

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Luke 2:25-32** *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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup> "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation <sup>31</sup> that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*

The holiday season reminds us of just how much our life has to do with arrivals and departures. Many of us, I think, got to visit with loved ones the past couple days, or, perhaps, family is still coming to town for a late Christmas celebration. And the arrivals—when you first greet those loved ones—it's always a joyful time, isn't it? The departures are a very different matter. They can be sad, maybe even feeling heartbreaking from time to time.

For Christians, the season we're currently in is also about arrivals and departures. At Christmas, we joyfully greeted the arrival of our Savior, who became flesh and blood like us to redeem us from our sins. But it is also a time of departures, and it is departures that we especially want to focus on this morning. In our text for today we met an elderly believer who was on the brink of departing this earthly life. Would his departure be anxious, full of uncertainty and misgivings, or would it be peaceful? The question might be asked of every one of us, and the answer is in our text for this morning. In the words of our theme:

## **With Christ. . . A Peaceful Departure**

It was forty days after the birth of Christ Jesus that Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple. That's where they met this devout old believer named Simeon, as found in our text this morning.

Simeon is a Hebrew name that means "listen," and Simeon had been listening to God. All his life he listened to God's Word, focusing in on the Old Testament prophecies of a coming Savior. And he waited. And finally, a special message had been given to him by God. Verse 26 tells us that, ***"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*** And on that day in the Temple, forty days after Jesus' birth, God made good on His Word, as He always does. The Holy Spirit led Simeon into the Temple where he saw Joseph and Mary. Then a strange thing happened.

You parents could imagine how you'd have felt if an elderly stranger just walked up to you and picked up your baby. But there was something different about Simeon. There was a dignity and a certain authority about the man, he acted as if he knew the baby Jesus. And of course, he did know Jesus! This was his Savior. He took the baby gently in his arms, lifted his eyes to heaven and said, ***"Lord, now***

***you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation.***”

We don't know exactly how long Simeon lived after that day. My guess is that it wasn't for very long. But one thing we do know—when his last breath came, Simeon was a man who departed this world in peace! The one thing he most wanted to see in all the world, the thing the nation of Israel had been awaiting for centuries—God granted to Simeon. There in his arms, he saw the Lord's promised anointed one, the Son of God, the Redeemer of a lost and fallen race! But most importantly, Simeon saw in that little Child his *own* Savior, the person who would one day shed His blood for Him on the cross of Calvary. He might not have known exactly how that would take place, but he knew this child had come to secure for him, Simeon, a place in paradise. And having seen Jesus, knowing and believing who this child was, Simeon said that was enough. That was all he needed. With that quick interaction, he was ready to depart this world in peace.

What about you? Here's an exercise you can do—fill in the blank: “I think I could die in peace, if only I had the chance to do (fill in the blank) first.” I remember when I was young and first learned about Judgment Day, and my teacher told us it could come at any time and then we'd go to heaven! I remember thinking that I really wanted Judgment Day to come so I could go to heaven, but there was a list of things in my life I was hoping God would wait for before coming, like a sleepover or a family vacation—things like that. In recent years, I've found myself thinking that I'd be ready to die at any time, but I do hope that I can see my boys become adults before the Lord took me home. Is that really what would allow me to die in peace?

What would you put in the blank? A lot of people live their lives with a constant view on the things they'd like to do or experience before they die. Perhaps you've seen the movie *The Bucket List*, which is based off of that concept. What would be on your bucket list of things you want to do before you die? Skydiving? Traveling the world? Visiting the pyramids? Becoming a grandparent?

As your pastor, I'd like to encourage you to narrow that list down. In fact, when all is said and done, you can really focus your list down to one item—to know Jesus Christ and trust in Him for salvation. To stay connected to Him through constant study and meditation on His Word. To let your faith in Him be the “hub of wheel,” that part of your life that dictates and controls every other part!

That was Simeon's “bucket list”; it had only one item on it—to hold the world's Messiah in his arms. He needed nothing more. The Apostle Paul also essentially said the same thing, ***“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”*** (Philippians 3:7-9)

You know, there aren't many Scripture texts that are routinely used on more than one occasion in a church year. Typically, we hear most texts only once a year at most, but some are repeated. Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is one. Of course, we know that's used on Palm Sunday, but it's also often used on the first Sunday in Advent, just as we read it here a few weeks ago. Well, this account,

of the aged Simeon bearing the child Jesus in his arms is another. It is often used today, the first Sunday after Christmas. Can you guess on what other occasion this text is frequently used? It's often read at funerals! And it's easy to see why. A funeral is obviously a time of departure, and yet, for Christians, it is also a time of joy.

Finding ourselves at the end of the year, it always presents an opportunity to look back and reflect on the events of the year coming to a close. Here at Immanuel, we had six funerals this year: for Loye Issitt, Bill Issitt III, Bill Hartmann, Emily Kuehne, Sharon Brown, and Dan Gurgel. On the occasion of each one's departure, we had the opportunity to hold funerals to commemorate the passing of a fellow believer. But in each case, it's the commemoration, not of a perfect person, but of a sinful human being. Sinful just like me and just like you. Just like Simeon, for that matter. Like Simeon, each Christian we've buried so far from this church had a long life and saw a lot of things. But also like Simeon, the Lord showed each of them the most important thing in life. God allowed them to see with the eyes of faith Jesus as their personal Savior from sin. With that knowledge in their hearts, these believers were ready when the Lord called for them. **With Christ. . . a Peaceful Departure.**

Peacefulness, it's such a rare idea these days. We've got so much stuff packed into our lives—so many activities, appointments, youth sports; sadly most people can no longer tell the difference between what's really important in life and what's not. How about you? Have you got your priorities straight? You remember the two sisters, Mary and Martha. Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to His Word, while Martha bustled about the kitchen getting supper ready. Finally, Martha started complaining to Jesus because Mary wasn't helping. But what did Jesus say in reply? ***"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*** (Luke 10:41-42)

One thing is needed! To see Jesus Christ in the Word of God and to believe in Him as your Savior—that is the single most important thing in life. And it's the only thing you need to prepare for the day when you eventually leave this life. Without faith in Christ, you will never be prepared even if you live well into old age. But *with* faith in Christ, you will never be unprepared—even if your final day comes tomorrow!

For our God has told us in His Word that a believer has nothing to fear in death. The Apostle Paul asks a question that needs no answer: ***"O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory? ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 15:42,44) Jesus has defeated all our enemies, with death being the last one. For a Christian who has been washed in the blood of Jesus, death is nothing more than the gateway to a life that never ends. In this life, the weaknesses and diseases of our frail human bodies afflict and distress us. Especially as one gets older, it seems that the body becomes more and more of a burden. But we can be reminded in these times that all the aches and pains, all the sin and sorrow and suffering—that's just temporary! It is but for a moment, said the Apostle Paul. But the joy, the rejoicing, the peace, the rest, the glory—that will go on for eternity.

In Christ, we can look forward to our heavenly home, where there are no tears. There are no diseases or disabilities, no frailties of old age, no pain. When a person meets his Savior in heaven, there is

perfect peace and happiness that is greater than you or I can even imagine. It's as Jesus said, **“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”** (John 14:1-2)

Jesus has prepared a room for you, too, in His mansion of heaven. So should He reserve that room for you or not? When your last day comes, would you like to be able to say with Simeon, **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart. . . in peace”**? If so, then abide in your Savior Jesus Christ! There's nothing in your life that's more important than this. You may sometimes think that there are more important things. Young people especially can become convinced that there is, but there simply is not. Ask any older believer and they'll tell you the same thing, there is one thing that's really needful. Better yet, consult the Word of God, where God reminds us, **“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”** (Isaiah 40:8)

You can trust that unchanging Word of God that brings salvation. Bring all of your sins in repentance to your Lord. No matter what you've been or what you've done, you'll find pardon under the shadow of His cross. With the blood He shed on that cross, Jesus paid the price for every one of your sins. And with His resurrection on Easter morning, Jesus gained—for you!—the final victory over death.

So truly, **With Christ. . . A Peaceful Departure.** That's the promise God made to Simeon, and it's the promise He kept. It's the promise He has made to countless believers over the centuries, and it's the promise He kept. Dear friends in Christ, God has made that promise to you as well. Take Him up on the offer of His grace. In fact, why not make it a New Year's Resolution? Why not resolve that in 2022 you will, more and more, live in Christ as your highest treasure. Keep Him at the very top of your life's priorities. Because then you'll have the peace of knowing that you too possess the one thing needful for a blessed life and a peaceful death. Then you'll learn the truth of those comforting words of Jesus, **“Because I live, you will live also.”** (John 14:19)

We have only a limited time to spend as visitors here on this earth—let's make sure we're ready to leave whenever the Lord decides it's our time to go. Let's make sure we have the key to a truly peaceful departure. Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior! Amen.

**“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.