



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

8th December, 2023

"...my eyes have seen your salvation..."

Luke 2:21-40

We know that Christmas Day will be on the 25th December, but we *don't* know (hopefully!) what gift we may get from a loved one! Supposing you knew what gift you will be given, but you don't know when; -but you will live to receive it!

Simeon had been told *"that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah."* (Luke 2:26). Since ancient times the whole nation had been *"waiting for the consolation of Israel... the Lord's Messiah."* (2:25-26), but Simeon had been promised that he would live to see and recognise that promise, -in his lifetime.

Our last three 'walk-ons' of the year don't appear until *after* the birth of Jesus. Simeon is first, and he saw Jesus around 40 days after his birth (Luke 2:22; cf. Leviticus 12:3-4).

What do we know of Simeon? We know he *"was righteous and devout"* (2:25), and we assume he was 'old'. The sense of the passage is that he represents the devout, humble, faithfully expectant folk of his nation. By contrast the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law in the New Testament give the impression that they had decided what kind of Messiah they were awaiting, and, later, that Jesus didn't fit! Simeon is in another league: *"the Holy Spirit was on him"* and he was alert to His call (v.25-27).

I imagine Simeon sitting quietly in the temple courts, watching hundreds of young couples bringing their newborns, and going home wistfully each night. Then one day he feels compelled more than usual to be there. Like Samuel with the sons of Jesse (1 Samuel 16), I imagine him silently saying, *"Is it this one, Lord; is it this one, Lord..."*. What caused him to recognise Jesus? It was that same Holy Spirit, of course, to whom Simeon was so closely attuned.

I wonder whether it was before or after Joseph and Mary dedicated their little firstborn and made their thank offering that Simeon stepped forward (Luke 2:23-24). In my mind's eye I see them going through the ritual with a priest, and moving away saying to each other, *"That's that, then... nothing special."* Then out of the shadows steps this venerable old man, and as the priests and the protocols fade into the background, his outstretched arms draw them to give their baby for this holy stranger to hold. Then come the words, *"my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."* That was it!

Here was a man not hidebound by tradition and ritual; his devotion is to God, who had promised salvation (Isaiah 45:17 etc.), a light for all nations, *through* Israel, not just *for* them.

We may imagine Simeon then, -retiring to his little garret, awaiting his peaceful death. But he left a disturbance in the heart of Mary, or perhaps a loving warning to prepare her for what was to come (2:34-35), so that she would know it was all in God's salvation plan.

May we pray for just something of the devotion, inspiration, insight and joyful fulfilment of a Simeon.