



Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in Peace

Sentence: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. (Colossians 3: 15,16)

Collect: Almighty God, you have shed upon us the new light of your incarnate Word, May this light, enkindled in our hearts; shine forth in our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.,

Readings:

Isaiah 61: 10-62:3

Psalm 111

Galatians 4: 4-7

The Holy Gospel: Luke 2: 22-40 When 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 shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon,^[a] this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.^[b] ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[c] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon^[d] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant^[e] in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which 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 the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon^[f] blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna^[g] the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child^[h] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him

Sermon: *"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."* Familiar words to long time Anglicans! We know them as the

Nunc Dimittis, part of the evening prayer service in the Book of Common Prayer. Today's Gospel tells us where this prayer came from...straight from the lips of Simeon, a good and holy man. His prayer sounds to me like a long sigh of relief and fulfillment. All he ever wanted was to see God's Messiah, the One who would deliver Israel. He had waited his entire life for this this moment, and here it was. Guided by the same Spirit that told him he would not see death until he saw the Messiah, Simeon knows that the infant Jesus **is the one**. He takes him in his arms, and, to the astonishment of Mary and Joseph, praises God and says, in effect, "I can die now." When we say the Nunc Dimittis at Evening Prayer, we think of it as a dismissal, letting us leave the church, not really about death at all. But for Simeon, this is a final word. He only had one item on his bucket list, and now it's checked off. His praise is full and deep.

Simeon's longing is surpassed, perhaps, only by Anna's. We don't know much about her, but we know enough. First, she's a prophet. So God speaks to her just as He spoke to Simeon. She too is waiting for God's Messiah. And she's been waiting for a long time. We assume Simeon is elderly, but with Anna there is no doubt. She is 84 years of age in a time when the average life span for a woman was 40. Maybe 50 if they were wealthy and strong. This congregation has many sprightly people in their 80s and 90's and one over a hundred, but in Israel at that time, 84 was ancient. Not only is Anna old, but she has been a widow since her husband died within seven years of their marriage. She lives in the Temple. They take care of her, and she prays and meditates day and night. How glad she must have been to see Jesus, and to hear the Spirit confirm that Jesus was the One for whom she had waited and prayed so very long.

Together, Anna and Simeon speak to a very human sense of longing that we have all experienced. We all want to see God act; to see Gods' love and presence in motion amongst us. In different ways, of course, but longing is a universal

emotion. What **is** your soul's greatest hope? What is it that you long for? Maybe, like Anna and Simeon, you simply want to see Jesus. Maybe, like them, you are looking for a sure sign that God is with us right now, right here in this place, and that He will do something to change this sad and confused situation we are in together. Maybe your greatest hope feels more personal to you – you want to find someone to love, or you long to know that your kids are going to be okay. Whether your hope is cosmic or personal, waiting for it to happen is hard. The good news for us in Luke's Gospel is two-fold: **First**, our faith is not misplaced. **God did come down**. God fulfilled the hopes of Simeon and Anna. We can trust Him to fulfill His promises and remain with us. **Second**, waiting is hard, but it isn't forever. Luke presents us with these two people, a man and a woman, who have one thing in common: They have been waiting a very long time. Simeon is ready to die...just as soon as he sees that God is on the move. Anna has been fasting and praying for longer than most women of her time had been alive. **Israel** also had been waiting a long time. Then God came down, and two faithful servants feasted their eyes upon the Messiah, the Christ of God, the babe of Mary and of Joseph. We too may have a long wait. We too are called to endurance in prayer. And, like the Psalmist (27) we too **shall see the goodness of God in the land of the living**. Right here in our time and in our lives. God will not abandon us. He will come.

New Year's Eve is just days away. It's a time when many make resolutions, promises to ourselves or others that, if kept, might make us healthier, happier, and more in tune with God and each other . We want to keep our promises, but relying on our own efforts generally results in us feeling powerless by about noon on January 2nd. There is however merit in simply trying for *however* short or long. I'm going to do my best facing my own challenges, and I am inspired by a brand new year to make better efforts. How about you? Anna and Simeon pointedly

remind us that God is our helper, our source of strength, the **one we look** to, the one **for whom we wait**, and ultimately the only One **in whom we can confidently** place our greatest hopes. Perhaps the best prayer for us in 2021 is that God would **increase our faith**. As Jesus taught, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they will be filled.” Simeon felt filled, full enough to die a happy man. Anna rejoiced and shared God’s good news with all who would listen.

Hear the words again “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace”. We are leaving 2020 behind. We are “departing” from the 12 months of this past year. How then do we “depart” in peace, when much remains which troubles us? How do enter the first week of 2021 with peace in our hearts? In much the same way, I think, as Mary and Joseph entered the temple on the eighth day of Jesus life. By putting one foot in front of another and doing what is right.

They had returned from Bethlehem to Nazareth with the Babe; the family had all exclaimed their praises and ooh’d and aah’d over this wonderful new little son, grandson, nephew! There had no doubt been some food and laughter and rejoicing. But there was yet one more trip to be made by Mary and Joseph right away....off to Jerusalem to the Temple for the circumcision and naming of the newborn. He was called Jesus; the name given by the angel before He was even conceived. Two prophets then added to everything that Mary, and Joseph also, pondered in their hearts. They said that their tiny little baby would somehow bring about a falling and a rising in Jerusalem, and would somehow be opposed, leaving a wound in Mary like a sword had pierced her heart. Ah, but surely there would be time to figure it all out. Now they were heading back to raise the child with the family in Nazareth! They did not know that in just two years, there would be another visitation, not shepherds, butwise men from afar; another angelic warning, and a hasty flight into Egypt where they would live until Jesus was about five. Only then could they return to Nazareth. Only then could life settle down.

Be “normal”. In all their anxieties, they did, however, live with peace. Because the very Prince of Peace was with them. And that reality, my dear brothers and sisters, is what takes us into 2021 in peace. We go with Jesus. Jesus, the One of whom Isaiah said “ For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and **the** government **shall** be upon **his** shoulder: and **his name shall** be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” We go with Jesus. So peace goes with us! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Prayer of Blessing for the Day and for a brand New Year: (please sing)

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.

God will go with you each hour of every day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there watching from above.

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love. —

Judie+

