

Simeon's Prophetic Adoration

Waiting for God to come through with His promise to send the Redeemer takes prayer and patience, especially when the arrival date of the One coming is unknown. How long oh Lord before the promised One comes? In our Christmas tradition we sense this expectation in the well-known Advent hymn:

O come, O come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear,
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Immanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Ever since the first Gospel promise was made to Adam, there was a feeble spark of anticipation (Gen. 3:15). The thread of the Plan of Redemption is interwoven throughout the pages of Scripture. For example, Balaam announced in an oracle, "a star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel" (Num. 4:17). The prophet Isaiah foretold the way the Messiah would come into the world: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [God with us]" (7:14). And into this world of anticipation, God fulfilled His promise.

The apostle Paul said, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4a). The time was filled with expectation. Israel had lost most of its independence. It had become part of the powerful Roman empire. It meant that foreign rulers had the lot of Israel in their hands. It also meant that not only Israel's political life, but also its spiritual and culture life were impacted by the occupiers' ways of thinking and acting. But the Jews never lost their belief in the coming of the Messiah. In the midst of all the tragedy of the occupation, first by the Greeks, and then by the Romans, they remained convinced that the Messiah would surely come. And come He did. The virgin Mary gave birth to a Son, the Messiah, the long awaited Redeemer. A choir of angels welcomed the long awaited Redeemer, whose name is Jesus, meaning Yaweh who saves. The new born child is in fact God. Here He is, then, perfect God and perfect man. This is the greatest news story ever told! No wonder the shepherds hurried to the stable in Bethlehem, as directed, to worship Him.

We quickly move on to see the high drama in the Plan of Redemption that reveals itself in the temple court. Besides Joseph and Mary, there were others in the temple who saw the baby Jesus. There was a priest who performed the act of circumcision, and other officials who gathered around the group. They saw the little baby but noticed nothing remarkable in Him. In fact, many years later the letter-learned scribes would look upon Jesus as a sign to be spoken against and to whom He would become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

With the elderly Simeon it was different. Luke describes Simeon (Luke 2:25-32) as "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, waiting for the kingdom to come." His name means "one who hears and obeys." He kept the lamp of prophecy burning in Israel. This godly man had been waiting in the temple because it had been revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Anointed. He belonged to the faithful remnant of Israel who in the dark days of decline and apostasy held fast to the prophecies of old and waited for their

fulfillment. The Spirit had led him into the temple at the right moment.

Simeon was not ashamed to declare that the one born in the City of David was the Saviour of the world. When he saw the child Jesus, he was convinced the moment had come: "My eyes have seen thy salvation." His waiting ended when he saw Jesus. He saw a baby, who looked like any other baby. Yet his faith saw in Him Jesus' true identity. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-30). The elderly Simeon represents the old Israel, which welcomed the new Messiah. His words testify to his overwhelming joy that God had granted that he was allowed to witness the arrival of the long awaited Messiah. He could now die in peace, satisfied and happy.

There are a couple of things in Simeon's prayer that we must note. Simeon speaks of salvation as being for all peoples, even the Gentiles. This was a valid concern. The Jews should have known from the teaching of their Scriptures that the coming Redeemer would be for the whole world, but they had forgotten it and had become very provincial/narrow in their thinking. Throughout the Gospels Simeon's message resounds. Only for a brief moment Israel is in the picture, when Jesus said "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). But when Israel rejected its King and the cross was erected on Calvary, the last barriers were broken. And before the Lord ascended to heaven, He gave His disciples the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The Gospel is for all nations. In other words, the Bible shows the development of God's plan in history: Adam, Abraham, Israel and now the world. All along God intended Israel to be the light among the nations. He had the world in mind when He said to Abraham "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:1,3). God had chosen Israel to become the vehicle for the salvation of the world. Not for the Western world nor for the Eastern world but for the *whole* world. We have a world embracing Plan of Redemption; whether in Canada, Sri Lanka, Germany, Uganda, or wherever, the Gospel message is the same.

Simeon called Jesus "a light for the revelation to the Gentiles." Years later, Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world (John 8:12). What light is to the earth, Jesus is to humanity. The world without Jesus Christ is a world of spiritual darkness, groping and lost. Jesus Christ alone can save people from the dark night of sin. Light makes the darkness flee. Jesus as the Light of the world dispels spiritual darkness. Light guides. In the dark, people easily stumble and fall. Light makes possible an intelligent sense of direction and destiny. We cannot live without light.

Jesus said, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am...the bright *Morning Star*" (Rev. 22:16). What is a star? A star is a source of light. Jesus is our source of light. When I think of stars, I think of the beauty of Christ – the Creator – "all things were created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:17). One of my favourite memories of the Philippines is standing on deck at night as we sailed from Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, to Manila, Luzon. The spectacle of the star-sparkled sky reflected for me the breath taking beauty and majesty of Jesus the Creator.

The star figured prominently in the life of the Eastern traveller. An artist once drew a picture of a lone man rowing his little boat on a dark night. The wind is fierce, the waves crest and rage around him. But there is one star that shines through the dark and angry sky above. On that star that rower fixes his eyes and keeps going through the storm. Beneath the picture are the words, "If I lose that I 'm lost." From Christ, our *Morning Star* we can take our bearing for our journey in life. May we follow the directions of the Star for our journey in life . They are found in His Word, which is our Lamp unto our feet and a light for our path (Ps. 119:104). But there is also another side to the Gospel. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World." But He also said to His disciples, " *You* are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). May we, therefore, "shine like stars in the universe as [we] hold out the word of life" (Phil. 2:15b-16a). When will the Plan of Redemption reach its final fulfillment? When the *Morning Star* appears for the second time. As Simeon eagerly anticipated Christ's first advent, are we patiently waiting for His second coming? When He does appear we will see Him in all His glory and majesty. We will then have an even greater thrill than Simeon experienced when he held Jesus in his arms in the temple court.

Johan D. Tangelder