

Songs of the Season



Advent Service Three

2022

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

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December 14, 2022

Midweek of Advent 3

The order of worship is based upon *Evening Prayer*, from *Hymnal Supplement 98* (CPH, 1998)

Service of Light

- ¶ The Spirit and the Church cry out:
- ¶ Come Lord Jesus.
- ¶ All those who await His appearance pray:
- ¶ Come Lord Jesus.
- ¶ The whole creation pleads:
- ¶ Come Lord Jesus.

Hymn of Light 891 O Light Whose Splendor

- ¶ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- ¶ It is right to give Him thanks and praise.
- ¶ Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ¶ Amen.

Psalm 24

¹The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,
²for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸**Who is this King of glory?**
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰**Who is this King of glory?**
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Amen.

Reading Luke 2:28-32

[Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,
²⁹“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to
your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹that you have pre-
pared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gen-
tiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

P In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by
the prophets.

C **But now in these last days He has spoken to us by His
Son.**

Canticle Hymn (*Nunc Dimittis*)

937 Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace

Litany

P In peace let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to
the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the
Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the
Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship
and praise let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and
for all the people, let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For our public servants, for the government and those who
protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every
good deed, let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and pro-
tection in this and every place let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in
this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the
people here present who await from the Lord great and abun-
dant mercy let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the
earth, and for peaceful times let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and
need let us pray to the Lord.

C **Lord, have mercy.**

P For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ
let us give thanks to the Lord.

C **Alleluia.**

P Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

Silence for meditation.

P Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend
ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our
Lord.

C **To You, O Lord.**

P O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels,
and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace
which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to
obey Your commandments; and also that we, being defended
from our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through
the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns
with You and the Holy Spirit, God forever.

C **Amen.**

P Lord, remember us in Your kingdom, and teach us to pray:
C **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,**
 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is
 in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and
 forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who
 trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and
 the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

P Let us bless the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Presentation of the Offering

Office Hymn 341 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

Sermon

Prayer

P O Jesus, Word of God made flesh, through whom the world was formed and by whose Word all things are upheld, we stand in humble awe and reverence before the great mystery of Your incarnation. Our reason cannot comprehend how You, the Almighty Son of God—our Creator and Preserver—could be born on earth of a virgin and live here as our flesh-and-blood Brother. You are both God and man. But what we cannot understand with our minds, You have graciously enabled our hearts to accept by faith. We thank and praise You that through the Holy Spirit You have directed our hearts to bow in faith before You. You are indeed our God who was made flesh, our Sin-bearer, our Substitute under divine wrath, our Savior from sin, our Righteousness, our Hope, our Joy, our Peace.

Through Your Spirit, keep us in true repentance so that we ever confess our sins and unworthiness, and so ever more trust the sacrifice You made on the cross for us.

O Savior of the world, send the Holy Spirit to create faith in every heart through the Gospel, so that every sinner may find in You forgiveness of their sins and eternal rest and salvation for their souls. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, empowering us to testify to others that they, too, have been ransomed by Your blood; and be pleased to use our testimony as You effectively call sinners to You.

With the Spirit directing and controlling our lives, bless our efforts to overcome sin and to live righteously in this evil

world. Where we have failed in doing good, where we have lacked love for our neighbor, wherever we have disobeyed Your holy Law and sinned, assure us of Your forgiveness that is full and free thereby restoring us unto You.

Lord, increase our faith so that with Your help we will be able to chase our worries away, cast out all our doubts, subdue every desire in us to sin, and change our gloom and sorrow to joy and hope.

At last bring us safely to Yourself in heaven where, together, with all the saints, we will gladly proclaim our hosannas to you through endless ages in words and works. We ask all these things, knowing that as our Lord and loving Savior You can and will hear us.

C **Amen.**

P Lord, we thank You that You have taught us what You would have us believe and do. Help us by Your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to hold fast Your Word in hearts which You have cleansed that thereby we may be made strong in faith and perfect in holiness, and be comforted in life and in death.

C **Amen.**

Blessing

P The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ☧ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C **Amen.**

Closing Hymn 880 Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow

Silent Prayer

Upcoming Services

December 18—Regular Sunday Worship/Holy Communion 10 am

December 24—Christmas Eve Worship with Children's Program 6:30 pm

**December 25—Christmas Day, Hymn Sing 9:45, Worship/Holy
Communion 10 am (No SS or Adult/Youth Bible Study)**

December 31—New Year's Eve Worship @ Concordia, Geneseo 6 pm

**January 1—New Year's Day, Hymn Sing 9:45, Worship/Holy Communion
10 am (No SS or Adult/Youth Bible Study)**

Third Advent Midweek Service
December 14, 2022
Luke 2:28-32

“Songs of the Season: The *Nunc Dimittis*”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This Advent, we are considering the Biblical texts connected to Christ’s birth that have entered the Church’s liturgy as canticles, such as Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, and Zechariah’s song, the *Benedictus*. This evening, we will reflect upon the song of Simeon, known as the *Nunc Dimittis*, the name again coming from the first words in Latin, meaning “now You dismiss.”

Historically, and based upon its words quite aptly, this canticle was used in the evening Vespers as a Christian’s bedtime prayer, a tradition which continued in Lutheran hymnals until *Lutheran Service Book*, which moved it to Compline (Prayer at the Close of the Day).¹ Even more fittingly when considering the biblical account, the Nunc Dimittis is currently used in the Funeral Service.² But it is likely most familiar to us as a post-communion canticle in the Divine Service. And while there is some evidence of early and medieval usage, it seems it was 19th century Lutherans who began to regularly use the Nunc Dimittis in such a way.

One might wonder if this late change was warranted. Or is it an example of the liturgy being a hodgepodge of various things that have been slapped together without any real thought put into it? This evening, we will first meditate upon the *Nunc Dimittis* in its original context and then, hearing that, we will be better able to judge its current liturgical use.

Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus come to the temple in Jerusalem forty days after His birth in order to fulfill the necessary requirements of the Old Testament Ceremonial Law, both Jesus’ presentation to the Lord as the firstborn male and the sacrifices for Mary’s purification. But as the holy family enters the temple courts, they are approached by a man named Simeon.

Based upon what is written, it is very likely that Simeon was old and that he died soon after these events.³ But we know for sure that he was righteous and devout,⁴ believing in the Lord and living a life that gave evidence of his faith. And when he saw Joseph and Mary bring the Child into the temple, Simeon comes up to them, extends his arms to hold Jesus and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, praises God with those words that have become known as the Nunc Dimittis.

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”⁵

While more could be said, there are three major truths proclaimed here. First, Simeon was “waiting for the consolation of Israel”⁶ and was promised “that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”⁷ As seeing Jesus fulfilled this promise, then it is certain that faith in the Coming One is the Old Testament faith and more, that the Coming One *had finally come* in the person of Mary’s son, Jesus. Thus any other view of the Old Testament, such as that it

promises an earthly restoration of the nation of Israel, or that obedience to the Law saved those under the old covenant, is shown to be completely false. No. Christ Jesus alone fulfills the prophets' promises concerning the consolation and restoration of Israel.⁸

Second, the promised Christ is not for blood-Israel alone, but for all people, for Simeon praises God saying that His salvation has been "prepared in the presence of all peoples." Truly, that the Christ is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" is "for glory to your people Israel." For what greater glory could any nation have than the honor of being the people from whom the Christ comes? Surely there is none! And since all people must come to the Christ to be saved, by so doing, they come to Israel, for the Christ, according to His human nature, is an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham and a king in the line of David. The Christ restores *true Israel* by bringing Jew and Gentile alike back to their God.⁹ And so, the Old Testament promise that the Gentiles would come to Mount Zion is fulfilled *as they are brought to faith in Jesus!*¹⁰

Third, and based upon all that was just said, it is quite right to point to Simeon as an example of how one who has faith in Christ Jesus is able to face death. Whether he was old or not, whether he died later that day or, though unlikely, much later, whatever the circumstances, *Simeon was able to depart in peace.* He had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, the one who would save him and all people from their sins. And now, seeing the fulfillment of God's promise before his eyes, touching it with his hands as he held the baby Jesus in his arms, he faced death without fear. And so to can we face death without fear for our faith, like Simeon's, is in Christ Jesus, who has taken our sins away by His life and death for us. Like Simeon, we too are able to depart this world in peace, for we too have peace with God in Jesus our Savior!

Yes, we can relate to these words of Simeon, that we can *depart in peace according to the Lord's Word*, that is, His Word of Absolution, our sins forgiven in Christ and so salvation is ours and heaven is our home. Yet, we may have some trouble with the rest of his words. We might well be tempted to say something like, "Simeon got to see Christ with his own eyes, touch Him with his own hands. How can I speak or sing his words in the liturgy, make them my own, without having the same opportunity?" It would seem a solid point. But is it, really?

Dear fellow redeemed, take a moment and consider what Simeon actually *saw and touched.* Not a mighty conqueror armed to the teeth, or a glorious king in heavenly splendor. No. He saw was a little helpless baby in His mother's arms whom he then held. Yet, *by faith he recognized* that little baby for who He truly was, God's Son and the promised Christ.

Based upon that, we come to see that our Lutheran forebears were actually rather spiritually insightful when they began to use Simeon's song after receiving the Lord's Supper. For our situation is fairly similar to Simeon's. Just as he saw only a baby, we don't see much in the Communion either. A small piece of bread, a little wine. Yet, in Spirit shaped faith through God's Word, we too recognize that we are seeing and touching *so much more.* In fact, in the Sacrament we have something more than Simeon had. For Christ's work of salvation is finished. With the eyes of faith, we see in the Communion Christ's body and blood, we touch Him with our lips, and through faith receive the forgiveness He has won for us when His body hung on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, when His blood poured out to make peace with God for us.

Yes, it is quite proper that Simeon's song, the Nunc Dimittis, has been included in the liturgy. As we speak or sing it, we are again given the opportunity to confess our faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of the Lord's salvation for mankind as a whole, and for each of us in particular. And as we confess these words, and hear others confess them as well, our faith is strengthened since those words assure us that we can depart this life in peace without fear. And this assurance is made all the more certain to us when we sing them *right after we have seen and touched the Lord's salvation*, Christ Jesus, who gives us His body and blood to eat and to drink, and with them also gives to us the forgiveness of sins, new life in the Spirit, and eternal salvation.

So dear Christians, the next time you are given an opportunity to praise God by singing Simeon's song, especially after the Communion, sing it with reverence and joy. Do such remembering that whether you are near death or have many more years on earth left, you can depart in peace whenever the Lord calls you home, for in Jesus you have peace with God. And having that peace which overcomes death itself, you also can live every day of your life in that same peace until you depart. Depart from this world of sorrow to arrive in the realms of glory.

"Lord, now you are letting your servant[s] depart in peace, according to your word; for [our] eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Amen!

¹ *Lutheran Service Book* p. 258. Compline was the last of the seven daily prayers used in the monasteries.

² The Funeral Service is found in *Lutheran Service Book* p. 281. The Rite of the Commendation of the Dying is found in the *Pastoral Care Companion*.

³ The full biblical account of Simeon is recorded in Luke 2:22-35.

⁴ Luke 2:25.

⁵ Luke 2:29-32. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Luke 2:25.

⁷ Luke 2:26.

⁸ For "consolation" see Isaiah 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 61:2; 66:13.

⁹ See Romans 4, 9:6-8

¹⁰ Compare, for example, Isaiah 2:2.