

## The Second Sunday after Christmas, A ✕ D 2009

**Luke 2:33-40** 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 You know Simeon. At least you know his words that he spoke immediately preceding today's Gospel reading. You sing them every week: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel." Having held the Infant Savior in his arms, Simeon confessed that he was ready to depart, ready to die. But then Simeon's words took a more somber tone. He moved from a confession about the Baby Lord Jesus to a prophecy about Him: "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."

2 A sign that is opposed? Lots of people like Jesus. He did many signs that were well received, that made him well liked. He's the Jesus whose serene nativity even non-Christians are willing to celebrate. He's the Jesus who did the wonderful miracles. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, restored the use of limbs to paralytics. He even raised the dead! And—who can forget, especially just a few days after the secular New Year—He's the one who made water become choice wine. These are signs no one would oppose. And a Jesus who does such nice things for people is a Jesus no one would oppose.

3 But these signs were not the sign of which Simeon spoke. Nor do these signs do you any good. The sign of God, the sign of the Savior, is not what you might expect. Sure the Baby is cute, but consider that the cute Baby born of the Virgin and placed in a manger is God. The eternal God was born a baby. He humbled Himself, setting aside the power and majesty of His divinity, and was wrapped in swaddling cloths. God Almighty was the Virgin's Baby. And that's not yet the sign that's opposed. The King of Israel, the Savior of the World, was born with slightly more pomp and celebration than there was at His death. That's the sign

that's opposed: the cross. Everyone—Pharisees, Disciples, Israelites, Gentiles—is opposed to the cross.

Even St. Peter opposed, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"

4 That God came to die in order to save sinners from their sins is the sign that is opposed. The message that your sinfulness is so inescapable that you simply cannot help yourself is the message that causes the fall and rising of many in Israel. That this Savior looks not for your power or prestige, but looks at your heart, is the sign to be opposed. So Dr. Luther says, "If you wish to be a Christian, know for a certainty that your Lord Jesus Christ, you, your teaching, and all your activity will not be pleasing to the world. For here you hear that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is a stone of contention and a hateful stumbling block for those chosen people of God, and for all those who consider themselves great, mighty, intelligent, and righteous. They find Christ's teaching offensive, then stumble and fall over it. If you wish to be considered a fool, a heretic, and a deceiver by them and their adherents, then accept this Lord and King and be a Christian; if not, if you become lazy and go to the devil, the world will praise and honor you. Therefore, whoever wishes to be a Christian and inherit eternal life must, along with his Lord Jesus Christ, be considered an offense and a pitfall by others, a child of the devil, a heretic, a deceiver, and a fool."

5 Lots of people may suppose to like Jesus. Until He gets into this talk about the hearts of men, that is. At His coming, Simeon prophesied, the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed. You can do a pretty good job of looking fairly righteous to the eyes of the world, but the world can't peer into your heart. No, it's Jesus, the Sign who is opposed, who sees into your heart. What does He find there? What do you find there, if you dare to look? Lustful thoughts for a co-worker or a neighbor's wife or an image on the computer screen? Angry thoughts that wish the death or misfortune of another? Greedy thoughts that want whatever's shinier and newer? Wicked thoughts of doing so-called good works so others will think more highly of you? Vain thoughts that regard yourself as the most important person in your life? Blasphemous thoughts that question God's provision in times of struggle? Every thought of your heart will be revealed, indeed, already is revealed. The Lord Himself says, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts" (Lk 16:15). Repent. Not even your private thoughts are private to Him who reveals the thoughts of hearts.

6 This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for the fall and rising of One in particular, and for a sign that is opposed. The sign of a Baby born to save you from these sins, from the wickedness of your own heart, is a sign opposed. The sign of a Savior born of a woman, born under the law,

who took your place under the law, is a sign opposed. The sign of the Christ hung upon the cross, Christ crucified, is a sign opposed, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But by the sign that is opposed, by the sign of the cross, by the fall and rising of the Holy One of Israel, Jesus Christ, God brought salvation to the world, Israel and Gentiles alike.

7 By a similar sign, opposed by your natural reason, God brought salvation to you. This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many, including you. You have fallen and have been raised. “Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” In the waters of Holy Baptism, the fall and rising of Jesus, His death and resurrection, becomes your fall and rising, your death and resurrection.

8 And through Him, the thoughts of all hearts will be revealed. What does the Lord find in your heart? It's quite different from what you find there. Receive the sign of the cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified. Because you are children of God, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. Whenever your hearts condemn you, God who has sent His Holy Spirit into your hearts, is greater than your hearts. He has made the sign that is opposed, the cross, to be the sign of your salvation, the sign to which you may cling.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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