

The First Sunday after Christmas
31 December, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 2:22-40

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Children of God,

Too often we over-spiritualize the Scriptures, especially when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit. And when we do that it becomes that much harder for us to understand how the Holy Spirit actually works among us. The consequences are disastrous. It is the Holy Spirit who gives life, but if we don't know how or where, then we will forever search for this life in vain, following a million rabbit holes and chasing after our delusions and imaginations. What is perhaps the most amazing thing is that the work of the Holy Spirit hasn't been left a mystery at all! And yet, sinful man is constantly wanting to mystify it.

When we hear that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die before seeing the Savior, I would guess that most of us imagine that the Spirit came to Simeon in some kind of vision or dream or spoke to him out of the sky. How else would the Holy Spirit reveal such a thing to Simeon? And if we think that way, then we are probably waiting for the Holy Spirit to do the same for us. We hear Christians claiming all the time that God spoke to them or that He laid something on their hearts. Sometimes it's very specific and often it exactly what they were hoping God would say.

But that isn't how the Spirit works. Not because He can't. He's absolutely capable of reaching out in rather mystical ways. But He doesn't. Nowhere does God promise to come to you in visions and trances. Nowhere does He promise you that He is going to speak to you out of the clouds or in the quiet recesses of your mind. Those places are the devil's playground precisely because God hasn't promised anything about them. They are filled with uncertainty. The imaginations

of your heart are tainted by sin. You can't and you won't find your Lord speaking in such hidden ways. Not because He can't but because He loves you too much for that.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man. And that means he was a devout student of the Holy Scriptures. He knew that God spoke in days of old by the prophets. He listened to the preachers of old and believed that their speaking was God's own. He believed the prophecies spoken by men like Isaiah, Malachi and others. He heard the prophecies and believed. He believed that the Holy Scriptures were the voice of God Himself and so he studied and meditated on God's Word. It was by that Word Simeon knew that the God of his ancient fathers, the God who had created him, had promised to redeem him by sending the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. And Simeon paid careful attention to what was going on. He saw all around him that the Scriptures were being fulfilled. Certainly the report of the shepherds had reached Jerusalem and Simeon knew exactly what was happening. After all, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel". And to hear the Gloria in Excelsis would have certainly brought unimagined joy to Simeon - the Scriptures were being fulfilled! God was fulfilling His promises to His people! Peace to God's people could mean only one thing - the eternal condemnation that stood against man because of our sin was about to be removed because the promised Messiah was born and would one day die in our place under God's righteous wrath.

This was all exactly as God had foretold through the Scriptures. That's also why Simeon knew to be in the temple at that time. He knew that the Christ-child and His mother would be presented in the temple according to the Law of Moses 40 days after the day of birth. By believing the preaching of the shepherds and counting the days, Simeon knew. There wasn't some secret code or special knowledge granted to Simeon. He knew because he believed the plain words of Scripture. No mysticism. No trances or ghosts or strange warmings of the heart. And because he believed God, Simeon went to the temple and saw the Lord's Christ right where He was supposed to be - in God's holy house, where God always promised to be for the redemption of His people.

We have those same Scriptures but too often we ignore them in the expectation of something more fantastic, something more mystical. We ask what God would say about something and then often expect some kind of special message to be relayed to us in a sign or whisper. But that isn't how your heavenly Father speaks to you or comes to you. He could, but He doesn't. He does something extremely simple, common, and mundane - He gives you His Word. He gives you the Holy Scriptures and says "This is what I say. Here is every answer that you need concerning what is and isn't sin, how you may be saved from your sin, and how you are to conduct yourself as My child. I have given you my Son. He has spoken My Word in perfect faithfulness. He has left absolutely nothing out that you need. And His Word is set before you in Holy Scripture." The Prophetic and Apostolic Scripture of the Old and New Testaments are God's answer to prayer. We speak to God. He hears. And He then points us to the Bible where we find the answer to those prayers. And then, on the basis of what God has spoken in Bible, we pray again.

Luther explains it this way in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed "...the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept in the true faith." The proclamation of what God has spoken through the Scriptures is the very and only means by which God comes to us and saves us. We don't need to wait for spiritual experiences or for God to speak to us in our hearts. If you have heard God's Word, you have heard God. By speaking, God makes things happen. He doesn't need magic wands or potions or incantations. He simply speaks into reality the thing He desires - "Let there be light, rise and walk, your sins are forgiven, this is my Body". Dear Christian, only open the Scriptures that are laid before you, that by God's mercy, have been printed in your own language. Pray that God would open your ears and hearts to receive the life and blessings that our heavenly Father pours out to us there. Turn away from those who would have you running around looking all over the place for God's will. God has already set it before you. It's not a secret that He is trying to hide from you. He wants you to have His Word. Consider that God was the very first to actually commit His word to writing on Mt. Sinai when He etched the

commandments in stone. It is pleasing to God that you have His Word in your home where you and your children and your children's children can read it and know what He has to say.

And then, with Simeon and Anna and all the faithful, let that Word lead you where you are to go - to Jesus your Savior who has revealed to you and who is Himself the will of God, your eternal salvation. Believe what the Scriptures say about Him, what He Himself speaks in the Scriptures. Don't doubt the promises that you find in the Scriptures for they have been made by the Almighty God whose Word remains forever. Do not doubt for a second that you have received the adoption as sons of the Most High God through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit for the Lord Jesus has promised it. Hear Christ's own invitation to the Holy Communion where He promises through His Body and Blood to pour out the forgiveness of sins. And all of these things are given as a free and endless gift of His divine grace. These are all fantastic things which we could never imagine to be true! And so God has given You His Word that you might hear with your own ears and even read with your own eyes that He has in fact given and promised these things to you.

Your Father knows that you will struggle, that you will suffer, and that you will doubt. But He wants you know that you don't need to. Nothing He has promised to you - not the forgiveness of ALL your sins, not your adoption as His beloved child, not His daily care of every hair on your head - none of your Father's promises will be kept from you. Your Lord will bring all of them to pass according to His Word in the perfect time and the perfect way. Listen to the Word of God. Turn away from your own wisdom, your own imagination, your own desires and listen to the Scriptures. They will always lead you in the way of life and truth. They will always lead you to exactly where He has promised to be for you. Your Father will not lie to you or deceive you. He wants you to be saved. He wants you to be filled with peace and joy. He wants you to be absolutely certain of your salvation through the Blood of Jesus.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.