

Sermon December 29, 2024 Luke 2:22-40

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

Holding the infant Jesus in his arms, Simeon rejoices that his watch has come to an end. He praises God for Messianic peace and salvation. However, when he is grown and now preaching, Jesus Himself says,

“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Luke 12:51–53

Simeon is not oblivious to this reality. His blessing of Mary foretells the division that the Messiah brings.

Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
Luke 2:29-32

Simeon is old and at the end of his earthly life. He stands in the Temple, holding the Messiah who will enlighten the Gentiles and is the glory of Israel. Simeon is full of the Spirit who has revealed this to him and brought him there. Simeon has obtained the promised peace and joy of God. But even apart from direct revelation of the Holy Spirit, Simeon might have guessed what is to come for Israel and the Gentiles for the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

Israel has a long history of contradicting God, rebelling and worshipping false gods. Gentiles have a long history of promiscuity and hedonism and violence. That many will fall, that many will speak against the Christ, is so obvious, in a sense, that it requires no prediction. But it does need to be told. It needs to be told so that Mary would not think what happens to her and her family and the Church strange but would find comfort in God's promise that though her heart is pierced through it is not destroyed, and though many fall, some also rise, and while many speak against her Son, some, like John, will confess and not deny but confess.

Mary was the first to hear the good news about her Son from the angel Gabriel. She was the first to hear and accept. But like us all, until she is transferred to glory, she must continue to encounter in her own soul the challenge of that Word. The Word is as sharp as a two-edged sword. The Messiah is a rock who causes many to stumble but is also fit to be the foundation and cornerstone.

Mary's own earthly family will suffer the divisions that Jesus foretells. When His brothers and His mother came to Him while He was teaching in Simon's house, they stood outside and called to Him. He answered them, saying, *"Who is My mother, or My brothers?" Then He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, who heard His Word, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."*

Being a natural relative of Jesus, even being the Mother of God, does not guarantee Divine favor. The Kingdom of God discriminates and divides. He divides families. He can and might even divide Mary's family. Mary passes the test. She hears and believes. She does not fall but rises. Eventually James, the brother of Our Lord, will pass the test as well. We hope that Our Lord's other brothers do as well, but it is not for us to judge or say. Those who pass, pass because they hear and

believe. They recognize the sign that was swaddled in a manger and that is spoken against. They are not without sin or doubt but they repent and throw themselves on God's mercy based on the Messiah's promise and sacrifice. Over time they come to understand, as we all must, that the claims of God in Christ, outrank all human attachments. Baptismal water runs thicker than family blood. It is more definitive and more enduring. It is also kinder and more true.

The Lord sets the solitary into families. Thus we depart from this world in peace. God has redeemed us, given us a Son, and in that Son not only salvation but also a Name and a family.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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Special thanks to the Rev'd. David Peterson for material for this sermon. Join us for worship online! Visit our website christlutheranfh.org, click the blue Facebook link at the bottom of the page, and you will be taken to our Facebook page. There you can view our 10 am Sunday service live or watch it later at your convenience.