

## **December 31, 2023 - Sunday**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature, and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Gospel Reading - 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 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

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

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna 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, 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. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

### **Sermon**

*Simeon blessed them*

*And said to his mother Mary*

*"This child is destined*

*To be a sign"*

A sign

An indicator

A proclamation

A point of reference

A warning

An alert

A notification

A reminder

“You are here now”

“You are this far away from where you are going”  
“You’re heading the wrong direction”  
“Construction ahead”  
“Last chance gas”

Simeon calls Jesus  
“A sign”  
An indicator  
A proclamation  
A point of reference...  
And more

A divine word  
A holy communication  
Indicating presence  
Demonstrating compassion  
Evidence of in-breaking  
Proclamation of promise  
Visible vulnerability  
Touchable grace  
A flesh and blood statement  
Of hope  
Even in the middle  
Of poverty which denied hope  
Of empire which denied hope  
Of old age which denied hope

Jesus was a sign  
An indicator  
A proclamation  
A point of reference...  
And more

*Simeon blessed them  
And said to his mother Mary  
"This child is destined  
To be a sign  
That will be opposed"*

Opposed  
Fought  
Questioned  
Disapproved  
Discussed  
Dissected  
Ridiculed  
Resisted

Refused  
Combatted  
Countered  
Contradicted

Not just passively  
Not just ignored  
Not just turned away from  
Not just dismissed  
Not just laughed at

Actively opposed  
Intentionally opposed  
Singled out by the powerful  
Publicly put down by leaders  
Attacked by the structures of the day  
And those who benefitted *from* those structures

Opposed for being too welcoming  
Opposed for being too insistent  
Opposed for being too honest  
Opposed for being too open  
Opposed for being too challenging  
Opposed for being too political  
Opposed for being too loving

Opposed for taking the side of the poor  
Opposed for taking the side of sex workers  
Opposed for taking the side of tax collectors  
Opposed for taking the side of traitors  
Opposed for taking the side of foreigners  
Opposed for taking the side of outsiders  
Opposed for taking the side of outcasts  
Opposed for taking the side of the unclean

Opposed  
For taking the side  
Of sinners

*Simeon blessed them  
And said to his mother Mary  
"This child is destined  
To be a sign  
That will be opposed  
So that the inner thoughts of many  
Will be revealed"*  
Revealed

Shown  
Exposed  
Brought into the light  
Make known  
Unveiled  
Laid bare

Opposing this sign  
Opposing *any* sign  
Reveals nothing about the sign  
Shows nothing about the one being opposed  
Says nothing about Jesus

Opposing this sign  
Opposing *any* sign  
Speaks *volumes*  
About the one *doing the opposing*

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of the poor  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who benefit from paying low wages

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of sex workers  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who want to pretend  
That there is a moral high ground  
Which is “theirs” by right

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of tax collectors  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who judge others for *their* decisions  
And yet absolve their own harmful choices

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of foreigners  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who place the supremacy of nation  
Above the identity given by God to all

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of outsiders  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who are insecure in their own selfhood  
Opposing Jesus

For taking the side of outcasts  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who are terrified of losing the standing  
They thought they had created for themselves

Opposing Jesus  
For taking the side of the unclean  
Reveals the inner thoughts  
Of those who can't acknowledge their own brokenness

Opposing this sign  
Opposing this Jesus  
Says nothing about Jesus  
But reveals libraries  
About the ones doing the opposing

*Simeon blessed them  
And said to his mother Mary  
"This child is destined  
To be a sign  
That will be opposed  
So that the inner thoughts of many  
Will be revealed  
And a sword shall pierce your own soul, too"*

Mary is not going to be immune  
From the pain of bearing this sign

**We** are not going to be immune  
From the pain of carrying this sign

We **too** will feel the sting  
Of being confronted by this sign  
Of recognizing our **own** opposition to Jesus  
When we refuse to welcome those who Jesus sends to us  
When we pretend that being Jesus' followers  
Is only about comfort and joy  
When we recognize our unwillingness to hear the stories of others  
That challenge our status and our privilege

That sword of Simeon's promise  
Will pierce **our** souls too  
When we recognize **our** opposition to Jesus

But that piercing  
That pain  
Is not condemnation

It's a sign of life  
A sign  
An indicator  
A notification  
That we are alive  
Alive to our real situation  
Alive to our true standing  
Alive to our own need  
For the promise that comes  
In this child

For this child  
Also reveals the inner thoughts  
Of the mind of God  
Who loves  
Who welcomes  
Who forgives  
Who reaches out  
To the poor  
To sex workers  
To tax collectors  
To traitors  
To foreigners  
To outsiders  
To outcasts  
To the unclean

And to us

At Christmas  
And always  
And forever

Master, now you are dismissing your servants in peace, according to your word; for our eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the nations and for glory to all your people. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

A - Trusting the promise of God in the Christ child, we offer our prayers for all the world's children.

*[Short pause]*

A - Sign of love, you come among us in vulnerability, in weakness, in poverty. Open us to your presence in all who are defenceless, that we may be freed from our assumptions. God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Sign of welcome, your friendship is extended to all, especially those who we consider “Other.” Open us to your presence in the stranger, that we may be freed from our prejudice. God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Sign of grace, you call us to be your people, regardless of our opposition to your invitation. Open us to the vastness of your acceptance, that we may share your gifts with the world. God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Sign of community, you bring all people together, that we may be united under your gentle hand. Open us to new ways of being your church, that we may more faithfully live the life to which you summon us. God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Sign of healing, you are found most profoundly among those who are sick, weak, outside, and cut off. Use us to spread your healing love in this dying world, especially with those we name before you.

*[Long pause]*

God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Sign of life, your arrival among us challenges us, confronts us, and awakens us to new possibilities.

Open us to your presence, that we may live into the gift you *are*. God who continues to come,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.