



THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

December 30, 2012

‘ ENDURING CHRISTMAS JOY ’

Sermon Text: Luke 2:25-32

“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 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. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Dear Christians that ‘one and all rejoice’,

“What did you get for Christmas?”

This is one of the first things children ask each other upon their return to church or school after the Christmas holiday. Most kids will proudly boast to friends of having received new toys, the latest personal electronic device, video games, new clothes or something else that made the holiday so memorable – *memorable that is, at least until next Christmas.*

Adults, too get into this ‘After-Christmas spirit’ as they relate to family, friends, and co-workers their children’s excitement and expressions of joy at receiving those things they had asked Santa for. Yes, adults get in on the ‘joy of the season’ too – *that is until they get the next month’s credit card bill for all those gifts!* And so it is a sad observation that the Christmas joy of the children of this world is unfortunately many times the fleeting joy of a decadent materialism.

It is not so with the Christmas joy of the Children of Light. Their Christmas joy is *spiritual* in nature and hence enduring. Today, let us meditate upon the believer’s Christmas joy, an ...

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1. *Of what does this joy consist?*
2. *For whom does it endure?*

{PRAYER:} *Heavenly Father, We humbly give you thanks for the precious gift of our Savior, your dear Son, Jesus Christ. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be with us today as we meditate upon Him and the wonderful enduring spiritual joys of His birth and that You would sanctify us through Thy Truth, for Thy Word is Truth. Amen.*

In the Gospel text of St. Luke preceding our sermon text, it is revealed to us that the angel of the Lord came in glory upon lowly shepherds who were tending their flocks at night, to announce unto them good tidings – *good news* – of great joy concerning the birth of the Savior. Heavenly hosts of angels soon joined the angel of the Lord, singing praises of this joyful event. The shepherds themselves would share in this Christmas joy by leaving their sheep – forsaking that which was their only means of a meager livelihood – to go to Bethlehem, where they found Mary and Joseph with the Baby Jesus laying in the manger. There these common shepherd folk of the countryside undoubtedly rejoiced with Mary and Joseph. And the shepherds could not keep this joy to themselves. Indeed, they spread the news of the child’s birth far and wide.

Mary and Joseph would make the trip to the Temple in Jerusalem some forty days later to make a simple offering in observance of the Old Testament law of purification of the mother (Leviticus 12:1-8) and to present her first born child to the Lord. (Exodus 13:2)

Suddenly a quite elderly man, being led by the Spirit of God approaches Mary and Joseph. This is Simeon, a just and devout man of God who had asked for and received the sure promise of God that before he died he would see the Messiah – *the One, the Christ who would comfort those that mourn on account of sin.* (Isaiah 61:2) This Spirit-inspired anticipation of seeing for himself the long-awaited Comforter of Israel was a part of Simeon’s Christmas joy. “...*Hope maketh not ashamed...*” (Romans 5:5) and Simeon was to finally see the fruition of that hope. Directed to the Temple by the Holy Spirit, Simeon sees and then goes to Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child. He takes the Christ Child up into his arms and realizes life’s supreme Christmas joy. You can just imagine Simeon saying to himself: “Here I stand, holding a little child, barely six weeks old, unknown as yet to the world, and yet this Child is the true Savior – indeed, *my* long-awaited Redeemer and Comforter.”

Then Simeon blessed God, first on his own behalf and then on behalf of the whole world. Overflowing with joy, Simeon’s heart finds expression in his humble voice. With the Baby Jesus in his arms, he sings a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving – *the Nunc Dimittis* – the song that is now so familiar to most of us, having found a special place in the liturgy of the Christian Church.

Let us listen once more to Simeon’s song: “*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.*” (Vv. 29-32)

Simeon sings of a peaceful departure – a release – from joyful earthly service to God and man. He rejoices because he has seen the Lord’s salvation with his own eyes.

By revelation of the Holy Spirit, in the Temple that day Simeon saw more than just a simple child in Jesus. By faith, he saw God incarnate. By faith, he saw the Salvation the Messiah would bring by His perfect life and innocent suffering and death on the Cross of Calvary. Furthermore, Simeon here boldly professes that this salvation is prepared – *given* – for *all* people, *for Jew and Gentile alike*, and that this Christmas joy shall be declared throughout the whole world.

And so in our time the Gospel of Jesus Christ *is* and *has* been declared in virtually the entire world, year after year, and to virtually *all* people.

My Dear Friends, Another joyous and blessed Christmas season is soon coming to a close. Have we by faith received its enduring joyous message?

Or have the accompanying temporal material joys of the season meant more to us? God forbid!

May we rather experience and retain within our heart the true Christmas joy of Mary and Joseph, of the shepherds to whom the angels proclaimed Christ’s birth and of Simeon. For then ours will also be an *enduring* Christmas joy – a *lasting* Christmas joy.

Dear Friends, Christmas joys are meant to be experienced not only on Christmas day, nor only during the weeks of the Christmas season, but they ought to be revisited and remembered within our hearts *each and every day* of the year.

Who are they that will possess such enduring Christmas joys? Once again, let us take notice of this venerable man, Simeon.

St. Luke refers to him simply as a man named Simeon. Nothing more is related to us concerning his station in life. Like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds of Luke’s gospel, he did not belong to any class of nobility – he was not a member of the rich elite of this world – rather he belonged to the obscure of this world – poor in this world’s goods, but rich in the things of God.

In his outward life Simeon was, like Zacharias, ‘just’ – “*righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*” (Luke 1:6) Inwardly, he was “devout” – *conscientious and God-fearing*.

Like Jacob of old, Simeon waited for the Consolation of Israel. His whole life was dedicated to waiting joyfully for the arrival of the promised Messiah, the Comforter of Israel. (Is.40:1; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20) and in the midst of a wicked and perverse world, the Lord had graciously preserved him in saving faith, which produces *as heavenly fruit* true *enduring* Christmas joy in the Forgiveness of Sins, Life and Salvation wrought for us in Christ Jesus.

Do you desire to possess truly enduring Christmas joys? Then follow the example of Simeon in his firm God-given faith and Spirit-led sanctification of life. May our lives be dedicated to *“looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13)

Guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit, Simeon came to the Temple at the right time, took the Child Jesus in his aged arms and sang his beautiful swan song. Simeon’s Christmas joy had endured and he was indeed ready to truly depart this world in peace.

Christmas will most assuredly endure for us too if we also are directed by the Spirit of God through the Means of Grace – *the Word and Sacraments* – to daily search – *hear, read and study* – the Scriptures, to regularly attend divine orthodox Christian worship services (if possible) and thus be led by God to find - in His Word , the Baby Jesus – the Savior and take Him into your own arms of faith.

Furthermore, our Christmas joys will endure if, like Simeon, we confess that the salvation of the Christ Child is prepared and meant for *all* people. As we read in 1 Timothy 2:3-6: *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”* And in Galatians 3:27-29: *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

In telling others who are sorrowful over their sin about the Salvation they freely have in Christ Jesus – in spreading true Christmas joy – as did the shepherds of Jesus’ day, we are truly ambassadors of Christ Jesus to bring others to Him, to increase these joys and to retain them for others and ourselves. Thus remaining in the service of Christ, our Lord, we shall – just as faithful Simeon – joyfully await our release from service here on earth and come to the everlasting joy of heaven, where we shall see our dear Savior as He is – *face to face. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.”* (Job 19:25-27)

AMEN.
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And now may the Peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the enduring Christmas Joy of Christ Jesus.

AMEN.

