

“Life in the midst of Death”

Christmas is ringing in our ears – the good news of great joy that shall be for all people – the birth of a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Yet today, this First Sunday after Christmas (and just the day after the Nativity of Our Lord) – God’s Word to us is soaked in death. So much for a Merry Christmas.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus’ parents brought Him to Jerusalem, to the Temple, to do what the Law of Moses required – to do the very thing we heard from Moses in our reading from Exodus 13.

The Presentation of Jesus, their firstborn Son – requires the sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” This consecration of the firstborn takes us back to the days of Moses – when the Lord redeemed His people from bondage – through the death of the firstborn in Egypt.

In Egypt, death came to the households of those who did not trust the Lord’s promise of deliverance through the blood of the Passover Lamb. So that Israel would remember the Lord’s deliverance – and specifically, how they had been saved by the blood of a substitute – they were commanded to present, or consecrate, their firstborn to the Lord.

The firstborn belonged to God – but one may redeem their firstborn child by shedding the blood of the sacrificial animal. More than any other firstborn – Jesus belonged to God – and yet, He is “bought back” through the blood of the turtledoves or pigeons.

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.” What is this consolation – and where is it to be found? In the death of another, a substitute, the Promised Messiah.

Just as all of Israel waited for the deliverance that the Savior would bring – so Simeon is consoled by the promise of the Holy Spirit – that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

When the Holy Family enters into the Temple, it is revealed to Simeon that this 40 day old Child is his consolation. This One is the Christ – his Savior! This is the One who will redeem Israel from their sin – who will “buy back” Simeon by dying in his place. And so Simeon sings: “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace [you are letting me die in peace], according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation ...”

Simeon is given peace with which to face death – but there is comfort and consolation for Mary as well – even though a sword will pierce her soul, with the sacrifice of her Son. Both of His parents have no doubt been treasuring and pondering all these things in their hearts – all the things that the Lord has revealed to them through the angel Gabriel, as well as through Simeon and Anna.

They have named their child Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins.” Like the Passover Lamb in Egypt, the Lord Jesus will save His people – shedding His blood in death – for He IS the Passover Lamb.

But they too are consoled – they too may live in peace – because their eyes have seen their salvation – the salvation prepared in the midst of all peoples – their Son, Jesus, the Sacrifice for all sin – “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of [His] people Israel.”

Anna too speaks of “the redemption of Israel.” The appearance of Jesus is the appearance of Israel’s Redeemer. Jesus will buy them back from sin, death and the power of the devil – not with gold or silver – but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death.

Yes, the Savior has come – and the people of God rejoice! The parents bring this 40 day old Gospel into their midst and the consolation of the world is revealed – and God’s people give thanks and praise to God that He has redeemed them.

When it was finished, they returned home. For us, we too shall return home – but not before we sing Simeon’s Song – giving thanks and praise to God that He has redeemed us.

Like Simeon, we need and are waiting for our consolation – and the Lord promises and delivers. He announces to you today – here is your Savior, your Redeemer. Here is His Body and Blood – given and shed for you – to redeem you from all that binds you – to release you from captivity and set you free.

He who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary – who was laid in a manger – has entered Jerusalem as your substitute – to endure what your sin deserves, to die your death – so that you need not fear death.

This child “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him.” At His Baptism, we will hear our heavenly Father declare – “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” God the Father is pleased because His Son has paid the ransom price for you, and for all sinners.

Having received the very ransom price – placed in your hands and mouth – even as the Child Jesus was taken up into the arms of Simeon – you too may now depart in peace. All the joy of Christmas is yours – for your sin is forgiven! That is the consolation the Lord gives to you this day.

So, depart from this place with the favor of the Lord upon you. And when your last day shall come – depart in peace – for the Lord is with you – the Lord Jesus Christ, your Christmas Gospel, your Redeemer and saving grace – your life and salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.