



***Pray for Peace, People Everywhere***  
**Luke 2:21-32**

**Said the king to the people everywhere,  
 Listen to what I say...  
 Pray for peace, people everywhere!  
 Listen to what I say...  
 The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night  
 He will bring us goodness and light...**

**Luke 2:21-35:**

**<sup>21</sup> On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. <sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."**

**<sup>25</sup> 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 on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:**

**<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."**

**<sup>33</sup> The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."**

**Just 15 days until Christmas--how are we feeling? Peace and joy should fill our hearts, but some of us may feel tired, sad, or depressed.**

**God has given us what we need: a Savior; but we get distracted by this "other stuff."**

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Simeon calls the baby Jesus "God's salvation" and says he will be 'a light unto the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.' He knew that what God was doing here could not be limited to any one race or nationality.  
This child was for the whole world.

This is foundational to this Christmas Gospel: the only way anyone can experience Christ's peace is to recognize that it's intended for all people, all nations, races, and ethnicities—and live their lives accordingly. There's no peace in the lives of people who pit us against them!

As followers of Jesus, we must speak a very firm, clear, but also compassionate "no" to all those who seek to divide us by appealing to our darker nature that still wants some group that we can look down on, and feel superior toward.

a celebration that took place at a swimming pool in New Orleans (IMAGE)



**Are we ever guilty of overlooking people in our midst who need to hear about the Savior who came to save us and bring peace to our lives and to our world?**

**“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”**

**Mary’s Magnificat says Jesus’ birth means: “He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ...he hath put down the mighty from their seats... and the rich he hath sent empty away” (Luke 1:51-53).**

When confronted with such undeserved love and forgiveness, if we remain hardened and unmoved or even hostile toward Jesus and those whom He loves, then we show ourselves unworthy to live in God's Kingdom. We pass judgment on ourselves.



Jesus lifted people up: the sick, the possessed, the guilt-ridden, the alien, the poor, the judged and rejected—  
Jesus lifted them up and gave them peace with God.

Embrace Christ. And in so doing, graciously embrace a world of strange and difficult people for Christ's sake—because this is exactly what He did.

Pray for peace—for people everywhere.  
Pray for Christ--for people everywhere.



***Pray for Peace, People Everywhere***

**Luke 2:21-32 (AFBC 12/10/17)**

Last Sunday—the first Sunday of Advent—I told you about the Christmas song called “Do You Hear What I Hear?” It was written in the midst of a very fearful time for our nation: 1962—the Cold War—but the specific event that prompted the writing of the song was the Cuban Missile Crisis.

For me, understanding this put the last verse of the song in a whole new light. Listen to what it says as we sing it together:

**Said the king to the people everywhere,  
Listen to what I say...  
Pray for peace, people everywhere!  
Listen to what I say...  
The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night  
He will bring us goodness and light...**

With the threat of nuclear war striking fear in the hearts of anyone who understood how horrific the use of these weapons would be, this song was written as a plea for peace: “Pray for peace, people everywhere.” The threat continues, and so does our need to pray.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we value peace. We cherish peace. We pray for peace in our lives, and peace in our world. And with that, we turn to our text for this morning--**Luke 2:21-35:**

**<sup>21</sup> On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. <sup>22</sup> When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord**

<sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

<sup>25</sup> 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 on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

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<sup>33</sup> The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. <sup>34</sup> 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, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

So here we have old Simeon, rejoicing over this child whom he recognizes as being God’s Messiah, the Savior. Yet before he finishes, he warns of trouble ahead and tells the baby’s mother, Mary, that her own soul will be pierced as if by a sword.

We’re two weeks into Advent now—**just 15 days until Christmas. So... how are we feeling? Peace and joy should fill our hearts, but some of us**, perhaps, just aren’t there yet. We **may feel tired, sad, depressed even.** Psychologists tell us these are common problems this time of year.

There’s so much to do—so many people to prepare for. Our time may be strained and our budgets stressed. Our emotions can get stretched almost to the breaking point.

Or... maybe you would love to have more to do. You long to have people to prepare for and presents to buy and wrap and put under the tree... but there's really no need for that this year.

We understand that the true meaning of Christmas is exactly what old Simeon said. **God has given us what we need: a Savior.**

**But we get distracted by this "other stuff;"** all the busy-ness, or the loneliness, or whatever it is that seems to get in the way of the peace and contentment we want to experience. If we're not careful, though, we'll end up settling for something much less.

Hold that thought as we hear again—listening a bit more closely this time to—the words of Simeon. He takes the baby Jesus into his arms and says: (Read 29-32)

**<sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. <sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."**

Do you see this?--an old man, holding a baby, while talking about this child's future impact on people's lives. Have you ever noticed how babies and fortune-telling go together?

"Why, look at the size of that boy—He's going to be a football player!" "She has such long fingers—I bet she'll play the piano."

Parents eat this kind of stuff up, of course, and no doubt Mary and Joseph did, too. After all, they were proud of their boy; and on his very first trip to church, here was this saintly old gentleman saying such wonderful things about their son.

What would have been a happy time regardless became even more exciting when Simeon said what he did. He spoke words of good news. This was confirmation of all that Mary and Joseph had been told.





This child was indeed extraordinary. **Simeon calls the baby Jesus “God’s salvation” and says he will be ‘a light unto the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.’**

Simeon loved his own nation, certainly; yet **he knew that what God was doing here could not be limited to any one race or nationality. This child was for the whole world.** He still is!

This is why we set a \$10,000 goal for our Global Missions Offering! God so loved the world that He gave us His son, and in response, we go and give and pray for this outreach to the whole world—good news for all people.

This was not the prevailing view in his day, but old Simeon, guided by God’s Spirit, understood it. The Christ Child was to bring light to all who were in darkness. Every person of good will could know peace and joy through Christ Jesus, whatever their race, status, or nationality. “He will bring US goodness and light.”

In fact, **this is foundational to this Christmas Gospel: the only way anyone can experience Christ’s peace is to recognize that it’s intended for all people, all nations, races, and ethnicities—and live their lives accordingly.**

**There’s no peace in the lives of people who must always pit us against them**—whether male vs. female, white vs. black, rich vs. poor, Southern vs. Northern, Protestant vs. Catholic, Believer vs. Unbeliever, citizen vs. alien—the list is long, and some seem to devote their lives to expanding this list of divisions.

**As followers of Jesus, we must speak a very firm and clear, but also compassionate, “no” to all those who seek to divide us by appealing to our darker nature that still wants some group that we can look down on, and feel superior toward.**

Even the very first announcement of our Lord's birth made it clear that such thinking was no longer acceptable among God's people. The angel said, "...behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." "All"—without any man-made limits.

Do we believe this—that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people? Well, sure we do—we're Baptists--evangelistic—we talk missions and pray for missions and give to missions—we believe!

But do we live this? Do we "live-out" this belief that the Gospel is for everyone? Through the words of our mouths and the attitudes of our hearts, is it clear to all that this is what we believe?

It could seem to those looking on—impartial observers--that we believe the Gospel is only for our families and perhaps other people who are already close to us in some way. If there's any chance this could be the case, how can we change this perception?

How might we get the message across that we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone? Since there's so much talk in the Christmas story about it being Good News for all people, this seems like an appropriate question to raise.

Several years ago, I read a news account of **a celebration that took place at a swimming pool in New Orleans (IMAGE)**. Approximately 100 certified lifeguards who had served the various municipal pools around that city had gathered to celebrate the fact that they had gone through an entire summer season with no drownings. None! It was the first time this had ever happened.



The lifeguards also brought some guests with them to share in the celebration, including a 31-year-old man named Jerome Moody. Somehow, during those festivities, and while surrounded by all these lifeguards, Mr. Moody slipped below the surface of the water; and no one noticed. He drowned that day--hard to miss the irony.

**Are we ever guilty of overlooking people in our midst who need to hear about the Savior who came to save us and bring peace to our lives and to our world?** Are we sensitive enough, observant enough, compassionate enough... to respond to their need?

Old Simeon told all who would listen that Jesus had come to bring the light of God's salvation—to them, and... to all people.

The holy season, and the Good News of the Christ who came for us at Christmas, will mean so much more to us as we allow God to use us to get this word out, and use our arms and our hearts to embrace all people—for Christ's sake.

Old Simeon said that he could depart in peace now—he was ready to die—because now his eyes had seen God's salvation—he had seen the Christ, the Savior of the world.

I suppose that good word remained on Simeon's lips until the Lord took him home. Friends, if we have experienced the peace that Christ brings to our lives, the good news of His salvation should be on our lips. It should be our witness, and our lifestyle, as well.

But let's also pay attention to what Simeon says in verses 34-35: **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."**

Simeon's first words about the Christ-child are positive, but he's also senses what life will hold for Jesus. He feels compelled to tell Mary some sad and sobering news—that Mary's heart would one day be broken, pierced through as if by a sword, because of the resistance to Jesus' message and the abuse her son must endure.

Simeon provides a summary of people's reactions to Jesus when he talks about **"the falling and rising of many... and a sign that will be spoken against...."**

What would people's reactions be? Some will rise up and follow Jesus; but others will stumble and fall away and speak against all

that He stands for—and thus the true convictions of people’s hearts will be revealed.

Yes, many will fall. Don’t forget that there’s bad news for some in the coming of Jesus. Remember **Mary’s Magnificat—what she said Jesus’ birth would mean: “He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ...he hath put down the mighty from their seats... and the rich he hath sent empty away” (Lk. 1:51-53).**

God doesn’t judge US, friends, so much as WE judge ourselves. In our resistance to what Jesus taught us and stood for, we try to pass judgment on others; but it’s really a judgement on ourselves.

If, when confronted with the perfect goodness and sacrificial love of Christ, we’re moved to respond with a gracious love toward all, then we show ourselves ready to live in God’s Kingdom.

But if, **when confronted with such undeserved love and forgiveness, we remain hardened and unmoved or even hostile toward Jesus and those whom He loves, then we show ourselves unworthy to live in God’s Kingdom. We pass judgment on ourselves.** In our prideful rejection of Jesus and His way, we fall.

Jesus Christ demands a decision from us. We cannot remain neutral. Neutrality/indecision/failure to identify with both the person and the message of Christ...is to reject Him. And those who reject Christ will be brought down—way down... to eternal death and destruction. The message is clear: “many will fall.”



But the Good News is that “many others will rise!” Everywhere **Jesus** went, He **lifted people up: the sick, the possessed, the guilt-ridden, the alien, the poor, the judged and rejected—Jesus lifted them up** out of their despair and gave them **peace with God**.

And He still does. What's got you down today? What is there in your life that's trying to keep you down? What prevents you from experiencing the peace of Christ within your own life and being an instrument of His peace in this world?

God wants to lift all of us out of the darkness by reminding us that, no matter what we may be feeling today, the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas are always available to us. The offer stands.

**Embrace Christ. And in so doing, graciously embrace a world of strange and difficult people for Christ's sake—because this is exactly what He did.** Listen: we don't have to like them all—we won't! But in Christ, we do have to love them all—and by His grace, we can!

Only then will we discover the blessing of peace—even in a world where hateful and divisive rhetoric conspires to make us forget about Jesus and His Gospel of Peace.

Yes, we can and should take a clear stand against those who sow seeds of hate and division, but this is so important: we take our stands armed only with the love of God in Jesus Christ. Anything more, and we become the problem, not the solution.

Jesus never said it would be easy. In fact, old Simeon made it clear that it wouldn't be. But that doesn't change the fact that the way of Jesus is our only path to peace.

So, pray for peace, people everywhere. And in doing so, **pray for peace—for people everywhere. Pray for Christ--for people everywhere.**

If we know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord, then, by all means, let's reflect His light by faithfully serving Him and others as instruments of His peace in this world. For Christ's sake, Amen.