

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord

1 Samuel 1:21-28

Hebrews 2:14-18

Luke 2:22-32 (33-40)

At last! That is what Adam said as he feasted his eyes on Eve. At last! It is an expression of exuberance, gratitude, and profound satisfaction. After extensive waiting, the long-promised object of desire becomes present. When the heart pines for something, when prayer after prayer is uttered, when waiting becomes long but without bitterness, when the object of desire appears on the scene then joy explodes and the words tumble out of the mouth: At last!

I am counseling a couple who will be married in April. They are my age. Not exactly “old” thank-you very much, but not spring chickens either. I told them about Adam’s “At last” and they smiled. A week later, they said: “that is us.” Exuberance, gratitude, profound satisfaction... at last! Not “finally.” There is something negative in saying “well, finally” when something that you’ve waited for suddenly arrives. “Finally” is a bit of a complaint, an ongoing complaint that what you desired didn’t come sooner. Adam didn’t complain. Adam didn’t say: “finally.”

Adam waited one day. Granted, it was likely a pretty long day. Naming all those animals and looking for someone who was like him, but different, and none was found. A long day. A late day nap, a little divine surgery, and a joyful awakening... there she was. At last! Simeon waited longer. It is not for a bride that Simeon waits. He knew God would deliver on His promises. He’s old, we reckon; old. His eyes had seen much. Death is always close at hand for those who are old – in Simeon’s time more so than in ours. But the Holy Spirit was upon him. God had let him know. Simeon would not “see” death before he has “seen” the Lord’s Christ. Simeon waited. In the Temple, he waited. In faith, he waited. In patient submission to God, Simeon waited. Simeon grew old waiting. Righteous and devout, Simeon was good at waiting.

The Temple – that’s where sacrificial blood poured. The Temple – that’s where God’s presence was located. The Temple – that’s where Mary and Joseph bring Jesus. Forty days old, they brought the infant Christ to the Temple. By virtue of God’s prescription in Leviticus, Mary was to be purified (Leviticus 12). Because the firstborn was to be consecrated to God (a remembrance of the Exodus and protection from death which God provided the firstborn through the blood of the Lamb), Jesus was to be presented (Exodus 13:1-2). Mary and Joseph were also devout and righteous. They were acting to fulfill the law, the Torah. But Simeon is the key. He is waiting. Get this: he is waiting for the *consolation* of Israel. How many of y’all have ever needed to be consoled? It’s not when you hit the lottery that you need to be consoled. It’s not on your wedding day, or when you receive a promotion, or the day your child is born that one is in need of consolation. When is it? When is it that you need consolation?

When you fail. When you and everyone around knows that you are a flat mess. When earthly props give way. When death visits your home, your family. When sin and its consequences, like a vulture, circles ominously overhead. When you are betrayed. When you betray someone you love. When you are slandered and the world throws stones. When you, like a dog, go back to your sinful vomit. How many of y’all have ever needed to be consoled? If you are alive, if

breath is in your lungs, you need consolation, real consolation. Not a fake prize, not an empty gesture, not a temporary bump to your ego, but real consolation. Simeon knew what was around him, the loss, the pain, the gnawing emptiness that ravaged souls. Simeon also knew that consolation was approaching for those who hurt, those who need redeeming.

Divine consolation – that is what you need. Support from your loved ones is sweet, but there is only so much your dearest relations can provide. God fully intends to intervene. God knows your hurt, your grim predicament, your inability to extricate yourself from the flat mess you are, the flat mess you are in. How does God intervene? The Father sends His Son. Made like you in every way, the Son of God takes upon Himself your flesh. His eyes alight with divine consolation, Simeon is exultant. At last, at last, at last – here is God’s eternal love, here is the all-powerful instrument of our salvation, here is the mystery of God made man.

Have you not been consoled by this Savior? Have you not known with unassailable certainty that His blood, shed on the Holy Cross, has cleansed you from your sin? Has not His teaching, His fidelity to you in every dark day, His relentless love and encouragement and His superlative gifts (has not all this) consoled you and lifted you and brightened you? You have known His mercy, His grace, His forgiveness. He doesn’t forgive grudgingly. He doesn’t place requirements on His grace. He doesn’t force you into some religious performance before He extends to you His love. That is remarkable! When the world beats you down, He consoles you with His body and blood. When your own sin torments your conscience, He reminds you that He paid for that sin, that it has been taken away in His death. When you are sinned against, He brings a Word of the Gospel so that you know that what defines you is His love, His righteousness, not what other people do to you. That is consolation! I need it. You need it. And it is found in Christ.

God incarnate, in the tender form of an infant baby boy, Jesus comes to His Temple and Simeon rejoices. At last! Our consolation has come! And Simeon was ready to die. Death; is there more consolation or less to be found in death? It is a now and not yet question. God’s kingdom is present now, yes? Your salvation is present now, yes? You are alive with God’s resurrection now, yes? All true, all totally true. Is the fullness of God’s kingdom a “not yet” reality, that is that it is still in your future? Are you saved totally now or not yet? Have you been raised from the dead, literally called out of your grave now or not yet? Death; Simeon was ready to die because He knew that in death he would receive the ultimate consolation. Our three men who died in the last few months – Dale, Ted, and Ken – as they slipped from this life to Christ’s embrace, what do you expect came tumbling out of these aged men’s mouths? At last! All that they knew in this life, all that the Spirit had revealed to them by His Word became exceedingly real, exceeding present, exceedingly now – no more “not yet.” At last!

That heavenly consolation is ahead of us. Now we rejoice in the consolation the Lord Christ gives us. What is that? The fruit of His cross, His empty tomb. He was made like you. Jesus became your brother. Since you have flesh and blood, God Himself took it on to redeem you, to pay the price for sin, to destroy death by dying. He wants to console you. You were a slave to sin and Christ’s blood is the crimson key that sets you free. He wants to console you. On the cross there was none to console Him. He died in that grim and horrific manner for one reason: He wants to console you, to give you life, to bless you with His righteousness. That is authentic

consolation. He lives! That resurrection is in the very Word you are hearing now. He conveys it to you and Easter literally grips you, renews you, consoles you. Now! You will not see death before you have seen the Lord's Christ. You see Him by faith, now! He has opened the eyes of your heart and you have the faith of Simeon. After you receive the Lord's body and blood you will sing the song of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis. You make Simeon's words your own for you are consoled, blessed and you will depart this Divine Service, and this life, in peace.

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word,
for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared before the face of all people,
a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.