

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Text: St. Luke 2:22-40

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

There was a time when, as God's people wandered in the wilderness for forty years, the glory of God filled the entire space of the Holy Tabernacle, a tent made of animal skins. When the Tabernacle finally came to Jerusalem, it was no different. You see, on the day King Solomon dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and God accepted it as His exalted House, the priests could not continue ministering because God's glory came out of the Holy Place, that is, the Holy of holies, and filled the entire structure.

Thus, He who is infinite deigned to confine His presence to the finite—first, in a tent of animal skins, and then to a building of mortar and stone. On each of these, in their turn, the Name of God rested, and there, seated on the Mercy Seat guarded by two cherubim, God was enthroned to dispense His judgment and His mercy; and His glory filled the Holy of holies in the Tabernacle and Temple, and each was sanctified by His glory as God dwelled among His people.

However, the birth of our LORD JESUS changed all that. At the conception of our LORD, God now deigned to descend from His heavenly throne and take on a tabernacle of human flesh. The Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon pointed to our LORD JESUS, the Temple made without hands; a Temple to be torn down and rebuilt in three days.

Even as God filled these shadows of Christ, within the Body of this Divine Infant lived all the glory, all the fullness, of the Godhead, bodily. JESUS is the One and only God, of whom Saint John speaks when he tells us, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the FATHER, full of grace and truth,”* and again, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the FATHER and was manifested to us....”*

Therefore, know that JESUS CHRIST is God, whose glory now sanctifies all human flesh, returning to humankind God's Divine Image. In JESUS, the IMMANUEL, He who is *“God with us,”* the Name of God rests, and through Holy Baptism all flesh receives His Holy Name.

This, then, is the CHRIST, the anointed One of God and the promised Seed of Eve, through whom the Gentiles are to be saved. This is who Simeon saw as he held this little Infant in his arms; a promise of peace fulfilled; the Salvation of all people and the Love of God made manifest in the very flesh of men.

Yet, JESUS will not be accepted by all men. He is a Sign to be spoken against, for He will cause the rise and fall of many and reveal the thoughts of the hearts of those who will love Him as well as those who will hate and reject Him.

What is it that men will reject? Against what will they speak? Open your ears and you shall hear what the world has to say against our LORD. Does the world not speak against the virgin birth, claiming that JESUS is no more than a mere man conceived in sin? How, after all, is it possible for a virgin to conceive and bear a son?

Some claim that JESUS was a fake, an imposter, a poser and master of the “*sleight of hand*” with a God complex and a twisted death wish who He engineered His own death. Yet, for what benefit, no one seems to adequately explain. Others claim that JESUS never really existed at all; that He is a compilation of old stories made up by a group of men seeking power and influence over the weak, the illiterate, and the superstitious. Odd, that every one of these evil and twisted men should have died for such a lie when they could have denied JESUS and lived. Still, others say that JESUS did not rise from the dead, making “*the last deception... worse than the first.*” Yes, the world declares JESUS a charlatan at best, and your faith nothing more than a lie or a simple-minded superstition.

Among unbelievers, all things that JESUS claimed about Himself are a sign spoken against. Yet, as if that is not bad enough, there are even those who call themselves Christians who add their voices to the cacophony of rejection. Many rob the Sacraments of their comfort speaking against Holy Baptism as though it is no more than a symbolic washing rather than “*...the washing of regeneration and renewing of the HOLY SPIRIT, whom He poured out on us abundantly through JESUS CHRIST our SAVIOR....*”

Others speak against the Body and Blood of CHRIST in the Holy Supper implying that JESUS is a liar when He said “*This is my Body... This is My Blood.*” After all, how could the finite contain the infinite? And if JESUS is not there, then how could mere bread and wine convey the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation? How could the mere washing with water save you? But the finite does contain the Infinite and His coming was foretold by the prophets, heralded by the angels, and witnessed by the shepherds. Mary, His virgin mother, wrapped the Infinite in swaddling cloths and on the eighth day Simeon held the Infinite God in his human hands.

This Infant, whom Simeon holds, is the LORD of Creation, who spoke all that is visible and invisible into being with the Word of His mouth. He spoke into the dust of the earth and breathed life into the first man—Adam. He brought His people out of Egypt with His mighty arm and destroyed Pharaoh, casting him and his army into the Red Sea. This tiny Babe went before Israel in the desert and cast down her enemies in the Promised Land. He delivered His people from all evil and provided for them their daily bread. And in the fullness of time, at just the right moment, He became Man—fully human, yet without sin, even as He is fully God. Indeed, He is *“very God of very God.”*

JESUS, the Incarnate Word of the Living God, came *“living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”*

This Babe, helpless in the arms of His parents and exalted in the arms of Simeon, despised by kings, and rejected by His people, is JESUS CHRIST our LORD who has come to save you from Satan, the world, and yourself. He came to be torn down, beaten, bloodied, crucified. He came absorbing into Himself all your pain, all your sorrows, all your heartache, all your sin; He came to absorb into Himself your death. He came to be raised up the Third Day, the Temple of Flesh restored. That day in the Temple, as the Infant JESUS rested in his arms, Simeon recognized that the time for the fulfillment of all things had finally arrived, and this Babe is the One who will fulfill them. He came, *“a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of [God’s] people, Israel.”*

Now, we are here in this holy house, the Temple of God, where we bask in His presence in Word and Sacrament and in blessed and Holy Absolution. We give praise for His first coming, and like Simeon, who waited patiently for JESUS’ first Advent, we eagerly and patiently prepare as we await His second Advent, praying for our LORD’s blessing and asking that we remain strong in the SPIRIT and filled with wisdom, that we may receive the favor of God at His return on the clouds of heaven.

So, come now and receive the True Body and Blood of JESUS that you remain the place of His gracious presence. For you are a temple not built with hands but with water and Word, maintained by His Body and Blood in lowly bread and wine. Come, receive the salvation of the LORD and depart in peace according to His Word.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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