



Why do we do these things that we do? Why do we get all dressed up, pass out candles, parade around the Church, and even set things on fire?! Because...while the world stopped celebrating Christmas at noon on December 25, Christmas actually ends today.

Christmas is broken into three sections. First is the Feast itself. Then it is the 12 days of Christmas. But then the season of Christmas actually ends today. 40 days ago we met in the same place and did the same thing didn't we? We started the Christmas season with candles and now today, on Candlemas, the Christmas season ends. The Church creates these bookends of the Christmas season by the use of candles. This is of course the confession that the Light of the World has come into the world and now makes himself known to us. These candles are an image of Christ: that we have light that comes not from the sun, not from electricity, but a light that comes from elsewhere. A light that the darkness cannot overcome. Such is Christ. On Christmas Eve we gathered with candles as we celebrated the Light of the World being born. Now, with Simeon, we confess that this Light has come to enlighten the gentiles. Well that's fine but why do you get to hold candles on these days? Because you get to participate in this Light.

And this is so because you get to participate with Simeon. You sing his song because you receive the same Lord he did. We don't know much about Simeon but we know that he held the same Savior that you receive from this altar and you sing the same song he did.

When you see artwork of this day, I can almost guarantee you that it will always be wrong. Pretty much every artistic depiction I have ever seen of this moment has Simeon holding Jesus and gazing off into heaven as he says "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace...". No! Dead wrong. He sings this song looking into the face of God whom he holds in his arms. Just like you do when you sing this song after you receive the Eucharist. You don't sing to some far off distant unknown deity, you sing this song to God who is made present on the altar and has in body and blood bound Himself to you this day. You and Simeon sing the same song because you receive the same Gift.

Having received the Body and Blood of Christ, this uncreated light has come to you in this place and you get to receive this light—God Himself from this altar. And with Simeon, you confess that in this sacrament that you have seen God Himself. That your eyes have seen his salvation on this altar.

Where you and simeon, having received the same Lord sing "**Lord now you can let your servant go in peace. I've seen your salvation which you have prepared as**

a light for every people. A light to reveal you to the nations, a light that is the glory for your people Israel". This is as if you say, "Having received this blessed sacrament, I can die now. I have seen the face of God. I have seen the Lord's salvation. I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. I have seen the Death of death and I have no fear".

With Simeon, you sing this song confessing that you can die now. In the same way that Simeon had waited who knows how long for Jesus, he reached the pinnacle of human existence as he received the Lord. So also do you as you receive the Body and Blood of Christ from this altar. When you sing this song or your read the script over the door, **Departing in peace** is not talking about getting out of here to watch the Superbowl, it is a confession that you have received life and Him who has conquered death and that you are ready to die. *That* is what you confess when you sing the *Nunc Dimittis*, you are confessing that you can die. Having received the uncreated Light that no darkness can overcome, the darkness of death cannot overcome the light of immortality you received in this sacrament.

There are 3 other times in which Christians most often sing this hymn: one is before you go to bed. There is an order of prayer in your hymnals called compline on page 253. It is a historic prayer office for the ending of the day and it ends with this song. The other times that this is used is at your deathbed and at your funeral. Where

pastor will approach the blessed dead, place his hand on the casket and sing this song. This is used before bed and at deathbeds and funerals because when you pray before bed as though you're going to your grave, then when you go to your grave it is just like going to your bed. This is what Simeon means that **now you let your servant go in PEACE..** Like Simeon, you can depart this life in peace because you and he have seen the Lord who has come to release sinners from bondage, give to you the objective peace that passes all understanding, and now you are able to die. Having received the medicine of immortality, you yourself become immortal. You are not constrained and burdened by the cares of this life. Yes death will come but it is not the end. Yes depression will come but you have the joy and peace of Christ. Yes you will face hardships in life but you do so with the peace of Christ and knowledge of your salvation.

With Simeon you sing, **“My eyes have seen thy salvation”**... You and Simeon see salvation in Jesus because Jesus is salvation. You fear not to enter some dark and lonely tomb because there has your savior laid and conquered all gloom. That is why Christian tombstones read *Rest in Peace*. This is the peace—Jesus is the peace in which you rest. We see at the end of the Gospel in the resurrection where this peace comes from. When The Crucified and risen Lord comes and stands among

the apostles, shows them his nail scarred hands and feet and says “Peace”. Because from these wounds is where you receive peace.

So how does our reading end? It ends with an eerie prophecy given to Mary. That a sword shall pierce her heart and that her Son will cause the rising and falling of many in Israel. This one man with the same actions and the same words and the same death will have different effects on different people. He is for the falling of many because any who reject Him will find themselves in damnation. Yet at the same time He is for the rising of many—of all who will, like Simeon, receive Him.

Because this sword that will pierce Mary’s heart is the sword that once guarded the doorway to Eden and barred us from life with God. Now that sword is thrust into the very flesh that God took from the Virgin Mary, granting us access to God—through Christ and at this altar and giving us this peace of which Simeon speaks. That is why you sing his song, because you have received the eternal God and participate in the eternal light. For Simeon it was in the temple, for you it was at this altar. You receive the same God that he did—the same uncreated Light.

I am not one to wax poetically...maybe I am...nevertheless, if I may for a minute, consider the moon. The moon has no light of its own. Yet it shines in the darkness nonetheless. The only light that the moon has is what it reflects from the sun. The moon was made to reflect the light of the sun. That is the image of the Church. The

Church has no light of its own but Jesus calls her the light of the world nonetheless. We reflect the Light of Christ to those who sit in darkness. The Church reflects the light of Christ. You get to participate in that light. That is why you get to hold candles. And like these candles, like the moon, you are made for the light. You are made to participate in the light. You are made to reflect that Light of Christ that has come to enlighten the unbelievers and be and the glory of the True Israel—God’s Church. Because make no mistake, this Israel of which Simeon—and the rest of the Scriptures speak—is not some country made up in 1948 and called Israel. He is speaking about you who receive this Light. And Jesus calls you to let this light shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. You participate in the eternal light and you receive from this altar everlasting life.

So therefore as those who are called to reflect the light of Christ, conduct yourselves as those on whom this light has shone. You confess in the Nunc Dimittis that you are ready to die in peace because having received the medicine of immortality, you are immortal. Because you abide in the eternal light of Christ and when you die, you do not actually die; you live forever in Christ. Because you receive the Lord, your life is not one that is bound by time, space, or matter. What you do here in time echoes into eternity. That is

what you confess with Simeon, that you are immortal and your life is not bound up in death or in sadness. But you live forever. Conduct yourselves not as those who are perishing but as those who are immortal.

To God be all ✝ Glory forever and ever.