
Luke 2:25-40. ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

Give thanks for the gift of faith.

Treasure the gift of the faithful.

What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

gift held in his hands was his personal Savior too. Then another came forward in similar fashion, a woman well advanced in age who expressed the kind of joy that we might expect to see on the face of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning, As Anna gazed upon this gift given for her, she spoke a message of redemption and how this child would set his people free! What a sight this must have been! Think of the childlike joy of Christmas morning. Think of children celebrating the gifts that they had waited months and years for and imagine the wonder in the eyes of Simeon and Anna, as the gift they had hoped for had come just as promised. The greatest gift once wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger was now being unwrapped and lifted up and celebrated as the precious Savior that he was!

Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

There is a rational part of us that might follow the logic that says that a person ought to be hardened by a long life living in this world of sin and such a person would consequently grow cynical of the concept of a loving God who sent his Son born of a virgin to be our Savior. Reason and time would likely talk the people grown-ups out of such childish things. No doubt, the devil does his best to attack each one of us with such temptations. To whittle down and erode our faith over time our wily foe turns our eyes towards the problems of this world and the heartbreaks that come to us personally, as he then slowly shoves us toward apathy and bitterness toward God and his gifts of grace. When times are exceptionally pressing, we may be tempted to willingly turn or even run in that same devilish direction towards our deserved destruction. But today the Lord is his grace, as he so often does, gently shifts our eyes to see the good news of Christ and the power of his Word. The LORD faithfully calls out to us with his promises and points us to the shining light of Christ and the brilliant reflection of those who follow him in faith. And while it does happen that reason and time erodes the faith of some, the fact that the opposite occurs, as often as it does, speaks volumes about the miracle and the wonder of faith. Consider the blessing of the faith of our elders, and treasure this as yet another God-given gift presented to us once again today.

I know you can bring quickly to mind example after example of the power of God's Word and his Holy Spirit, making inroads and a permanent dwelling in the hearts of men and women who are (to borrow a phrase from a church member) in their more "mature" years.

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The prophet Isaiah speaks of those who have such a faith as those made by God to be oaks of righteousness – a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Consider how such examples of faith subtly stand among us as a display of God's splendor. Often such life-long Christians - war vets and widows, cancer survivors and congregational long-timers - can be overheard speaking to the fact that they hold even tighter to those precious promises as they get older. This serves as encouraging evidence that God deepens and strengthens the faith of the faithful among us through the power of Word and Sacrament. For that word of God publicly proclaimed and personally given through study and sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit as he works through these means to strengthen and save.

Envision in your mind these oaks of righteousness singled out for us today. Simeon and Anna. For much of their life, they have been deprived of public prophetic activity, there was no family Bible to turn to and open, and the spiritual leaders of the day had led the people astray. Those who were supposed to point the people to the Word of God had instead become self-centered, corrupt, and divisive, and much of the public worship that the common people engaged in had become a hypocritical or a least shallow custom, as ritual and ceremony were often their chief concern. The temple while rather glorious in appearance was in many ways a shell of what the tabernacle and the temple used to be. And the problems of a sinful world were just as prevalent as they are today. Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, moral decay, sickness and suffering, the death of friends and family around them, Simeon and Anna saw it all first-hand. The darkness of this sinful world was very much on display daily. Their hearts could have easily grown cold. Reason and time could have talked them out of what seemed like a foolish faith and childish devotion. Like others, they could have given up on the promises that they heard as children and let go and moved on. But they didn't. Their faithfulness, their devoutness, came from a God who was faithful to every one of his promises. And God the Holy Spirit had blessed them with the wonderful gift of his Word and these believers were each blessed as they were personally connected to his promises. And so as they recited those promises from prophets like Isaiah, as they ran through those accounts of Moses and traced the promises God made

to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

With the eyes of faith, we stare down at this child and we rejoice that he is born for us. In this Christmas season, we are renewed once again in this hope and joy and peace that Christ brings. As we are encouraged by our fellow believers, Simeon and Anna, we also give thanks for those who have gone before us and those who are gathered with us here today! With childlike faith and excitement, together we give thanks to God for these Christmas miracles: God's Son was born to save us, God grants us the faith to believe this, and God encourages us through the gift of the faithful! Give thanks, sing, and proclaim the praise of the Child born to be our salvation! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Amen.

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to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

With the eyes of faith, we stare down at this child and we rejoice that he is born for us. In this Christmas season, we are renewed once again in this hope and joy and peace that Christ brings. As we are encouraged by our fellow believers, Simeon and Anna, we also give thanks for those who have gone before us and those who are gathered with us here today! With childlike faith and excitement, together we give thanks to God for these Christmas miracles: God's Son was born to save us, God grants us the faith to believe this, and God encourages us through the gift of the faithful! Give thanks, sing, and proclaim the praise of the Child born to be our salvation! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Amen.

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Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

Give thanks for the gift of faith.

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

gift held in his hands was his personal Savior too. Then another came forward in similar fashion, a woman well advanced in age who expressed the kind of joy that we might expect to see on the face of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning, As Anna gazed upon this gift given for her, she spoke a message of redemption and how this child would set his people free! What a sight this must have been! Think of the childlike joy of Christmas morning. Think of children celebrating the gifts that they had waited months and years for and imagine the wonder in the eyes of Simeon and Anna, as the gift they had hoped for had come just as promised. The greatest gift once wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger was now being unwrapped and lifted up and celebrated as the precious Savior that he was!

Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

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Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

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Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

With the eyes of faith, we stare down at this child and we rejoice that he is born for us. In this Christmas season, we are renewed once again in this hope and joy and peace that Christ brings. As we are encouraged by our fellow believers, Simeon and Anna, we also give thanks for those who have gone before us and those who are gathered with us here today! With childlike faith and excitement, together we give thanks to God for these Christmas miracles: God's Son was born to save us, God grants us the faith to believe this, and God encourages us through the gift of the faithful! Give thanks, sing, and proclaim the praise of the Child born to be our salvation! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Amen.

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

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Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

There is a rational part of us that might follow the logic that says that a person ought to be hardened by a long life living in this world of sin and such a person would consequently grow cynical of the concept of a loving God who sent his Son born of a virgin to be our Savior. Reason and time would likely talk the people grown-ups out of such childish things. No doubt, the devil does his best to attack each one of us with such temptations. To whittle down and erode our faith over time our wily foe turns our eyes towards the problems of this world and the heartbreaks that come to us personally, as he then slowly shoves us toward apathy and bitterness toward God and his gifts of grace. When times are exceptionally pressing, we may be tempted to willingly turn or even run in that same devilish direction towards our deserved destruction. But today the Lord is his grace, as he so often does, gently shifts our eyes to see the good news of Christ and the power of his Word. The LORD faithfully calls out to us with his promises and points us to the shining light of Christ and the brilliant reflection of those who follow him in faith. And while it does happen that reason and time erodes the faith of some, the fact that the opposite occurs, as often as it does, speaks volumes about the miracle and the wonder of faith. Consider the blessing of the faith of our elders, and treasure this as yet another God-given gift presented to us once again today.

I know you can bring quickly to mind example after example of the power of God's Word and his Holy Spirit, making inroads and a permanent dwelling in the hearts of men and women who are (to borrow a phrase from a church member) in their more "mature" years.

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The prophet Isaiah speaks of those who have such a faith as those made by God to be oaks of righteousness – a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Consider how such examples of faith subtly stand among us as a display of God's splendor. Often such life-long Christians - war vets and widows, cancer survivors and congregational long-timers - can be overheard speaking to the fact that they hold even tighter to those precious promises as they get older. This serves as encouraging evidence that God deepens and strengthens the faith of the faithful among us through the power of Word and Sacrament. For that word of God publicly proclaimed and personally given through study and sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit as he works through these means to strengthen and save.

Envision in your mind these oaks of righteousness singled out for us today. Simeon and Anna. For much of their life, they have been deprived of public prophetic activity, there was no family Bible to turn to and open, and the spiritual leaders of the day had led the people astray. Those who were supposed to point the people to the Word of God had instead become self-centered, corrupt, and divisive, and much of the public worship that the common people engaged in had become a hypocritical or a least shallow custom, as ritual and ceremony were often their chief concern. The temple while rather glorious in appearance was in many ways a shell of what the tabernacle and the temple used to be. And the problems of a sinful world were just as prevalent as they are today. Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, moral decay, sickness and suffering, the death of friends and family around them, Simeon and Anna saw it all first-hand. The darkness of this sinful world was very much on display daily. Their hearts could have easily grown cold. Reason and time could have talked them out of what seemed like a foolish faith and childish devotion. Like others, they could have given up on the promises that they heard as children and let go and moved on. But they didn't. Their faithfulness, their devoutness, came from a God who was faithful to every one of his promises. And God the Holy Spirit had blessed them with the wonderful gift of his Word and these believers were each blessed as they were personally connected to his promises. And so as they recited those promises from prophets like Isaiah, as they ran through those accounts of Moses and traced the promises God made

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to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

With the eyes of faith, we stare down at this child and we rejoice that he is born for us. In this Christmas season, we are renewed once again in this hope and joy and peace that Christ brings. As we are encouraged by our fellow believers, Simeon and Anna, we also give thanks for those who have gone before us and those who are gathered with us here today! With childlike faith and excitement, together we give thanks to God for these Christmas miracles: God's Son was born to save us, God grants us the faith to believe this, and God encourages us through the gift of the faithful! Give thanks, sing, and proclaim the praise of the Child born to be our salvation! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Amen.

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Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

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Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

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Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

Give thanks for the gift of faith.

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

gift held in his hands was his personal Savior too. Then another came forward in similar fashion, a woman well advanced in age who expressed the kind of joy that we might expect to see on the face of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning, As Anna gazed upon this gift given for her, she spoke a message of redemption and how this child would set his people free! What a sight this must have been! Think of the childlike joy of Christmas morning. Think of children celebrating the gifts that they had waited months and years for and imagine the wonder in the eyes of Simeon and Anna, as the gift they had hoped for had come just as promised. The greatest gift once wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger was now being unwrapped and lifted up and celebrated as the precious Savior that he was!

Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

There is a rational part of us that might follow the logic that says that a person ought to be hardened by a long life living in this world of sin and such a person would consequently grow cynical of the concept of a loving God who sent his Son born of a virgin to be our Savior. Reason and time would likely talk the people grown-ups out of such childish things. No doubt, the devil does his best to attack each one of us with such temptations. To whittle down and erode our faith over time our wily foe turns our eyes towards the problems of this world and the heartbreaks that come to us personally, as he then slowly shoves us toward apathy and bitterness toward God and his gifts of grace. When times are exceptionally pressing, we may be tempted to willingly turn or even run in that same devilish direction towards our deserved destruction. But today the Lord is his grace, as he so often does, gently shifts our eyes to see the good news of Christ and the power of his Word. The LORD faithfully calls out to us with his promises and points us to the shining light of Christ and the brilliant reflection of those who follow him in faith. And while it does happen that reason and time erodes the faith of some, the fact that the opposite occurs, as often as it does, speaks volumes about the miracle and the wonder of faith. Consider the blessing of the faith of our elders, and treasure this as yet another God-given gift presented to us once again today.

I know you can bring quickly to mind example after example of the power of God's Word and his Holy Spirit, making inroads and a permanent dwelling in the hearts of men and women who are (to borrow a phrase from a church member) in their more "mature" years.

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The prophet Isaiah speaks of those who have such a faith as those made by God to be oaks of righteousness – a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Consider how such examples of faith subtly stand among us as a display of God's splendor. Often such life-long Christians - war vets and widows, cancer survivors and congregational long-timers - can be overheard speaking to the fact that they hold even tighter to those precious promises as they get older. This serves as encouraging evidence that God deepens and strengthens the faith of the faithful among us through the power of Word and Sacrament. For that word of God publicly proclaimed and personally given through study and sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit as he works through these means to strengthen and save.

Envision in your mind these oaks of righteousness singled out for us today. Simeon and Anna. For much of their life, they have been deprived of public prophetic activity, there was no family Bible to turn to and open, and the spiritual leaders of the day had led the people astray. Those who were supposed to point the people to the Word of God had instead become self-centered, corrupt, and divisive, and much of the public worship that the common people engaged in had become a hypocritical or a least shallow custom, as ritual and ceremony were often their chief concern. The temple while rather glorious in appearance was in many ways a shell of what the tabernacle and the temple used to be. And the problems of a sinful world were just as prevalent as they are today. Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, moral decay, sickness and suffering, the death of friends and family around them, Simeon and Anna saw it all first-hand. The darkness of this sinful world was very much on display daily. Their hearts could have easily grown cold. Reason and time could have talked them out of what seemed like a foolish faith and childish devotion. Like others, they could have given up on the promises that they heard as children and let go and moved on. But they didn't. Their faithfulness, their devoutness, came from a God who was faithful to every one of his promises. And God the Holy Spirit had blessed them with the wonderful gift of his Word and these believers were each blessed as they were personally connected to his promises. And so as they recited those promises from prophets like Isaiah, as they ran through those accounts of Moses and traced the promises God made

to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

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to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

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to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

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Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

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Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

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Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

There is a rational part of us that might follow the logic that says that a person ought to be hardened by a long life living in this world of sin and such a person would consequently grow cynical of the concept of a loving God who sent his Son born of a virgin to be our Savior. Reason and time would likely talk the people grown-ups out of such childish things. No doubt, the devil does his best to attack each one of us with such temptations. To whittle down and erode our faith over time our wily foe turns our eyes towards the problems of this world and the heartbreaks that come to us personally, as he then slowly shoves us toward apathy and bitterness toward God and his gifts of grace. When times are exceptionally pressing, we may be tempted to willingly turn or even run in that same devilish direction towards our deserved destruction. But today the Lord is his grace, as he so often does, gently shifts our eyes to see the good news of Christ and the power of his Word. The LORD faithfully calls out to us with his promises and points us to the shining light of Christ and the brilliant reflection of those who follow him in faith. And while it does happen that reason and time erodes the faith of some, the fact that the opposite occurs, as often as it does, speaks volumes about the miracle and the wonder of faith. Consider the blessing of the faith of our elders, and treasure this as yet another God-given gift presented to us once again today.

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The prophet Isaiah speaks of those who have such a faith as those made by God to be oaks of righteousness – a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Consider how such examples of faith subtly stand among us as a display of God's splendor. Often such life-long Christians - war vets and widows, cancer survivors and congregational long-timers - can be overheard speaking to the fact that they hold even tighter to those precious promises as they get older. This serves as encouraging evidence that God deepens and strengthens the faith of the faithful among us through the power of Word and Sacrament. For that word of God publicly proclaimed and personally given through study and sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit as he works through these means to strengthen and save.

Envision in your mind these oaks of righteousness singled out for us today. Simeon and Anna. For much of their life, they have been deprived of public prophetic activity, there was no family Bible to turn to and open, and the spiritual leaders of the day had led the people astray. Those who were supposed to point the people to the Word of God had instead become self-centered, corrupt, and divisive, and much of the public worship that the common people engaged in had become a hypocritical or a least shallow custom, as ritual and ceremony were often their chief concern. The temple while rather glorious in appearance was in many ways a shell of what the tabernacle and the temple used to be. And the problems of a sinful world were just as prevalent as they are today. Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, moral decay, sickness and suffering, the death of friends and family around them, Simeon and Anna saw it all first-hand. The darkness of this sinful world was very much on display daily. Their hearts could have easily grown cold. Reason and time could have talked them out of what seemed like a foolish faith and childish devotion. Like others, they could have given up on the promises that they heard as children and let go and moved on. But they didn't. Their faithfulness, their devoutness, came from a God who was faithful to every one of his promises. And God the Holy Spirit had blessed them with the wonderful gift of his Word and these believers were each blessed as they were personally connected to his promises. And so as they recited those promises from prophets like Isaiah, as they ran through those accounts of Moses and traced the promises God made

to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

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to his people throughout history, as they revisited the promises that God had made to them personally, that as they stood in the house of God they may have even rehearsed how this would all come true. And then one day it did. The gift wrapped in the pages of prophecy was now being opened and revealed before them. A gift from both God the Father and his Spirit was revealed in this precious tiny frame of the Son. And their eyes were filled with joy as their gaze was fixed on the one who was the fulfillment of their faith. They rejoiced in the one who made their hearts so full that they spoke aloud these words of elegant prophecy in happy and triumphant tones. How blessed they were that over all these years their faith was deepened, strengthened, bore the simple fruit of faithfulness, and then according to God's timing it was so memorably rewarded and lifted up as an encouragement to us all.

Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

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What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

gift held in his hands was his personal Savior too. Then another came forward in similar fashion, a woman well advanced in age who expressed the kind of joy that we might expect to see on the face of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning, As Anna gazed upon this gift given for her, she spoke a message of redemption and how this child would set his people free! What a sight this must have been! Think of the childlike joy of Christmas morning. Think of children celebrating the gifts that they had waited months and years for and imagine the wonder in the eyes of Simeon and Anna, as the gift they had hoped for had come just as promised. The greatest gift once wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger was now being unwrapped and lifted up and celebrated as the precious Savior that he was!

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Let us give thanks for this great gift of God opened up before these saints of God. Look upon this good news of Christmas and hold up that precious gift of Jesus given for all nations and know that this gift is for you too. He is our salvation, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel, and He is given for us as well. And as that gift is unwrapped for all take a moment to look around. Be encouraged by the saints before you and the people around you who share in this gift. Consider the joy and light, the comfort and the peace that Jesus brings to each of us. Look with the wonder of a child and through the eyes of a seasoned believer and know that this same truth of exuberant joy and this same breathtaking peace given to all mankind shines ever so brightly in the darkness of our world still today! The Son of God took on flesh to save each and every one of us: those of the ancient world, modern times, and everything in between. He came to save young and old, man, woman, and child. He is given as a gift to all of us.

In light of the joy Christmas, we hold up the gift of Jesus and know that the joy we have in God's gifts remains throughout the years as a source of hope and peace and light for each and everyone of us! From childhood, through the ups and downs of life, to our final breath we have been given the gift of peace in Christ our Savior - for our Lord has bestowed on the gift of his Son who brings salvation and the steadfast assurance of eternal life! Rejoice in these great and many gifts given to you and give thanks that you and I are so blessed that not only can we depart the house of God in peace, but when our last hour comes, we are blessed to depart this life in peace. For by God's gift of faith we have been given the forgiveness and salvation that opens up the very way to heaven for us! This child, this Jesus, is the very gift of salvation, given for all nations!

With the eyes of faith, we stare down at this child and we rejoice that he is born for us. In this Christmas season, we are renewed once again in this hope and joy and peace that Christ brings. As we are encouraged by our fellow believers, Simeon and Anna, we also give thanks for those who have gone before us and those who are gathered with us here today! With childlike faith and excitement, together we give thanks to God for these Christmas miracles: God's Son was born to save us, God grants us the faith to believe this, and God encourages us through the gift of the faithful! Give thanks, sing, and proclaim the praise of the Child born to be our salvation! ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** Amen.

Luke 2:25-40. ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."³⁶ There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Rejoice in the gifts of God

Hold up the precious gift of Jesus.

Give thanks for the gift of faith.

Treasure the gift of the faithful.

What those eyes must have seen? Political turmoil, social upheaval, spiritual apathy, medical dilemmas, and moral decay. Simeon and Anna would have been familiar with it all. While that could be a fitting description of the times we are currently in, a person in first-century Palestine and Judea would have been steeped in many of the same kind of trials that we face today, with far less of the modern comforts and luxuries. And yet through it all, there was hope in the darkness for them as it is for us. For God's promises strengthened and upheld these two servants of God in a very memorable way. A man waiting for the consolation of Israel stood in the temple courts and held the Son of God in his arms. By the Spirit's miracle of faith, he possessed and expressed such peace that not even the thought of death could put a damper on the joy that he had. For he knew that this child was indeed the Chosen One who would bring comfort and salvation to all nations. Some would not believe that to be true, some would flat out reject Jesus as the Messiah, but by God's grace, Simeon knew it to be true. By Spirit-worked faith, he believed that this child held in his arms was the glory of his people Israel, a light of hope and salvation for all nations, and that this precious

gift held in his hands was his personal Savior too. Then another came forward in similar fashion, a woman well advanced in age who expressed the kind of joy that we might expect to see on the face of a child opening a gift on Christmas morning, As Anna gazed upon this gift given for her, she spoke a message of redemption and how this child would set his people free! What a sight this must have been! Think of the childlike joy of Christmas morning. Think of children celebrating the gifts that they had waited months and years for and imagine the wonder in the eyes of Simeon and Anna, as the gift they had hoped for had come just as promised. The greatest gift once wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger was now being unwrapped and lifted up and celebrated as the precious Savior that he was!

Let us together - young and old alike - rejoice along with these fellow believers as we lay our eyes upon this gift of salvation and hold up the joy, and light, that is the Christ child! And we hold up the precious gift of Jesus, let us also give thanks for the gift of faith that God has given us and treasure the gift of faithful believers that surround us. Consider what an 80-year-old woman or a 90-year-old man among us today has experienced in this life. What those eyes have seen! *Multiple* health crises, national upheaval on various levels, seasons of global turmoil, intense military conflicts including a world war, a restless cycle of social unrest, so much change - both advancements and failures of society. What those eyes have seen! Take a moment to let that sink in, and then think of that fellow believer in your family or in your church that after seeing all of that still faithfully rejoices with childlike faith in this gift of God's salvation. Some may regard Christmas as a holiday that focuses chiefly on the joy of children but take some time today to consider the faith of your elders and how - after all they have seen and experienced - so many of our parents, grandparents, and neighbors speak so passionately of the unparalleled peace that they have in the message of Jesus Christ their Savior.

There is a rational part of us that might follow the logic that says that a person ought to be hardened by a long life living in this world of sin and such a person would consequently grow cynical of the concept of a loving God who sent his Son born of a virgin to be our Savior. Reason and time would likely talk the people grown-ups out of such childish things. No doubt, the devil does his best to attack each one of us with such temptations. To whittle down and erode our faith over time our wily foe turns our eyes towards the problems of this world and the heartbreaks that come to us personally, as he then slowly shoves us toward apathy and bitterness toward God and his gifts of grace. When times are exceptionally pressing, we may be tempted to willingly turn or even run in that same devilish direction towards our deserved destruction. But today the Lord is his grace, as he so often does, gently shifts our eyes to see the good news of Christ and the power of his Word. The LORD faithfully calls out to us with his promises and points us to the shining light of Christ and the brilliant reflection of those who follow him in faith. And while it does happen that reason and time erodes the faith of some, the fact that the opposite occurs, as often as it does, speaks volumes about the miracle and the wonder of faith. Consider the blessing of the faith of our elders, and treasure this as yet another God-given gift presented to us once again today.

I know you can bring quickly to mind example after example of the power of God's Word and his Holy Spirit, making inroads and a permanent dwelling in the hearts of men and women who are (to borrow a phrase from a church member) in their more "mature" years.

Seated in front of me, week after week, are faithfully devoted believers, who are often seasoned both in years and God's grace. Even in the midst of a pandemic people keep showing up or tuning in, some tackling new technology so that they can stay connected to Christ. The people gathered here, the people gathered out there watching online, are a source of blessed encouragement for all of us, as they are rooted in God's Word and Sacraments. These means of grace have been their continual companion through a life that has not always been easy. *Oh, what those eyes must have seen!?* And yet by the power of the Holy Spirit such believers have not been torn away by the issues of the day or dragged away by personal trials, nor have they been pulled from the hand of God by the spiritual fads or endless idols that this worldly life prolifically produces, but rather by God's gift of grace such faithful believers remain planted in God's Word and growing in Christ. And they stand tall as a source of God-given encouragement for faithful believers. Perhaps at this time of year, we can think of such believers, standing tall during a dark and difficult season like a tall and sturdy evergreen tree standing tall in the cold, holding up the weight of snow, and remaining green throughout the difficult season of winter.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of those who have such a faith as those made by God to be oaks of righteousness – a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Consider how such examples of faith subtly stand among us as a display of God's splendor. Often such life-long Christians - war vets and widows, cancer survivors and congregational long-timers - can be overheard speaking to the fact that they hold even tighter to those precious promises as they get older. This serves as encouraging evidence that God deepens and strengthens the faith of the faithful among us through the power of Word and Sacrament. For that word of God publicly proclaimed and personally given through study and sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit as he works through these means to strengthen and save.

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