

Title: Simeon's Swan Song  
Text: Luke 2.29-32  
Theme: Ready to die  
Series: Advent 2025 #4  
Aim: I aim to help my people be ready to die by understanding their purpose, living for it and acknowledging that to God.

Chick-fil-A has a great little bacon, egg and cheese biscuit for breakfast. What is the most important part? Bacon, egg, cheese or biscuit? That really doesn't make sense. If you get rid of any of those four parts, then it is no longer a bacon, egg and cheese biscuit sandwich. The parts matter because they all contribute to the whole. We celebrate the birth of Christ because it is part of the whole. If there is no birth, there is no life, death, resurrection, ascension, return or reign. It is all connected. The birth of Christ may seem sweet and safe, but God's breaking into our world, rightfully understood is cosmic!

In preparing us to enjoy, celebrate and commemorate the coming of Christ to the world, we've been looking at the 4 songs/prayers that Luke records related to the birth of Christ; Mary's song, Zechariah's blessing, the angel's song and now the most overlooked of them all, Simeon's song. But this song is such a beautiful prayer because it is the happy, contented blessing of a man who knows that he has accomplished his God-given purpose and God-ordained part in God's plan to bring the Messiah to the world. But his song comes with a surprise. I've titled the sermon, Simeon's swan song. There is an ancient myth that a swan, in spite of being silent most of its life, will sing a beautiful song, just before it dies. It saves the best for last and after performing it, it is ready to die. A swan's song is a term used to describe an artist's final and most significant work. They can die satisfied that their greatest dream has at last been realized and they are bowing out at the peak of their profession or contribution. They are finally at peace. How does a designer, artist, actor, writer, teacher, coach, athlete, musician, know when they have peaked and should pack it in and call it quits? More importantly, what would it mean for you to come to the end of your life and be able to go to sleep in peace knowing that you knew your calling and purpose and that you fulfilled it? Listen to the beautiful, contented swan song of Simeon.

Read Text:

Many readings of the birth of Christ end at Luke 2.20. But there is more to the story. Like John the Baptist, Jesus was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day and formally named. 33 days later, Joseph and Mary go to Jerusalem in order to go to the Temple for three reasons in accordance with the Old Testament Law. 1) Mary needed to offer a sacrifice of purification for giving birth. This was to be done 40 days after delivery. Jesus was now almost 6 weeks old. 2) Since Jesus was the firstborn male in the family, they needed to offer a ransom payment and 3) they were offering their son in a dedication ceremony to the Lord. Of course, this is fascinating since, their son would become the ultimate means of purification. His payment would pay the final ransom payment and he, being the Son of God was actually the one they were dedicating him to. This was an important day. And when they get there, they encounter this man named Simeon and then an old woman named Anna. They are the real somebodies.

## 1. The Real Somebodies

We know from Luke's introduction that he is writing a work on the life of Christ according to the accepted formal writing style and format of his day. Because Luke is proving the authenticity of Christ, he includes a lot of biographical and historical data, such as: the names of rulers, events, specific accounts and quotes. But it is more than facts that Luke gives for authenticity to his account of Christ, he reveals the way that God works and it is different than how we think. We think that if you want to accomplish something big, then you have to acquire power in order to impose your will on others. Or, you acquire money to pay for your desires to be accomplished. Or you acquire people you can influence/intimidate into doing what you want. It's top down or outside in. But that is not how Christ and his kingdom operates. Jesus is the king of what appears to be the upside-down kingdom. God's plan for carrying out his plan is actually shocking. He does not impose his righteousness and justice on us and crush us with it. Christ came as a lowly, poor, child, raised in obscurity, only to be executed in about the most shameful and inhumane manner ever conceived in order to offer himself up as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins. What kind of a king is this? What kind of Kingdom is this? This is not the kind of kings and politicians we are accustomed to.

For example, there are 3 prominent rulers named in these first 2 chapters; Herod, king of Judea (1.5), Caesar Augustus, emperor of the Roman empire (2.1) and Quirinius, governor of Syria (2.2). Herod, the Great (as he called himself) ruled in the region by appointment of Rome from 37 B.C. to 4 A.D. The older he got, the more paranoid he became, famously killing a couple of sons he viewed as a threat to his power and even his wife Mariamne. He died in Jericho after suffering from an exceedingly painful disease and "putrefying illness" that became known as "Herod's Evil." As he neared the end, he knew that no one would mourn his death, so he ordered a large group of distinguished men in the country, be arrested and brought to Jericho, and then, at the time of his death, these men were to be executed so that at least some people would mourn. This megalomaniac is one of many in this world.

Caesar Augustus, was also known as Octavian. His family had connections in Rome that enabled him to rise to power, eventually becoming emperor. Augustus gained power through power and had to hold on to it through constant threats and killings. Quirinius was a tutor to two members of the Caesar's family and that relationship gave him status and a position in the Roman Empire.

These three men were well known in their lifetimes and were part of the Who's Who of the Roman World, but in reality, Herod, Caesar, and Quirinius were bit players in the plan of God and unwittingly carried out his plan, yet remained in the dark. Rome appeared to be the seat of power, when in reality the seat of power was a manger in Bethlehem. The real power-players did not have their names and images minted on coins, but their names and stories are told in the Scriptures. The people who appeared to the kings to be the "pawns" were the real insiders who willingly participated in God's plan and were in the know and had a front-row seat on what he was doing.

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary, shepherds, Simeon, and Anna are nobodies in their world, but their names and stories are etched in the Word of God and the plan of God. Once again, the seat of power and the real sources of authority are not the White House and Capitol Hill, but where faithful people are making much of God by deliberately and consistently following him.

## **2. The Real Story (2.29-32)**

Simeon is worth listening to and looking at because you are going to come to the end of your life someday. It may not be this week, or this year, but for all of us, it is going to come a lot sooner than we imagine right now. So many people die with regrets and I mean deep ones. All of their accomplishments and possessions are not enough to numb them from their unaddressed sins that resurface when facing your final days. I am not being dramatic when I ask you to imagine being alone with your thoughts with six hours to live. What will it be worth to you to be at that point and be at peace? This was Simeon's story.

Simeon is described as a man in Jerusalem. He may have lived there. He was righteous and devout. He believed God and he was faithful to follow God's law. He longed for and looked for the coming of the Messiah. He was "*waiting for the consolation of Israel.*" His affections were given to the plan of God for rescuing his people. Luke says that "the Holy Spirit was upon him 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" (Messiah).

On the day that Joseph and Mary went to the Temple to offer their sacrifice, Simeon was there. Maybe he went every day. Maybe he happened to be in town and went. Maybe the Spirit told him to go that day. But he was there and he was looking. The meeting between Simeon and Joseph and Mary was directed by God. The Temple area is about 33-35 acres. It covers about 35 football fields. Thousands of people could be in the Temple area at the same time. On this day, Joseph and Mary, along with 6-week-old Jesus meet Simeon who takes Jesus into his arms. Somehow, he knew when he saw Jesus that this was the Messiah. My guess is that Simeon and Anna were in the area of the Temple where new parents went to offer these sacrifices and make these dedications. Before Joseph and Mary got to do what they came to do, Simeon interrupted them (27b). He took Jesus up in his arms and he blesses God with this song/prayer. Simeon's prayer is incredible. He blesses God because God is allowing Simeon his servant (bondslave) to die in peace according to the promise that God made to him.

### **A. He knew the plan. (29-35)**

This is the language of a soldier who has fulfilled his mission and is now relieved of duty for a good reason. God had kept his word to Israel in bringing the Messiah, and God was keeping his promise to Simeon that he would not die until he got to see him. And here it is. But Simeon knows that God's plan is redemptive. Like the angel's announcement to the shepherds, Simeon says, "*my eyes have seen your salvation.*" He is calling Jesus Savior. This is good news, however, look at v.34-35. Simeon is the first one to address the cost of this salvation. (read) Simeon knows there will be a serious price to pay and that Mary is going to face deep pain as a result.

Simeon also knows that this plan of God is so much bigger than him, and bigger than Israel. This salvation has been prepared “in the presence of all peoples.” Simeon is referencing Psalm 98, Isaiah 42, 49, 52 and 60. The Messiah is a light for revelation to the Gentiles (32a) and for glory to your people Israel. This is very significant. By referencing this second section of Isaiah (Isaiah 40-66) and connecting that to Christ, Simeon was telling us something else about Jesus. This Messiah was not only in the line of David and would be King (as the first two songs tell us) but this Messiah as also the suffering servant that Isaiah prophesied about. King and Savior. Victorious conqueror and suffering savior were all connected in Christ.

Do you see what I see in v.32? The light of the world for the Gentiles is the light that reveals God’s redemption and God’s plan to the peoples of the world. This light for the Gentiles is also for the glory of Israel. There is no competition between God’s light for the Gentiles and God receiving glory through favor given to Israel. The animosity of antisemitism is simply hatred of God and the doctrine of election. Why are the Jews hated? Because God chose them to be a special people. Yes, but don’t stop there. What makes them a special people? Because they are the people through whom the Savior of the world comes. Simeon knew that God’s plan to save Israel was the same plan to save the nations. Both Jews and Gentiles have the same Savior.

#### **B. He knew that he had a part in the plan. (29)**

Simeon knew that God planned to send the Messiah and Simeon knew that God’s plan directly involved him. He would get to see the Messiah with his own eyes before he died. Therefore, Simeon knew that things were happening. The plan of God was going forward. These promises were indeed going to be fulfilled and it was go-time. The plan was centered on Jesus. Jesus would be the reason for many to rise and for many in Israel to fall. This was not going to be an easy road. This one that he was holding was the Messiah who would be received and resisted. God had told him that he would get to see the Messiah before he died, and now it was actually happening. Simeon would likely be dead before he saw Jesus do miracles or heard him preach, or watch him die and hear about or see the resurrection. Luke does not tell us how old Simeon is. The opening line of his prayer/song gives us the idea that he knows that the finish line for him is not too far away. Which means...

#### **C. He knew that his part was fulfilled. (29)**

This was his mission. He saw Christ and he gave a message to Joseph and Mary. This was more than a private thing between him and God. God prepared him in order to tell them this and they “*marveled at what was said about him.*” (v.33) Simeon’s mission was to be a witness to Joseph and Mary. But Simeon’s word to them also revealed that the plan of God for the Messiah was for the world and would come at a steep cost. This was hard for Joseph and Mary to hear. And the fact that Simeon said it directly to Mary and not to Joseph was noted. Joseph would not live to see his son’s public ministry. His “untimely” death was planned by God and here, God was already preparing Mary for it, through Simeon. Jesus would be the source of pain for those who rejected him, and their rejection would be a source of deep sorrow for Mary.

One of the Christmas songs that every artist has to arrange and record is, "Have yourself a merry little Christmas." One of the lines, as you know is: "from now on all our troubles will be out of sight" then in the next verse, "from now on our troubles will be miles away." It's a nice wish, but not true. There is no such thing. And one of the reasons why there is sadness for many at this season is because we feel the gap between what we wish the holiday were and what it is.

What do you see in this text? What has Luke 1 and 2 all been about? The first Christmas was not a perfect family gathering with wonderful presents, gently falling snow, carriage rides, decorations and the Lions making the playoffs. The first Christmas certainly had joy but there was also the promise of sorrow. God came to us in our need but in order to rescue us, he had to die for us. In order to die, he had to be hated and rejected. He had to bear our sin and pay for it with his life. This was the plan. Mary was being informed about the plan. This was a hard and costly road, but it would be worth it. The cost of securing our salvation was steep, but worth it. And for those who followed Christ then, they felt some of that pain and rejection. For those of us, who follow him now, we feel some of it too, even as we long for the day when it will be gone. And now we have even more reason to anticipate the day when sorrow will be banished and only joy will be found. From then on, all of our troubles will be out of sight and will never return. What is your goal in life right now? Is it to have a life where all of your troubles will be out of sight? God never promised you that. What he does offer you is something better. He offers you a part in his plan to remake this world as it is supposed to be. It starts with you embracing Christ as your Savior/King and joining his group of nobodies who are part of the greatest Kingdom ever.