

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Christmas 1 – December 31, 2023**  
**Luke 2:22-40 – Commit to the Wait**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Christ the newborn King! Amen.

The ending contains a new beginning. In the ending of each day, a new day begins. In the ending of the year, a new year begins. As one generation passes away, a new generation rises in its place. Even in ending of the world, when our Lord returns in fiery judgment, we look forward to the beginning of a new heavens and a new earth, the start of life everlasting.

In today's gospel reading, the end of many ages of waiting brings a wonderful new beginning. As the old man Simeon's life draws to a close, he takes the Messiah in his arms, rejoicing that the age of Christ Jesus has begun. At the end of the long Old Testament ages of Israel's waiting, Simeon witnesses the start of a new era of the church and her Lord.

Simeon was advanced in years, as was Anna. Both had been waiting all their lives to see the Lord's Christ. Now at last in the temple they see him, and they are content to die in peace.

Simeon and Anna are the culmination of all the faithful Old Testament believers who waited year after year, century after century, to see the Christ. The Messiah was first promised to Eve, that her offspring would crush the serpent's head. God told Abraham that in him, the Messiah, all the families of the earth would be blessed, but the son of promise was still two thousand years ahead. Isaac and Jacob heard the same, but they all died, waiting. Moses saw him from afar, fourteen hundred years in the future. He prophesied about him, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen." And Moses wrote down the oracle of Balaam, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." But Moses died outside the land of Canaan, seeing it only from afar, only catching a glimpse of the Messiah from afar.

Then a thousand years before his coming, David glimpsed him too. God promised David a son far greater than Solomon, one to reign on his throne forever, "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... My steadfast love will not depart from him... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." But David died without seeing the fulfillment. So also the prophets waited, and died. Elijah did mighty deeds, Elisha even mightier ones, but none were able to save Israel.

Then at last, after many thousand years of waiting, the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would not taste death until he should see the Lord's Christ. And finally, as Simeon's days drew to a close, one day he came. The Holy Spirit told Simeon: This is the one. There was nothing exceptional in his appearance, just an ordinary baby carried by ordinary parents, brought to the temple for a common ritual. But Simeon trusted the Lord's word. This was the Messiah, promised from ages past, the light of the Gentiles, the glory of his people Israel.

So Simeon marveled. How was he of all people granted to see this day? How was he more blessed than Abraham, Moses, and David? So he worshipped God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation."

Since ancient times, the church has sung these beautiful words of Simeon right after we receive the Lord's Supper. For in the Lord's Supper we are like Simeon, receiving the Lord's body into our hands, the same body Simeon held. And we even do Simeon one better. We don't just hold the Lord's Christ in our arms, we actually take his body and blood into our mouth, into our own mortal bodies. We take his life into ourselves. So we can truly depart in peace, we can die in peace, knowing Christ is in us, and we shall not taste eternal death. With Simeon, we shall be raised imperishable, to live and rejoice in our Savior's presence forever.

What joy is ours, and what blessing! Greater even than Simeon! Simeon did not live to see what Jesus came to do, to die and rise and ascend into heaven, to establish the church forever. But we see it all. So rejoice! Our waiting is over! Christmas is finally here! Advent was dragging on and on for weeks, just as it dragged on for thousands of years. But now we finally get to sing the Christmas carols and welcome the Christ child. A new season and a new era have begun.

This is the era of the Lord's Christ, the era Simeon and Anna and all the prophets longed to see. We have crossed into the New Testament, all the way to the year of our Lord, Anno Domini 2023. And tomorrow we enter

yet another new year of our Lord. In this time of the reign of our Lord, in the church, all the great hopes of Israel are fulfilled. We possess the era of his grace. We stand forgiven in his name.

So rejoice, and bless the Lord! How have we been granted to see what the ancient believers longed to see? How have we deserved the blessing of his coming? In the death and resurrection of this child, a death that pierced Mary's heart with grief like a sword, we have eternal life. And he rose to come to us today, not in a temple made with hands, but here in the temple of his body. Here in his word and sacrament, we have the forgiveness of the cross delivered to us personally.

Nevertheless, the Savior is here, but he seems ordinary. And the wait goes on. We have never actually seen Jesus with our eyes. We must believe the Lord's word that this is the one. We must believe he still comes in the church in word and sacrament. And we must believe he is coming again. The waiting is over, but now a new era of waiting has begun. We still await his final coming in glory.

So as another year of waiting for our Savior's return draws to an end, as a new year of waiting begins, let us learn to wait like Simeon and Anna. They were righteous and devout, waiting with confident patience for the consolation of Israel. Their whole lives were focused on the coming Christ. Why should ours be any different, if we are even better off? Anna was in the temple all her days. From the time when her husband died after a mere seven years of marriage until she was 84 years old, she did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer. How should we not seek out God's presence in his church, since we live every day of our lives in the time she prayed so longingly to see?

Wait for the Lord in humble repentance and faith, in a life that is righteous and devout. As this year draws to a close, turn to Jesus and make a new beginning. A new commitment to the wait, a new resolve to imitate the saints of old. Take time to examine your lives, and seek to do better.

Live as children who have seen the light of the Gentiles, blessed by the coming of the mighty Christ. Cast off your old habitual sins, whatever they may be. If you are often impatient and irritable, consider the great patience of Simeon. If you seek money and possessions more than the things of God, consider how Anna sought nothing but to be in God's presence night and day. If you are prone to sexual sin, consider Anna's chastity, how God's grace was enough for her even though she lost her husband early on. And if you are prone to discouragement or anxiety, consider how Simeon never wavered because he kept trusting the Lord's faithful word.

Also, think about your station in life. Are you a father? Then take responsibility for the spiritual care of your family. Bring your children to church and teach them daily at home, just as Joseph brought his son to the temple, according to the law of the Lord. Are you a mother? Raise your children in the faith, with prayer and patience, as Mary did for Jesus. Are you a child? Remember the child Jesus, who grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the grace of God. Commit your way to the Lord, praying that God would make you grow in grace and wisdom like Jesus. If you are a widow, devote your time to the things of God, to prayer and fasting like Anna in the temple. If you are an old man, devote your time to pointing the younger generation to Christ, like Simeon proclaiming the good news to everyone in the temple.

In this new year of the Lord, live as Christians, righteous and devout. Stand firmly. Turn to God for grace, seek his forgiveness as often as you miss the mark. And pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell in us like in Simeon, that we may live holy and God-pleasing lives. May God cast off our works of darkness, to show us the way of light. May he make us righteous and devout, always turning to Jesus as our precious Savior, always prepared for the end of this era and the beginning of his eternal day. And may God give us eager hearts, waiting for the day of his coming, when the great new era will begin, when all sorrow and waiting are ended in Christ and his eternal presence. Then your eyes, which have seen the salvation of Jesus in the church, shall see him face to face in heaven forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.