

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Christmas 1
December 31, 2023
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Peace presented physically

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³(As it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male will be called holy to the Lord.”) ²⁴And they came to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷Moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, ²⁸Simeon took him into his arms and praised God. He said, ²⁹Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word, ³⁰because my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared before the face of all people, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. ³³Joseph and the child’s mother were amazed at the things that were spoken about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Listen carefully, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” ³⁶Anna, a prophetess, was there. She was a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then she was a widow of eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple complex, since she was worshipping with fasting and prayers night and day. ³⁸Standing nearby at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord. She kept speaking about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹When they had accomplished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town, Nazareth. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him.

—Luke 2:22-40

Her world was a storm of anxiety. Although she was home from college for Christmas break, the nerves of school followed her. How will she pay her loans one day? How will the relationship with the boy she met pan out? How will she do in retaking Business Calculus?

A few days after Christmas, her dad sensed her anxiousness. So, dad walked over to her on the couch in the living room. He didn’t say anything. Then, he gave her a big hug and held his daughter like he did when she was small. The nerves receded. Her racing heart was calmed by her father’s embrace. At that moment, she found peace in her father’s arms.

Perhaps your heart races at times too. Perhaps you feel the anxiousness of this young woman. Maybe you too are a college student home from the holidays with the stress of school following you. Maybe you are a parent worried about a wayward child. Maybe you feel anxious for all sorts of reasons and can’t pinpoint it to one single thing.

So, I have a question for you dear sibling in the Lord, from where does your peace come? What gives you rest and serenity? This morning, let’s use Simeon and Anna as examples to follow. Simeon and Anna both received peace in this lesson. Let’s see from where their peace comes.

There are many reasons to stress in this life, right? There are many reasons to feel as though you have no peace. Perhaps you are stressed by the reasons that I gave before. Maybe you are stressed out by the looming election year, the rising cost of living, or the potential of war rooted in the Gaza Strip. When these stressors arise, from where does your peace come?

In our world, many platforms of peace are pushed. Some of them work for a period, but many of them fail to provide permanently. Psychotherapists purport that peace can come through pills and paid sessions. Physicians purport that peace can come through pain relief and physical healing. Professors purport that peace can come through pedagogy and prosperity. But you, people of God, from where does your peace come? You recognize that these proposed solutions presented will not lead to lasting peace. The pills, counseling, healing, and education won’t solve all your problems. They certainly do not provide eternal peace. Even the positive paths to a peaceful life can seem pathetic from an eternal view.

So, brothers and sisters, we need to look for peace that lasts. We need to find a path that has an eternal solution. Let me present to you wonderful examples of two believers who were found at the temple during the time of Jesus’ presentation. These are Simeon and Anna.

First, we need to talk about what is going on here. According to Leviticus 12, there was a period of purification that was necessary for women after they gave birth to a child. Following the birth of a son, a woman was ceremonially unclean for seven days. On the eighth day, the son would be circumcised. Also, the mother would have a 33-day purification period. After this purification period, a mother could go to the temple. She also was instructed to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Families who could not afford to give a sacrifice of the lamb were allowed to give an alternative sacrifice of two turtledoves or pigeons. This is the sacrifice that was given by Mary and Joseph. Evidently, they could not afford to give the lamb. Perhaps, their extended stay in Bethlehem outside of their hometown of Nazareth caused an extra financial strain for them. Perhaps, our Lord in his humble state just lived in a family that experienced the stress of poverty. Ultimately, this is what brought Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus lived to fulfill the law.

At the temple, the Holy family was met by the first person I want to point to as an example for us. His name was Simeon. We do not know much about Simeon. Simeon is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Simeon was a true believer in the Lord. He was waiting for the redemption of Israel. This means that he was waiting for the promised Messiah. Simeon's eternal peace came from the promise. He knew that the foretold Savior would come.

Simeon, although a fairly insignificant man in the whole narrative of the Bible, received a word from the Holy Spirit that he would physically see the promised Messiah before his death. On this day, the Holy Spirit led him to the temple to fulfill this word. And that is exactly what happened. At the temple, Simeon got to see the Messiah. He even got to hold the Savior in his arms. God gave him this gift of peace.

Interestingly enough, Simeon could have departed in peace without physically seeing and holding the Messiah. The promise was sufficient for Simeon's salvation and eternal peace. Yet, God in his good grace gave Simeon an extra gift. Before his own death, peace was presented physically to Simeon. With his own eyes, he saw the promised Savior. In his own arms, he got to hold the Son of God taken flesh.

It is this peace that led Simeon to burst out in song. He sang what we may know as the Nunc Dimittis or the Song of Simeon. Moved by the grace of God and what was physically presented to him, Simeon declared that he could die in peace. In this beautiful song, Simeon proclaimed that Jesus is the peace for all nations. Although the life of Christ would not always look peaceful, he came to deliver peace.

The other person of example for us is Anna. Anna was a prophetess. Sadly, from the little we know about Anna, she must not have had the most peaceful life. When Anna was a young woman, she married a man, yet he died only seven years into their marriage. Following this tragic event, Anna spent the next 84 years at the temple. She spent her time in prayer and fasting. It is safe to assume that Anna experienced moments without earthly peace. Life would not have been easy for a widow with no children at that time.

In the face of this anxiety, Anna was driven to the temple. This was the place of the presence of her Lord. This is where she could hold to the promise of eternal peace in the promised Messiah. Anna, too, was a true believer in the Lord. She was waiting for the redemption of Israel like Simeon.

Again, Anna could have departed in peace without seeing her Savior physically. Anna's eyes of faith looked to the person of Christ who was coming. Yet, God in his grace gave Anna the extra gift of seeing Jesus in the temple. When Anna received the gift of physically seeing the Messiah bodily, she was moved to give thanks to the Lord.

Simeon and Anna are the two examples for us regarding the question from where does your peace come. Both of them received peace from the promise of their Savior. This was eternal lasting peace. Although we do not know much about these two, we can say something for certain. They were sinners in need of forgiveness from God. Their forgiveness was received through faith that looked forward to the Messiah coming.

God in his grace gave Simeon and Anna an extra gift at the temple. Simeon and Anna were both able to receive the Christ physically before their physical deaths. With her own eyes, Anna saw Jesus in the temple. In his own arms, Simeon held the body of Christ. The baby presented in the temple was their peace. He was actively fulfilling God's law for them. He would grow up in favor of God and people. He would go forward to give himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for Simeon's sins, Anna's sins, and the sins of the whole world. The baby presented at the temple was peace presented physically to them.

People of God, this is where peace for you comes too. Eternal peace comes from the promise fulfilled. When our parents sinned, God promised to send a Savior of the world. Indeed, the Father followed through with his Word. After revealing more and more of this promise... after people waiting for thousands of years, the Father sent His Son. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God took flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. She gave birth to the Son and they called him Jesus. The baby that was presented in the temple is your Lord. The baby presented in the temple fulfilled the law for you. God's law gave demands that we have broken. Jesus did every one of them

for you perfectly. He, the firstborn of Mary, who was also the only begotten Son of God, was presented in fulfillment of the law of God. This Jesus would grow up living for you. This Jesus would one day be the perfect sacrifice given for you. He had no sins, yet he died for the sins of the world. The result of this sacrifice is peace for you. The baby brought to the temple was peace physically presented for you.

I see another cool connection for you in Simeon and Anna. This promise and word is sufficient for you. The Holy Spirit has created faith in your hearts. Through faith, you have received the forgiveness of all your sins. You have the eternal peace of knowing that you will go to heaven because of all that Jesus did for you – from conception to resurrection. Through faith, you receive the peace that comes from the one that came physically for you. Yet, God has given you an extra gift as well. Anna and Simeon got to see the body of Christ with their own eyes. Simeon got to hold the body of Christ in his hands. From this, God gave them peace. God has given you this gift in the sacrament.

In the Lord's Supper, you receive the forgiveness of sins in physical form. With your mouth, you consume bread and wine, yet God gives you something far more than that. God gives you peace. This is because of his promise and what is received in, with, and under the bread and wine. With your hands, you also hold the body of Christ. Then, you receive his body in your mouth. In your mouth, you receive the blood of Christ. In the Lord's Supper, God gives you this gift of peace. You receive tangible forgiveness. Peace is presented physically to you as well.

Just as a father's hug gives his anxious daughter peace. Your God has given you peace. He has given you the eternal peace through the fulfillment of the promised Savior. He presented the fulfillment physically to Simeon and Anna. He brings the Christ to you as well in this sacrament. Brothers and sisters, come to the altar. Then, let us depart in peace. Amen.