

Rev. Jim Gill

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"The Songs of Christmas: Simeon's Song"  
Psalm 148 Luke 2:21-33 Galatians 4:4-7

### INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 148

The Psalms are the songbook of the people of God. The last few are the grand finales. Psalm 148 doesn't limit God's praises as coming from people alone. All of creation gets in on the act. Hear the Song of all the Earth from Psalm 148

### INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 2:21-33

As I've been saying throughout this sermon series, the Songs of Christmas, Jesus conception and birth is like a Broadway musical. "When Gabriel tells Mary she is going to have Jesus Mary breaks into song. When Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth Mary breaks into song. When Elizabeth's baby is born and there is a fight about the baby boy's naming rights his father Zechariah, breaks into song. When the angels announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds, they break into song. And now when Simeon sees Jesus He breaks into song. Hear the grand finale of Jesus newborn saga from the gospel of the Lord from Luke 2:21-33

Let's pray, Open our eyes to see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our minds to receive your word. Open our lives to respond to this your word. Amen.

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How many of you remember Gabby Hayes? Gabby Hayes was the longtime sidekick of Roy Rogers in his many cowboy movies. He was cranky and he was crusty and he had a long scraggly gray beard and he had a distinctive vocabulary. In one of the many movies he made with Roy when Gabby was in danger and Roy would show up on his Palomino horse to save the day Gabby would say, "Well, if you ain't a sight for sore eyes."

When Simeon saw Jesus, it was a sight for sore eyes. Jesus didn't show up on a trusty steed to save the day, he showed up in his mother's arms to save the world.

Simeon was living in a day when people were longing for the good old days of Joshua or the judges or King David (you know, the good old days when they weren't occupied by a foreign power but were the foreign power conquering Canaan). Simeon was a part of a small minority of the faithful in Israel who were known as "The Quiet in the Land". The "Quiet in the Land" had no dreams of violence or of power or of armies with banners. They believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until the coming of the Messiah.

Babies are universal ice breakers. A mother with a babe in arms can walk into a room and instantaneously transform the room from sane, rational people talking about the Dow Jones, to a room of cooing, babbling idiots. When Anne and I first had Andrew,

we were constantly being attacked by ladies who bent over his stroller muttering sweet syllables of incomprehension. We even had department store sales clerks take him from our arms to play coochie coo before we even knew what was happening!

On the fortieth day of Jesus' life on earth, he found himself in the arms of a stranger, a senior citizen who burst into song. The moment Simeon's eyes fell upon the child, he knew that the moment for which he had dedicated his life, indeed the moment by which he marked the days of his life, had come.

Luke is very careful to set the stage for this spontaneous eruption of praise from this senior citizen. Though their child's birth has from the outset been accompanied by supernatural signs and wonders, in no way do Joseph and Mary feel that Jesus is exempt from the requirements of any other Jewish baby boy. The only child ever born who would never break the law of God not only never broke it, but fulfilled it from day one.

On his eighth day of life, Jesus was circumcised and officially given the name the angel Gabriel gave him. There's so much in a name. Today, parents agonize over naming apps struggling to find a name that suits the child they haven't even laid eyes upon. Late last month there was a story about Southwest Airlines attendant who got in trouble for making fun of a 5 year old girl's name. Do any of you remember her name? Traci Redford was the mom's name but her daughter's name was ABCDE.

Jesus' name was so important that he had an angel give it to him. His name literally meant "Savior." It was quite a name to live up to. Every time someone called his name it reminded him of his special calling. Every time Mary and Joseph called his name they were reminded of the special circumstances of his birth. Every time a neighbor boy came to ask, "Can Savior come out and play?" they were reminded of his special destiny. I'm sure his four brothers and his sisters got tired of hearing, "Why can't you be like your brother Savior?"

Through circumcision Jesus was identified with Israel and laid claim to the covenant promises of God in very much the same way we claim the covenant promises of God when we baptize an infant. Jesus was not only laying claim to the covenant promises of God and receiving the name given him by the Angel Gabriel, he was in essence punching the clock, checking in for his lifetime work of redeeming the human race.

Jewish families were required to offer a temple sacrifice for their child when they presented the child at the Temple. The sacrifices are set down in Leviticus 12: 6-8. A lamb was the standard offering for the child, but a poor family was allowed to offer two turtle doves or pigeons instead. This was called the "offering of the poor." How ironic that the lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world was born to a family so poor that they couldn't afford a lamb for his mother's purification.

As they presented their offering, they encountered Simeon, whose name means "God

hears." Simeon has no title in this story. He is not a member of the religious classes. He is simply an old man who is called, "just and devout." And yet Simeon has the supreme honor of being one of the first to announce that Jesus' salvation is for all people.

What Joseph and Mary lacked in wealth they more than made up for in their dedication. In adhering to these rituals, they exhibited their firm belief that their child was a marvelous gift from God. Because they were faithful, they were treated to marvelous confirmations that indeed their faith was well founded. At the moment Simeon began to sing they knew they had done the right thing. They marveled at the things Simeon's song said about Jesus.

The first thing at which to marvel was the experience itself. It certainly was a miracle of "divine appointment" for Simeon to be at the right place at the right time with the right discernment to pick Jesus out of the lineup of busy bustling worshippers. But even a greater miracle was the things that Simeon knew. He knew things about Jesus that even Joseph and Mary didn't know. They had had angel visitations. They had had visits from shepherds who had had angel visitations. But here was another mere mortal directly prophesying and singing of the things that lay ahead for their child. In hearing Simeon's song, for the first time they heard of the universal scope of Jesus' mission. Not only will He bring glory and salvation to the nation Israel, but He will serve as a guiding light to guide the Gentiles out of their present darkness to the light of God's land of forgiveness and joy.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the consolation of Israel before he would see death. That became his one hope. The hope of seeing that sign consumed his life and everything he did was toward that end. He wished nothing for himself. He didn't wish for his own children, or for grandchildren. His heart's desire was to see something for everyone-- to see the unfolding of God's promise for his people and for all people. Little wonder that when it actually happened he broke into ecstatic praise. "Lord, now let me depart in peace! Now I can die happy! I have seen the salvation of the Lord face to face!

It took a lot of faith to look at that 40 day old boy and believe that he was the "consolation of Israel". If Simeon had looked at the facts only he might not have come to such a conclusion. The facts "only" were that here was a child whose parents couldn't even afford a lamb for the mother's purification sacrifice. But through the eyes of faith Simeon saw far more.

Yesterday I was privileged to officiate for a wedding of two dear friends of mine. I began my meditation by saying, "If you want to make God laugh, make a plan. Bob was my racquetball partner for most of the 80's when I was serving as an Associate Pastor at St. Andrew's Presbyterian. Dianne was my singing partner for most of the 90's when I was serving as her pastor at a John Knox Presbyterian. Bob had been widowed for over a year last May when we had lunch at Aladdin's on Westheimer one day and he described his frustration over trying to find someone to share his life. Dianne had been

single for 35 years and was not looking. Something rose up in me to say, "I have a friend that I think you would like to meet." Friday was seven months from their first date. I had a hard time leading that service yesterday. At 74 and 72 it was not something they thought they would be doing yesterday. When I saw Dianne beaming as she strode down the aisle she was a sight for sore eyes. I closed my meditation by saying, "Don't you just love it when a plan comes together?" Diane said, "It's a God thing."

What "God things" are in your future? What "God things" are in my future? Twelve years ago in 2006 when I officiated for Dianne's daughter's wedding in Provence France, little did I dream that yesterday I would be officiating at Dianne's wedding. It was the first time I officiated for two generations of a family. What is not evident now that could be if we take a page from Simeon's book and watch and pray and hope? To what are we willing to dedicate ourselves to the point that we ask the Lord to not let us die until we see it take place? Is there a special project or need of which you are aware that needs a champion that will see it through? Is there a neighbor or a family member who needs to know the love you've come to know in Jesus? Is there a stranger that we have never met that needs us to take him in our arms and welcome and wind up singing the praises of God together?

Speaking of the Songs of Christmas, there is one that was written by another old man... It almost didn't get written. His health and fortune had reached the lowest ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and all his money was gone. His creditors seized him and threatened him with imprisonment. For a brief time, he was tempted to quit, to give up the fight; but then, his obedience to God welled up within him, and he rebounded to compose his greatest work, the second part of which ends majestically with a powerful chorus.

Hallelujah!" (Sing Hallelujah Chorus) Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Halle lu jah!

"Well if YOU ain't a sight for sore eyes **AND** a sound for sore ears! Thank you for breaking into song with me. Simeon sang, "Now I can depart in peace" after seeing Jesus after his first 40 days on earth....After 40 years of ordained ministry it moves me to say, "Now I can depart in peace!" In addition to those of you who have come this morning and just joined me in singing that chorus I trust there were many more in heaven's grandstand that were singing along with us just now, including my parents Kenneth and Annabelle who dedicated me to the ministry when I was baptized but didn't tell me till I graduated from seminary so I would think it was my idea.

Simeon had to wait to see Jesus' face to face before he could die in peace. We will have to die in peace before we can see Jesus face to face. When we do, we will experience what Simeon has experienced ever since that fateful fortieth day in the temple. We too will experience Simeon's joy at seeing a sight for sore eyes that moved him to break into song ... Simeon's song.

**Let's pray.** Dear Lord, we thank you for the sight that Simeon saw. We thank you that he was faithful, and that his faith was honored and that he was able to depart this life in peace having seen what was promised him. We thank you for the faith you have given us and for everything you do to confirm that faith.

As we look around us we see an alarming amount of need and pain and suffering. We agonize over the senseless violence and the lives lost, both innocent and guilty. We long for peace on earth and goodwill to all. We agonize for the families who lost loved ones in the night because of drunk driving... for families that are separated ... for families who will enter this new year grieving lives lost this past year..

We pray for those hanging on to life, battling illness and disease, fighting emotional demons that threaten to undo them, that in the midst of those struggles your Holy Spirit will be present to heal and strengthen and walk beside.

We pray for those in dangerous circumstances around the world, for the missionaries we support, for all who have taken seriously the call to make disciples from all nations. May our support and their effort work hand in hand to spread the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We pray for our own mission...that each of us will find our special place in your body here at Faith, and that we will be faithful to your call to make disciples of this nation, this state, this city, this community.

All of these things we pray in Jesus' name.

## BENEDICTION

You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. God has a purpose in your being there. Christ who lives in you and has something he wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in the grace and love and power.

— Rev. Richard Halverson.

## CHARGE

Go out into the world in peace, have courage, hold on to what is good, return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak and help the suffering; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.