

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

**Title: Long-awaited Consolation and Redemption**

**Lesson: Luke 2:22-40**

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup> 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 on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. <sup>38</sup> 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.

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

Today is a very special and perfect day because it is the last day of the year and the last Sunday. I am really happy because all three of our churches have come together here to praise and worship Jesus Christ.

When you hear the words "the last day of the year," you might feel a mix of emotions. Some people may take this time to reflect on the experiences and achievements of the past year. Others might embrace a sense of bright expectations and hope for the upcoming new year. Some may look forward to spending the year-end and New Year with family and friends, sharing special moments. And, some may participate in the festive atmosphere of the holiday season, attending various festivals and events organized by communities to celebrate the New Year. On the other hand, some individuals may not feel particularly excited about the last day of the year or the New Year. There could be those who experience uncertainty and stress about the future.

Depending on our individual situations, our feelings and thoughts about the last day of the year and the New Year may vary. However, one thing we should remember is that regardless of our circumstances, Jesus Christ came to this earth for all of us.

The passage we read today from Luke 2 tells the story of an old man and old woman who had been eagerly awaiting consolation and redemption for a long time.

The old man was called Simeon. The Bible describes him as righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. He was a prophet who diligently read the Scriptures and awaited the consolation of Israel.

If we were asked who the Messiah is for us in today's world, we would undoubtedly answer Jesus Christ. However, during the time when Jesus was born, there was another person who was referred to as the Messiah before Him – Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor. During that era, the Roman Emperor was regarded as the Messiah, Christ, and the Son of God.

The prophets of the Old Testament had prophesied that the Messiah would be the "Prince of Peace." Caesar Augustus, through his strong military force and power, conquered not only Israel but also surrounding nations, bringing an end to long-standing wars and establishing the Roman Empire. Due to these accomplishments, he was hailed as the Messiah who brought peace.

The nobility of Rome, as well as kings and aristocrats from neighboring countries under Roman colonial rule, pledged allegiance to Caesar Augustus and made efforts to show loyalty to him.

Caesar Augustus seemed to bring peace using his strong power, but it wasn't real peace. The kings and nobles of Israel didn't care much about their people. They

weren't trying to make their country better because they relied on the Roman Emperor for survival. They were only focused on impressing and pleasing the Roman Emperor.

As Israel became corrupt in this way, those under colonial rule were ignored and neglected by the powerful. Especially the poor, socially despised, discriminated against for their ethnicity and religion, all those who were seen as sinful, women, and children were not cared for by the ruling class and were left alone. No one looked out for them.

For a long time, Simeon read the Bible and followed God's word, but the time he lived in didn't feel right or peaceful. It was a time when people stayed silent in the face of Roman violence. So, he waited a long time for the consolation of Israel. Consolation means comfort received by a person after a loss or disappointment. He hoped for a world where Israel would be free from colonial rule, and everyone, regardless of their situation—whether they were poor, oppressed, marginalized, discriminated against, sinners, women, or children—could receive God's care and mercy.

As he waited for this better world, he read and followed God's word. Because he always followed the Holy Spirit, he was spiritually sensitive, listening carefully to what the Holy Spirit said. The Holy Spirit was always with him, and he got the guidance that he wouldn't die before seeing Christ. This meant he would see Christ before he physically died. As time went on, Simeon looked forward to seeing Christ as he approached the end of his life.

Even though we don't know exactly how old he was, it seems that when he was quite old and close to passing away, the Holy Spirit touched his heart. The Holy Spirit told him to go into the temple. Following the Holy Spirit's guidance, as he entered the temple, a young couple approached him with their baby for purification rites. When he held the baby, even though there were no angelic songs like “Glory to God in the highest”, he sensed that the child was the real Messiah, the Christ, God's comfort for the poor, oppressed, marginalized, discriminated against, sinners, women, and children on this earth.

So, Simeon starts praising God in the following way:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.” (29-32)

In that place, there was also a very old prophet named Anna. The Bible describes her as being very old, so she must have been quite old. She got married when she was young, but her husband passed away after seven years, leaving her a widow. Over the next 84 years, she probably reached around 105 years of age. Anna lifted up all her sorrows to God and devoted herself to Him. She clung to God, fasting day and night, praying, and never leaving the temple. God was with her, loving her. Like Simeon, when she saw the baby brought by the young couple, she sensed that He was the Messiah who had come for the redemption of all people.

Friends, today's story was about an old man and an old woman who waited their whole lives for God's consolation and redemption. Their ability to patiently anticipate a Savior who would redeem their lives was rooted in their strong faith. This unwavering faith kept them from getting tired and stopped them from feeling too sad.

Just like Simeon and Anna, God saw the yearning for salvation and the thirst for redemption in their hearts, responding to their prayers by sending Jesus Christ to this earth.

No matter what situation you're in or what difficulties you may be facing, God understands your pain, sorrow, and suffering. God hears all our prayers and is with us in the midst of our pain, sorrow, and suffering.

So, whenever you are sad or hard, please remember that God is always with you.

Immanuel: God with Us! God loves us.

Immanuel: God with Us! God knows all our pain and sorrow.

Immanuel: God with Us! God is enduring these tough and difficult situations with us, desiring to gradually lead us to a better place.

So, on this special last day of the year, saying goodbye to 2023, let's rely on Jesus Christ who will guide us into a bright future. I pray that all of us, with hope and expectation, welcome 2024. Amen.