

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church Modesto, California
The First Sunday after Christmas
December 29, AD 2002

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

Luke 2:25-40

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. (NIV)

Perfect Peace Is Yours in Jesus

Picture this: a man and a woman sitting at the dinner table, silent. The kids provide the only noise. They seem to have it all: the house, the family, the financial stability. But there's something missing, and what it is surfaces each time they argue. They have no peace.

And this: Explosions. Blood. Wailing. Rubble. Gunshots. War. People's homes, families and lives are destroyed. The relationship between the two warring sides is fractured. There is something missing. There is no peace.

Or this: A wealthy businessman. Huge office, stock portfolio, mansion in the suburbs. Whatever he wants, he can get it. Yet every time he reads the newspaper and sees the death notices, he feels uneasy. He seems to have everything, but he longs for something more. He has no peace.

"Peace on earth," the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, still rings in the air. But is there peace? The Bible tells us that there is. It gives us an example. And it tells us something even better: **PERFECT PEACE IS YOURS IN JESUS.**

Jesus made peace

Since we're talking so much about peace today, it would be wise to clear up exactly what peace is. As the Bible uses the word peace, peace means completeness, wholeness, what you have when you don't lack anything. Think of the examples I just mentioned. When there is love and commitment in a marriage, there is peace. When there is unselfishness and complete understanding between two countries, there is peace. When a person has total spiritual security, we might say that he or she has "inner" peace.

There was a time when perfect peace existed in everything on earth. In the Garden of Eden, people lacked absolutely nothing. God and his creatures had peace. People received all they needed from God, and he received the obedience he deserved. But then peace disappeared. Something was suddenly missing. God was not to blame; he was still doing his part. It was people who broke the peace. They failed to give God the obedience he deserved. Now there was no completeness. And there would not be, until God made a promise to restore what was missing, someone to give God the complete devotion and obedience he demanded. That's what God did. He promised to send one to restore that peace—the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

That's the background for what's happening in Luke chapter two, the part of the Bible we're looking at today. Now we jump ahead several thousand years. It is a few weeks after the first Christmas. We once again meet up with Mary, Joseph and the Christchild. They are in the Temple at Jerusalem. Why? Because that's where God said they needed to be. After a firstborn son was delivered, sacrifices were to be brought to God. Even as a little baby in the arms of his parents, Jesus is doing what God's law tells him to do.

Do you see what's going on? Jesus is obeying God in our place. He is brought to the temple on the appointed day, he offers the required sacrifices. He is following, without flaw, every single regulation that God had given his people. And by doing all these things, he is restoring what was missing in the relationship between people and God. He is our substitute. He is giving God the obedience we cannot.

The fact that Jesus willingly placed himself under the obligations of God's laws is mind-boggling. Who made all those laws that Jesus kept? Really, he did! He subjected himself to his own laws so that we could again have peace with God. "He serves that I a lord may be – a great exchange indeed!" Since Jesus willingly obeyed God completely and on the cross paid for our disobedience, our relationship with God is restored.

When we use the word "peace" today we often are referring to a cease-fire between two warring factions, or a period of relative quietness somewhere that's usually not quiet. That's not the kind of peace Jesus made between God and people. When Jesus was on the cross, he shouted out, "It is finished!" "It is paid in full! All is done!" Because of the total obedience he gave, the peace he established is unlike any worldly peace. War will not suddenly break out again. God is satisfied with what Jesus has done. What Jesus did cannot be changed – it's a fact. Therefore, the peace he made cannot be shaken. It's a peace you can count on.

The Holy Spirit delivers peace

We now see two examples of people who have this peace that Jesus made. The first is a man named Simeon. He was no king or dignitary, just a "man in the temple." That's where he spent his time. He was "righteous." He trusted God. He was also "devout." He showed that he loved God by the way he acted.

The other person who has peace is Anna. We don't know much about her, only a few things. We know she was eighty-four years old, and that most of that time had been spent as a widow. We know that she was a prophetess. In other words, she spoke God's Word to people. And we know that she was tirelessly devoted to serving God.

Both of these people had peace inside. Both of these people sound good. But how did they get that way?

The answer to that is not to be found in Simeon or in Anna. The one who delivered this peace they had is in the background here. Look closely at this section of the Bible. In the verses describing Simeon, you'll notice that someone else's name is mentioned just as often as Simeon's is. Who is it? The Holy Spirit! Through the promises God made to his Old Testament people in the thousands of years prior to the Savior's birth, he made contact with Simeon's heart and Anna's too. Through those promises the Holy Spirit led these two people to trust the Messiah, who would come to make things right between them and God.

My dad told me about something that happened recently near where he lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It seems that a retail store chain ran a special on DVD players. On the day after Thanksgiving, these DVD players were going on sale for about \$48 dollars. Well, so many people decided they needed one that a riot ensued. The police had to be called to restore order.

Every Christmas season there's something like that, some new toy that everybody just has to have. I suspect that something else a lot of people want at Christmastime is peace—genuine peace within themselves. The hunger for peace is not just a passing fad. Philosophers have wondered how to get it for thousands of years. Religious leaders too. To obtain peace most have looked in the mirror for a solution. "If I do more good things, God will be satisfied with me, and my relationship with him will be complete." Or, "If I have the right kind of moving religious experience, then I'll know I'm at peace with God." People are turned inside to find peace.

The solution, however, is not to look inside ourselves for peace, but outside. *God gives* the peace that Jesus earned, and he gives it for free. He gives it to us in much the same way he gave it to Simeon and Anna; God tells us about Jesus through the Bible. He told Simeon and Anna, "Your Savior is coming." He tells us, "Your Savior has come." The Holy Spirit also works through the sacraments of baptism and communion. How does one get peace? The Holy Spirit delivers it through words and sacraments.

We live and share God's peace

The peace the Holy Spirit gave Simeon filled him. Look at how Simeon responded to God's gift. He spoke a simple prayer to God, one that we know well: "Lord, you now let your servant depart in peace." God had made Simeon a special promise, a promise that he would not die until he saw the coming Savior. Now Simeon had seen him.

If I were in Simeon's place, I think I would have had mixed feelings about seeing Jesus. On the one hand, I would have the unparalleled thrill of actually seeing and touching the one and only Son of God. On the other hand, I would know that God's promise to me had been fulfilled, which meant that I could now die at any time.

But Simeon here expresses confidence, even knowing that his death could now be at any time. "Lord, you are now letting your servant depart [Does he mean depart this life? Probably.] *in peace.*" He knew that he was at peace with God, even as he faced death.

It's worth noting, though, that Simeon was not just, as the song says, "smiling, though his heart was aching." The warning he gave to Mary, that Jesus would lift up and bring down a lot of people, and that she would feel grief like a knife through her heart—this tells us that Simeon knew that life is full of conflict and pain for a follower of Jesus. Anna, too, knew the hard realities of life. She knew the pain of loneliness, having lost her husband in an untimely death and having lived for decades as a widow.

In spite of these things, though, they had peace. The reason for their peace was in Simeon's arms. God had fulfilled the promise of a Savior. This child was the salvation, the

rescue from death and sin that God had promised. Simeon and Anna knew that God had acted “according to his word,” and done what he had promised.

These two believers expressed the peace in them. Simeon spoke his words, worshiping God in his praise. And Anna? As soon as she had seen Jesus, she told people about him, sharing the good news about Jesus.

We can praise God that these two believers and millions of others throughout the centuries have shared the peace that was in them. That’s why you and I are here! God the Holy Spirit has delivered the peace of Jesus to people like us, and then he’s taken those people and moved them to share the peace with other people. Then he’s taken those people and moved them to share the peace of Jesus with more people, and... you get the picture.

God would make good on these promises in a short time, in an event we’ll recall next Sunday. He would reveal himself to some foreigners. The wise men from the east would soon come and visit the baby Jesus. God still tells foreigners about Jesus and brings them peace.

I know many of you own fruit trees. You know that when a tree is healthy on the inside, you can see it on the outside – it produces good fruit. Simeon and Anna were the same way. They knew God’s perfect peace, and it showed. The Holy Spirit had worked in them and had brought forth fruit. They lived their lives in peace.

Now, we might have just caught them on a good day. I’m sure Simeon and Anna both felt the sorrow that we feel living in a world like this. But in spite of all that, these two knew that their relationship with God was secure. That peace colored their lives, and even enabled them to face death. That’s what Jesus’ peace does for us. We still have many weaknesses and don’t feel peaceful all the time. The world is still full of conflict. But our peace is still there. It affects our relationships with other people. It leads us to talk about the one who made peace with God. We strive to reflect outwardly, in what we say and do, the peace we have on the inside.

There is peace on earth. And you have it. What millions have longed for and searched for thousands of years, you got for free, without even doing anything. That’s a real Christmas gift. You have peace – complete and permanent because it’s based on what Jesus has done, and nothing can change that. If you see it or not, if you feel it or not, it’s there.

Even on your deathbed, at your departing, if the question comes into your mind, “Have I done enough to make peace with my God?” answer boldly, “No I haven’t, but Jesus has.” Then close your eyes, and depart in peace. Amen.