your attention to seeking pleasure while you're still alive. A good gift distracts you from the unavoidable end of your life.

2 If you received gifts for Christmas that make you enjoy life so much that you fear dying if dying means having to let go of these gifts, repent. If you have received gifts in the past—whether given to you by others or by yourself—that you hope someone will

place into your coffin with your cold, lifeless body, repent. You won't need toys, or money, or possessions to accompany you into the grave. They'll be wasted gifts if they get buried. And you can save money on your coffin if you get one without padding and fancy wood. You won't need to be comfy, well-dressed, or surrounded with a beautiful casket. You'll be dead. So if gifts, possessions, or life's little pleasures distract you from considering your own mortality, repent. If gifts make you less ready to die, repent.

3 Simeon received a gift that did exactly the opposite. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, His parents brought Him to the temple for the rite of purification. And Simeon received his gift. He held the infant Savior in his arms and declared, "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." This gift was the fulfillment of prophecy. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. And here, in an otherwise unassuming infant, Simeon knew he held the Savior of the world.

4 So, Simeon sang his death song. "Lord now you let your servant depart in peace." Because of this Christ, I may die in peace. Simeon's was the song of faith. There was nothing reasonable that should have caused him to know that this baby was the Christ. In fact, if Simeon were thinking clearly, he should have been watching for more fanfare, more pomp and circumstance, more angelic choruses like the shepherds got. But this 40-day old baby—Simeon knew only by the Lord's gift of faith—was the Christ.

5 Simeon sang to Mary a death song, too. "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." The sword that would pierce her heart would strike on a Friday as she watched the one she

knew was her Lord and Savior as well as her Son nailed to a cross and crucified. There, even more humbly and humiliatingly than His life began, her Child's life ended. Worse than that, perhaps, was knowing the rest of Simeon's prophecy came true, as well. This One, the Crucified Son of God and Son of Mary, is the sign that is opposed. "How could God die on a cross?" ask those who oppose Him.

6 This gift given to Mary, a Savior born from her own womb, prepared her for death, too. Not because, at Calvary, Jesus entrusted His mother to John's care was she prepared for death, but because by His death, the Lord entrusted into the Father's care all who receive the gift of faith in Jesus, Mary was prepared for death. Mary was prepared for death because Her Lord died and rose from the dead. Mary was prepared for death because by faith she was united into His death and resurrection, as well. Mary was prepared for death because her Lord took her flesh and died in her place, bearing the punishment for all the world's sin.

7 So, this gift prepares you to die, as well. No other gift will prepare you for death except the gift of a Savior and the gift of faith in Him. You're prepared for death because you've already died once. Through Holy Baptism, your Lord united you to His Own death. In His death, He took your sins upon Himself, so in the waters of Baptism, your sinful flesh died as well. To be prepared for death by the Lord is to be prepared to live. Those who have been united with Him in a death like this will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. On the day of the Lord's return, whether it precedes or follows your death, you will rise and live. On that day and forever afterward, you will live more than you've ever lived before. Every day lived before that will be only a dim shadow of the brilliant reality, the complete, full life that will be yours then.

8 You join in singing with Simeon his death song, too. After your eyes behold your Savior present in the forms of bread and wine, after your ears hear His promise "Take, eat; this is My Body. Take, drink; this is My Blood, given for you for the forgiveness of

sins,” after your mouth tastes the forgiveness of sins in your Lord’s Body and Blood, you sing with Simeon. “Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Will. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people.” You confess to the Lord that this gift He gives you in His Holy Supper makes you ready to die. The same body Simeon held in his arms, you have held in your mouth. The Lord’s promise to Simeon was fulfilled, and His promise to you is fulfilled. Your sins are forgiven. You are ready to die. And you are thus ready to live, ready to live with your Lord who lived and died for you. Depart in peace.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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