

Happy New Year's Eve! Did you make a New Year's resolution? Imagine what would happen in the world if Christians everywhere made the resolution to receive the love of God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then shared it. The world would explode with joy!

In the Gospel, we heard the story about how the prophet Simeon saw God's love as he peered into the face of the Baby Jesus. This morning we're going to talk about this story and what it might mean for us in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

LUKE 2:25-35

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

In the Gospel, we read about how Joseph and Mary brought the Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, following the Old Testament custom of purification for the mother and her new born child.

As the Holy Family went into the Temple I'm sure they were filled with wonder. "What could possibly happen to us next?" they must've asked themselves. After all, their lives had been filled with one surprise after another ever since the angel

Gabriel first appeared to Mary and announced that she would bear the Son of God by the Holy Spirit.

In the Temple, Mary and Joseph came upon the prophet Simeon. The Scripture reads, **Luke 2:25-26, "(That Simeon) was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."**

The Lord had spoken to Simeon. In a vision or a dream, we do not know, but God had revealed to him that the redemption of Israel was on the way.

Mary and Joseph's eyes must've been like saucers when they saw Simeon approaching them! I think they knew in their hearts he had a word for them. And so, without a second-thought, Mary gently placed Baby Jesus into Simeon's outstretched arms.

Simeon looked intently and lovingly into the babe's eyes. And then he raised Him before his parents, before the others who'd gathered around, and before the Lord God Almighty, and he said, **Luke 2:29-32, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."**

"**Light**" and "**glory**," gifts from God, but gifts that would not come cheap. As Simeon brought the Baby Jesus down close to his chest, he looked first at Joseph and then at Mary, and he said, **Luke 2:34-35, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed³⁵—and a sword will pierce through your own soul also—and the thoughts from many hearts will be revealed."**

Simeon gave Mary a snapshot of the future. A sword piercing one's soul means that their heart will be broken. So it was for Mary when, years later, she witnessed that her Son was not received by those to whom He was sent and then his crucifixion.

As Simeon gazed into the face of the Baby Jesus, what did he see? In the Scriptures we read that what is written on one's face may reveal many things. For example, one's face may reveal the condition of his **HEART**. For example, Nehemiah wrote that, **Nehemiah 2:2, "The king said to (him), 'Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.'**"

Simeon saw the **HEART** of God when he peered into the face of the Baby Jesus, and that's why he said, **"my eyes have seen Your salvation."** Simeon saw God's love, His mercy, His care for humanity in Jesus' face.

We also read in the Scriptures that one's face may reveal the **PRESENCE** of God. For example, we read, **Exodus 34:29, "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai,... the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God."**

As Simeon looked into the eyes of the Christ Child he beheld the very **PRESENCE** of God. If Moses absorbed the radiance of God into his flesh, imagine how Simeon must've been transformed as he was enveloped in the presence of the Baby Jesus!

Finally, in the Scriptures we read about how we can see another person's **INTENTIONS** in their face. For example, when Jesus was near the end of his ministry **"His face was set toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53)**, which is to say, his face revealed that he was on a mission!

When Simeon looked into Baby Jesus' face, he saw God's **INTENTIONS** for humanity. He said that he saw **"A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to His people Israel."**

"Light" and **"glory"**: That's what Simeon saw, God's salvation for his people, for you and me. **"Light"** and **"glory"**: That's our hope amidst the darkness and shame of this world in which we live.

St. Paul wrote, **"God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give us the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).**

I have been depressed. Perhaps you too have felt enveloped in that kind of darkness. You don't believe anyone can help you, and you feel there's nothing worth living for. And if it weren't for the people who depend on you and love you, you just might give up. It's as though a sword has pierced your soul, that all of your hopes and dreams have been crushed and that life is a lie.

But "light shall shine out of darkness."

The Holy Spirit of the living God redirects our eyes from the things of this world, brothers and sisters in Christ, to the face of Jesus. He fills our hearts with His own **HEART**, a heart so big He can say to each and every one of us, I love you, and you belong to me.

So "Light shall shine out of darkness."

When we were baptized, we were clothed with Christ's righteousness. And we stand now in the **PRESENCE** of the Living God, our Creator, our Father, our Savior. And nothing can take that away from you.

For light shines out of darkness.

Now we gaze into the face of Jesus, remembering everything He has done for us, and we embrace His **INTENTIONS** for us: lives filled with love, reconciliation one to another and to God himself, and we have peace in our hearts.

For light shines out of darkness."

I'm reminded of the hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus"? Will you sing the chorus with me?

**Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.**

Friends in Christ, Jesus is our salvation from the heartache of this world, from sin, from death, and from the devil. This is light and glory; this is life; this is our hope and our encouragement forever.

God's love pours over us in abundance in every part of our lives. It's inescapable. It permeates every pore of our body and spirit. To make a New Year's resolution to embrace God's love in our hearts, minds, souls, and with all our strength is not so hard. All we have to do is see Jesus in the face of the people around us, to meditate on his promises, and to receive his gift of life with thankfulness.

In the New Year, may we direct our eyes toward Jesus through worship, prayer and devotions, Bible study, Christian fellowship, and acts of service, for therein will we will see his **HEART** for us.

In the New Year, may we meditate on God's **PRESENCE** in our lives, in the work he's called each one of us to do.

In the New Year, as we plan our days, may we be filled with assurance that God's **INTENTIONS** for us are light and glory, forever.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.