

# 1<sup>ST</sup> Sunday after Christmas      December 30 , 2018

Year C – the Gospel of Luke

**Lutheran**

## **Living the ^ Lectionary**

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.  
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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<https://lutheran-church-regina.com/blogs/post/the-expected-yet-unexpected-gift-first-sunday-after-christmas-luke-222-40>

### Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 389 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 105

“ Let all together praise our God”

**(Author)** “Russell, Arthur Tozer , M.A. He was the son of the Rev. Thomas Clout, who later changed his surname for Russell (*Gentlemen’s Magazine*, 1848), an Independent or Congregational minister who won for himself a good reputation by editing the works of Tyndale, Frith, Barnes, and Dr. John Owen, &c...

In his earlier years he was an extreme High Churchman, but by the study of St. Augustine his views were changed and he became, and continued to the end, a moderate Calvinist. His original hymns are gracious and tender, thoughtful and devout. His translations on the whole are vigorous and strong, but somewhat ultra-faithful to the original metres...

Of his original hymns, about 140 in all, including those in Dr. Maurice’s *Choral Hymn Book*, 1861, the following are found in a few collections...” Exerpts from John Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology* (1907)

- [https://hymnary.org/person/Russell\\_AT](https://hymnary.org/person/Russell_AT)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxjrJ2cdP5o> This Paul Manz arrangement is played on a 1966 Moller organ by David Christensen.
- <https://www.cph.org/p-32455-let-all-together-praise-our-god-hurlbutt.aspx> This arrangement of the Christmas hymn LOBT GOTT, IHR CHRISTEN uses grace notes and unexpected harmonies to create a fresh setting. The tune is also used for the Epiphany hymn “The People That in Darkness Sat.” Scored for 3–5 octave handbells. Level II.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIUhy7b5EXw> Polyphonic setting of this well-known Christmas Carol. Thanks to the Wyoming Catholic College Choir for the kind permission to post this recording.

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

**Exodus 13:1-3a, 11-15; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 (Next week: Epiphany of our Lord; Isaiah 60:1-6; RCL, the same reading)**

*“The book of Exodus continues the story of Jacob/Israel in the land of Egypt and beyond. Over an extensive period of time in Egypt, the people of Israel grow into a major community. But life does not go well for the Israelites over time and they are oppressed by the rulers of Egypt...*

*Exodus 2:23-25 summarizes their suffering situation and names their cries to God. God hears their cry, remembers the covenant/promise made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and takes special notice of their suffering situation. To use the comparable language of Exodus 3:7, “I know their suffering”; that is, God so enters into their suffering situation that God takes that suffering into the divine self and bears it there.*

God then directs the divine energies toward a resolution of this situation; Exodus 3:1-7:7 specifies the nature of that divine move in remarkable detail. Note that a “quick fix” does not seem to be available, even for God. Indeed, much of this section in Exodus is an ongoing dialogue between God and Moses with regard to the best way to address this suffering situation...”

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3310](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3310) *Terence E. Fretheim* Elva B. Lovell Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminar, Saint Paul, Minn.

## Consecration of the Firstborn

13 The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”

## The Feast of Unleavened Bread

<sup>3</sup>Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. *No leavened bread shall be eaten.* <sup>4</sup>*Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out.* <sup>5</sup>*And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month.* <sup>6</sup>*Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD.* <sup>7</sup>*Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory.* <sup>8</sup>*You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’* <sup>9</sup>*And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.* <sup>10</sup>*You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.*

<sup>11</sup>“When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, <sup>12</sup>you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. <sup>13</sup>Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. <sup>14</sup>And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.’ <sup>15</sup>For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’

*Commentaries of this reading are difficult to find. Many study Bibles also give few details. Themes that run through the comments are:*

- *References to Jesus as the first born...*
- *Discussions of the various OT understanding of the English term "first born" especially as it relates to inheritance...*  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firstborn\\_\(Judaism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firstborn_(Judaism))
- *References to the deaths of the firstborn, human and animal, in the Passover story...*
- *A need for a greater understanding of the "blood sacrifice" as understood in Mosaic law.*
- *An interesting discussion of the role of the donkey. The exception allowing it to be replaced by a lamb had to do with its economic value as an animal of burden. Another way to deal with the economics was to sell the pregnant animal to a non- Jew with the intent of buying them back after the first-borns birth.*
- *References to "redeeming" first born children (sons)at a specific price and how that countered blood sacrifices of children.*

*"The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a feast that is generally mistaken for Passover. Passover however is only one 24 hour period while Feast of Unleavened Bread lasts for seven days.*

*On the evening after Passover God told the Hebrew people exiting Egypt not to allow their bread to rise, but to grab everything and leave...*

*God then told them that in the future they were to commemorate this feast by getting all yeast out of the house for seven days.*

*On a normal Passover eve a family that celebrates the Biblical feasts will leave a bit of bread in their home in hidden places for the children to find. The children will search out the yeasty creations till they "eradicate" the yeast from the house. The family then takes what is found and burns it outside.*

*If you are trying to clean your house of all yeast you will realize just how tediously impossible that idea is, on your own. No matter how I sweep or dust, yeast is in the air , hence how it lands on grape leaves, it always finds it's way back into the home.*

*God even told us what the yeast represented. Yeast represents sin...*

*So as we clean out our homes of the yeast and eat Matzo, yeastless bread, we are reminded that it is a hopeless case. Just like our inability to clean out the junk in our souls/spirits. We need someone perfect to do it for us.*

*Matzo has a special way it is made now. It has stripes that look like bruises and is pierced thru. The Rabbi's reason for this is to make the bread cook fast, from start to finish in 18 minutes actually... Eighteen minutes is supposedly the amount of time it takes to prepare and cook it in a manor that will keep all yeast out. What they don't seem to realize is that they have created the perfect symbolism that God initiated long ago.*

*Jesus was beaten and bruised and pierced for our sins. He was and is the only sinless person on this planet and His body is represented by the matzo. Even in modern day Judaism they can't get away from God's plan of redemption.*

- <http://www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/the-feast-of-unleavened-bread...-wait-itsn%27t-it-passover%3F> Mia Kashat is a Messianic aka Completed Jew and grew up celebrating all of the Biblical Feasts... Her family has a Bible-study dedicated to repairing the way between Jews and Gentiles.

### Psalm 111; RCL, 148 (Psalm 72:1-11 (12-15); RCL, Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14)

*"...While Psalm 111 is not the most familiar psalm among us, Martin Luther was familiar with it, and he gives his thoughts on the context of this psalm: We know that God instituted the festival of Passover among the people of Israel as an occasion for them annually to praise His wonderful acts and to thank Him for their deliverance when He led them out of Egypt...therefore it seems to me that this psalm was composed for the Passover festival. (LW 13:354) As we look at the Psalm, it seems that Luther is correct. The first words in Hebrew are: יהוה קללו Translated: **Praise the Lord!** And then the psalm writer goes on to list reasons to praise the LORD, reasons that call to mind one specific event: the Exodus from Egypt..."*

- <http://www.risensaviorlutheran.org/sermon-blog/2017/4/14/psalm-111-lets-not-forget-april-13-2017> Risen Savior Lutheran Church, McFarland, WI

*"Psalm 111 introduces a series of "Hallelujah" psalms (Psalms 111-118) that are linked, like railroad cars, by the phrase, "Praise the Lord," or in Hebrew, hallelu (which means "praise) and Yah (a shortened form of Yahweh, or the Lord)..."*

*Psalms 111 and 112 are twins; they were probably written by the same author and were intended to be kept together, both psalms are alphabetical acrostics..." (continued after the reading)*

### Great Are the LORD's Works

111 <sup>[a]</sup> Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

<sup>3</sup> Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

<sup>4</sup> He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

<sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.

<sup>6</sup> He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

<sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;

<sup>8</sup> they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

<sup>9</sup> He sent redemption to his people;  
 he has commanded his covenant forever.  
 Holy and awesome is his name!

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
 all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
 His praise endures forever!

- a. [Psalm 111:1](#) This psalm is an acrostic poem, each line beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet

“There is a science laboratory in Cambridge, England, called the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, England...It is distinguished by having the words of Psalm 111:2 inscribed over the entrance to its building as a charter for every believing scientist...”

- [The Book of Psalms, the Smart Guide to the Bible Series](#), Connelly and Richards, Thomas Nelson Press, 2008, pages 270-271

"The ABC's of Theology"

“In his commentary in the Westminster Bible Companion series, James Limburg titles Psalms 111 and 112, "The ABC's of Theology" and "The ABC's of Anthropology," respectively.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that the two neighboring psalms are "twins." Each psalm is 22 lines, divided into 10 verses. Each psalm is an alphabetic acrostic -- with each half-verse beginning with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from *alef* to *tav* (from "A to Z," so to speak).

Psalm 111 is mostly about theology -- it is about God. Whereas Psalm 112 is mostly about anthropology -- it is about the human response to God. Themes introduced in Psalm 111 are echoed in Psalm 112. For instance, Ps 111:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 112:1 says, "Happy are those who fear the Lord." Or, Psalm 111 confesses about God's character: "The Lord is gracious and merciful"(verse 4b). Psalm 112 says God's people reflect God's character: "they are gracious, merciful, and righteous" (verse 4b).

Since the psalm for this week – { also, the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, Year B} -- is Psalm 111, the focus is on God. On God's character, actions, promises. In short, the focus is on "the ABC's of Theology." This is appropriate in the Epiphany season, because the focus is not so much on us and our actions, so much as it is on God and who God has been revealed to be.

Because of the psalm's acrostic structure, perhaps the best way to approach the psalm is thematically rather than structurally. Because the poet was constrained by the alphabetic structure, the poem does not develop logically -- from one logical development to the next, or from one theme to the next. Therefore, rather than moving from one section of the psalm to the next in an expository fashion, perhaps the most fruitful approach to preaching the psalm is thematic -- picking out key themes.

### **Who God Is**

A first theme to be considered is who God is...

Throughout, the psalm is bearing witness to the very nature of God -- to God's character, to who God is.

## What God has Done

The psalm also touches at multiple points on what God does and has done... Already above, it was mentioned that God provides food. As part of the divine creative agency, the Lord goes on working within creation -- providing food. But also suggested here is that the sustaining and renewing of creation are God's ongoing work...

In the words of the Gospel of John: "And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. . . From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (1:14, 16)."

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1216](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1216) *Rolf Jacobson* Professor of Old Testament and Alvin N. Rogness Chair in Scripture, Theology, and Ministry, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

## Colossians 3:12-17; RCL, the same reading (Ephesians 3:1-12; RCL, the same reading)

*"Paul begins the practical section of his Letter, based on the doctrinal section – esp Baptism (chs 1-2)"*

The Lutheran Study Bible, ESV, Concordia Publishing House, 2009, page 2047

*"...It is important to locate verses 12-17 of chapter 3 in their immediate literary context. Colossians 3:1-17 is a recognizable section of the letter. First, in verses 1-4 readers are admonished to seek heavenly ways because they have been raised with Christ. Second, verses 5-17 elaborate the meaning of this exhortation. Here, there are a pair of passages, one negatively focused (verses 5-11) and one positively oriented (verses 12-17).*

*Colossians 3:5-11 contains two lists of five negative items Christians are to shun. Then, in 3:12-17 there are a series of admonitions, including another list of five items, this time positive items that Christians are to embrace. Our text for this Sunday contains the more positively expressed set of verses..."*

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=482](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=482) *Marion L. Soards* Professor of New Testament Studies, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

*"The Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day is a good day to find a guest preacher to fill in for you. I mean, after all the hoopla of the holidays, people are exhausted and after exploring the depths and heights of the Incarnation. So is the preacher. What do you say on this first Sunday after Christmas?..."*

*Our reading from Colossians 3 calls for a very different response. Think back to Christmas... But how do you respond to a gift that changes your entire life? ... What is the appropriate way to respond to the life changing gift God gave the human race at Christmas? Paul introduces the answer to that question with one word. "Therefore...." {NIV, KJV - "Put on therefore"} With that word, he points back the life changing work of Jesus—not only his birth, life, and death, but also his resurrection and coronation. That awesome work of Christ has created a whole new self for us (3:1, 3, 10) and incorporated us into a whole new community (3:11). Paul had sung of the all-sufficiency of Christ in the gorgeous hymn of Colossians 1:15-23.*

*Now here he sums it all up in the closing words of verse 11. "Christ is all, and in all." (continued after the reading)*

<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

"How shall we respond to all that? In effect Paul says, Christ has put on your flesh, therefore you should put on Christ in your flesh. And he explains that not with a call for some mystical practices or heroic sacrifices or esoteric knowledge, but with a call to be Christ-like in our everyday living.

In the immediately preceding verses (5-10), he gives the negative side of post-Christmas living: "put to death," "rid yourself," "you have taken off." There are things you can't do anymore, now that Christ has come and is "all in all." Paul writes a big "NO" over the life we used to live. Sadly, many serious Christians stop right there and live a "NO" kind of life, emphasizing all the things we cannot do because we are Christians.

Thankfully, Paul doesn't stop there. He focuses on the new life with all its fresh possibilities. You can have a whole new set of attitudes toward life and a whole new set of behaviors, a positive way of living that will give you the joy Jesus promised and show the world how good life can be when "Christ is all in all, and in all." Those last words are important. In calling for a new way of living, Paul does not emphasize a new set of rules or a new philosophy of life, as the Jewish Gnostics in the Colossian church did (2:6-23). Rules and regulations, knowledge and philosophy are "a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality is found in Christ." (2:17) Thus, Paul simply points to Christ as the key to this new life..."

- [https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/1st-sunday-after-christmas-c/?type=lectionary\\_epistle](https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/1st-sunday-after-christmas-c/?type=lectionary_epistle) Stan Mast

**Luke 2:22-40, RCL, Luke 2:41-52 (Matthew 2:1-12; RCL, the same reading)**

*"The story of Jesus' presentation in Jerusalem is one of the few stories in the canonical gospels that have to do with Jesus' childhood.*

*Along with the stories of the circumcision and naming of Jesus (Luke 2:21, January 1 every year), the visit of the magi (Matthew 2:1-12, Epiphany every year), the slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2:13-23, First Sunday after Christmas in year A), and Jesus in the temple as*

a twelve-year-old (Luke 2:41-52, First Sunday after Christmas in year C {reference to 2014}), this story gives one a rare opportunity to preach on Jesus' childhood on a Sunday.

The scarcity of information about Jesus' childhood reminds us that the gospels are not biographies, or at least not primarily that. They are kerygmatic\* narratives -- they seek to proclaim the gospel and to undergird and strengthen faith in Christ. The little information that they give us about Jesus' childhood is not intended, say, to explain the development of his character or personality. It is clear that Luke's childhood stories seek to make theological points: Jesus was born a Jew among Jews. He came under the law of Moses. And, although he fulfilled the law in honoring his father and mother (Luke 2:51), his ultimate obedience was to his heavenly Father (Luke 2:49; cf. Mark 3:35). As such, our Gospel lesson is easily linked to the epistle reading for the day, where Paul tells us that Jesus was "born of woman" and "born under the law" so that he might redeem those who were under the law (Galatians 4:4-5). (The same link is easily made on January 1, for which the Galatians text is appointed every year.)..."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2258](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2258)  
[Stephen Hultgren](#) Lecturer in New Testament and Director of ALITE, Australian Lutheran College, North Adelaide, Australia
- [\\*https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/kerygma/](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/kerygma/) An extended article on the term "Kerygma"

## “The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the 2nd Chapter”

### Jesus Presented at the Temple

<sup>22</sup> And 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 <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” <sup>25</sup> 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<sup>[a]</sup> 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.”\*

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed

<sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.<sup>[b]</sup> She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

## The Return to Nazareth

<sup>39</sup> And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

- a. [Luke 2:29](#) Or *bondservant*
- b. [Luke 2:37](#) Or *as a widow for eighty-four years*

\*Cross references:

1. [Luke 2:29](#) : [Gen. 15:15](#)
2. [Luke 2:29](#) : [ver. 26](#)
3. [Luke 2:30](#) : [Isa. 52:10](#)
4. [Luke 2:30](#) : [See ch. 3:6](#)
5. [Luke 2:31](#) : [Ps. 98:2](#); [See ch. 24:47](#)
6. [Luke 2:32](#) : [Isa. 42:6](#); [49:6](#); [52:10](#); [60:3](#); [John 8:12](#); [Acts 13:47](#); [26:23](#)
7. [Luke 2:32](#) : [\[Isa. 45:25](#); [46:13\]](#)
8. [Luke 2:32](#) : [ver. 10](#)

## “This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“Seems like one question screams out to be answered this week: after all the candlelight and joy and presents and everything else that went along with our Christmas celebrations last week, what in the world are we doing talking about death. After all, Luke's account of Simeon's troubling song is simply haunted by the specter of death. Along side the other Christmas carols we'll likely sing this Sunday, this one sounds odd, even dissonant. So, let me ask it once again: what's all this talk about death doing in the middle of our celebration of life?...

But maybe we should back up a bit.

In St. Luke's account, it is now forty days after Jesus' birth. After eight days, Jesus had been circumcised and named in accordance with Jewish law. Now, thirty-two days later, his parents are again performing their duty as pious Jews by returning to the Temple, this time in order to offer a sacrifice and to consecrate their child to the Lord.

They must have been in a solemn mood that day, full of reverence and expectancy, the way many young parents in our congregations when their first child is to be baptized. It's not hard to imagine, therefore, the quiet procession they must have made to the great Temple,

their awe at entering its holy courts, their nervousness as they prepared to sacrifice according to the law.

Nor is it difficult to imagine their reaction as an old man comes forward out of the shadows to scoop up their child into his arms and prophesy about him. Startled at first, perhaps, even a bit frightened by the old man's ecstatic face, Mary and Joseph yield to him because they sense the Lord's Spirit upon him. Hearing Simeon's prophecy, they are reminded of the events of the previous weeks and months when angels and shepherds had intruded into their lives to foretell the greatness of their Son.

How puzzled they must have been, though, at what we now call Simeon's "song": Lord now let your servant go in peace." The words, I'm fairly sure, are familiar to many of our people. Some may even know them better as the *Nunc Dimittis*, Latin for "now send away," the hymn sometimes sung after Holy Communion. Simeon's words also conclude the service of Compline, the order for prayers at the close of the day, and they are regularly said or sung at the end of a funeral. Expressing Simeon's pious thanksgiving to God for the Christ child and his earnest plea for peace, his song has become one of the most familiar and beautiful hymns of the liturgy.

And yet each time I hear these words, I -- as I imagine Mary and Joseph did -- grow strangely uncomfortable. Listen to them again. "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel." Beautiful words, to be sure, but also troubling, for let's not kid ourselves, when Simeon asks that he be allowed to go, he's asking to die.

And so I wonder, why does Luke record this strange scene and song. Why would he move from the beauty and light and joy of the nativity straight to Simeon's morbid request for death? And why must we focus on that request, and therefore on death, just a week after our own celebrations of Christmas...

Some of our people, we know, have lost a loved one in the past year and that makes this Christmas especially difficult. And most of us are reminded of those we have loved and lost by a stanza from a hymn, a favorite ornament on the tree, or some fleeting but vivid memory of Christmas past. Well, Simeon is no different. He's an old man, and has been around the block more than a few times, and so we can imagine that he has tasted love and loss, joy and despair, hope and fear, just like you and me. And so he sings of death simply because he can't help it; because he, like us, lives with it everyday.

But here take note. This is more than merely stark realism. For St. Luke is clear that Simeon is able to speak of death so honestly only in the light of the coming of the promised messiah, only, that is, by the confidence that in this helpless child God has come to redeem Israel and save all the world.

"Lord," Simeon, sings, "now you can let your servant go in peace; for your word has been fulfilled." Simeon perceives, you see, that in the Christ-child God has kept God's promises; that in this babe, set for the rising and fall of many, God has acted once and for all to address the question and specter of death with the promise of life.

And so I was mistaken earlier -- Simeon does not *ask* for death; rather, he *accepts* it courageously and confidently in the light of God's promised salvation. And he does so, again,

only upon seeing and holding God's promise in his hands, only after touching and feeling the promise of life which God granted to him through Christ... and which God grants also to us...

So why do we sing about death just a week after our Christmas celebration of life? So that by naming death it may no longer terrify or diminish us, as with the coming of Emmanuel, God with us, we need no longer fear...anything. For in the birth of the Christ-child so long ago, and now again as we gather around word and meal, we too have seen and heard, tasted and felt, God's steadfast and tenacious commitment to be both with us and for us...forever!

And suddenly, this side of Christmas, Simeon's odd and courageous carol is also now our own: "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled" ...for Christ the savior is born! Blessed Christmas, Working Preacher!"

- <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1510> [David Lose](#) Senior Pastor, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church' Minneapolis, Minn.



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## Special Days in the liturgical calendar following Christmas

December 26      St. Stephen, Martyr

December 27      St John, Apostle and Evangelist

December 28      Holy Innocents, Martyrs