

The First Sunday after the Nativity of Our Lord

Luke 2:22-40

God always keeps His promises!

We see in today's Gospel reading Simeon holding the baby Jesus just as God promised him. We're not sure how God revealed this to Simeon. No new Scripture had been revealed in 400 years. Malachi was the last prophet. John the Baptist won't appear on the scene for about 30 years. The Israelites of Simeon's day received the Word of God the same way we do today. They had the written Scriptures and God provided priests to preach the Word of God. On a side note, you should be suspicious if someone says they have a direct revelation from God as that's not how He typically reveals Himself. I'm sure you remember the account of Lazarus and the rich man. When the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his brother's house, Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." (Luke 16:29) This is what the saints of Simeon's day: Moses and the Prophets. You have Moses, the Prophets, and the Gospels and Epistles. This is typically how God reveals Himself. Instead of priests, we have pastors.

Yet somehow, God had revealed to Simeon that he wouldn't die until he held Jesus in his arms. What a picture this is! Many of you are grandparents. Can you remember the first time you held your first grandchild! I can only imagine. Maybe one day. Hopefully before I'm Simeon's age. Yet Simeon isn't holding his first grandchild. He's holding the Creator of the Universe, the Savior of the nations, the Hope of all mankind in his arms. God always keeps His promises.

He first promised Jesus in Genesis 3:15. God says in judgment to the snake:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

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Jesus was lifted up on the cross just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. One of my favorite Christmons is a tau cross with a serpent wrapped around it depicting this famous image. Christmons are meant to show images that point to Christ. This one certainly does. As you know from the Old Testament, the stiff-necked Israelites grumbled against God one too many times. God is indeed long-suffering, but even God had had enough! So, in judgment, He sent fiery serpents in their midst that killed many of the Israelites. Moses interceded and God commanded him to make a bronze fiery serpent and put it on a pole. Anyone who looked at bronze serpent lived. Jesus was lifted on the cross so that all who look to Him are saved. Jesus is the Offspring of Eve and Mary that crushes the head of Satan on the cross.

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God promised to make a people for Himself that numbered more than the stars of the sky or the sands of the beach through His servant Abraham:

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that

you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

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Abram was old and childless when God made this promise to him. Yet Abraham believed God and God counted it to Abraham as righteousness. God started fulfilling His promise with Isaac when Abraham and Sarah were well beyond child bearing years, even by Biblical standards. Isaac was a child of promise. Can you imagine what Abraham and Sarah felt as they held this child of promise in their arms? Yet God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God provided Abraham and Sarah no other children, yet He wanted Abraham to sacrifice this child of promise! It was to teach Abraham and us that Isaac was a child of promise, but not the Child of Promise!

You’ll remember that Abraham called the sacrifice place “The LORD will provide.” (Genesis 22:14) God does indeed provide the sacrifice. He gave Abraham a ram in a thicket to sacrifice in thanksgiving. And He gave to the whole world the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God because He kept God’s Law perfectly. I was struck this year by the fact that Jesus keeps the Law because of Joseph and Mary. Like it says:

“And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb

shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.'" (vv. 22-24)

Even at 40 days old, Jesus was keeping the Law of God! The Advent Hymn, "Savior of the Nations, Come" has this great line:

Here a maid was found with child,
Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown:
God was there upon His throne. (St. 3)

It highlights the great truth that Jesus is God at all times. He is God in the womb of Mary. And He's God in the lap of Mary and Simeon. He's a God who knows what it's like to be a baby. He's a God who knows what it's like to grow up. He's a God who knows what it's like to face temptation. Yet without sin. And because He is the spotless Lamb of God, His sacrifice atones for the sins of all His creation.

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God promised David:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your Offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-13)

As you know, Israel was originally a theocracy. After Moses and Joshua, God provided judges to rule His people. God was their King and he shepherded them with judges. This was to teach them and us that God is our King. Yet the people wanted a king like all the nations around them. God relented and provided Saul. Yet God chose David, a man after His own heart, to show us what to expect.

God would provide a King that was lowly like a shepherd. David was least in the eyes of men with respect to his brothers, but that's who God anointed. Jesus "had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him" according to Isaiah. (53:2) Even one of His apostles said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) Both had a period of time before they ascended to their positions. For David, there was a period of strife and warfare with Philistine and Saul before he ascended his throne. For Jesus, there was a period of strife with Pharisees, scribes, lawyers, and Satan before He visibly ascended to His throne in heaven. David's kingdom was temporal and because of his sin doomed to see bloodshed and strife. Jesus' kingdom was bought by His blood and established as an eternal kingdom!

Jesus rules in His church with His Word of forgiveness. The kingdom of the church is a kingdom where grace may be found. And this grace lasts forever. You too are a child of promise:

Second

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."
(Mark 16:16)

This amazing promise of the forgiveness of sins and rescue from death and the devil were placed on you in your Baptism.

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We sing Simeon's song every week:

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel." (vv. 29-32)

Simeon sang this song after he held the baby Jesus in his arms. You sing it after you partake of Jesus' body and blood, whether you hold Him in your arms or not. Some of you take the Lord's Supper directly in your hands and some of you take the Lord's Supper directly from my hand as from Jesus Himself. Taking the Lord's Supper directly from my hand into your mouth is more the historical practice, but either way is truly fine. If you take the bread turned into Body into your hand, you hold Jesus in your hand just as certainly as Simeon held Jesus in his hands.

You can now depart in peace: you have received the forgiveness of your sins again and stand before God spotless.

You have seen the salvation of the Lord. You have seen the fruit of the cross delivered into your mouth or hand.

Jesus was lifted up on the cross before the world to see. And every Christmas and Easter it's obvious the world knows what and whom we celebrate, even if they don't like it.

Jesus joins Himself to you which enlightens and enlivens you so that you have eternal life and continue to cling to Him in faith. True wisdom is only found in Jesus.

The glory of Israel is fully shown in Jesus. This glory now shines from the cross in Jerusalem to the whole world. Jesus gives you His light and now you reflect His light where you work, live, and play in the world. And you glorify God in heaven.

God always keeps His promises.

He will surely keep you!

In Jesus' name. Amen.