

Luke 2:22-40 + Sing a New Song in the New Year!
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY
1st Sunday after Christmas: New Year's Eve + 31 December 2017

How quickly they got old! Less than a week ago, you could flip on any number of radio stations to hear an old, familiar Christmas song like “Jingle Bells,” “The Little Drummer Boy,” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” “White Christmas,” or the appropriately named “The Christmas Song.” They played those songs and played those songs. They played those songs so much that the songs got “old” before Christmas even arrived.

Of course, some of those songs are fun or silly. Some have certain memories attached to them, but listening to those Christmas songs for too long can be like a diet of junk food and candy. They're enjoyable for a little while, but soon you realize how shallow they really are. They speak of peace that's really only wishful thinking. They sing of joy that briefly appears on Christmas Eve among family and friends, but disappears by December 26.

In a sense, that really describes our world's after-Christmas song, doesn't it? As soon as the rush to Christmas passes with discarded wrapping paper and leftovers finished and after-Christmas sales, the peace and joy of Christmas get put away with the decorations as everyone goes back to life as usual. The world returns to war and conflict and terrorism and fear and fighting. People go back to picking up the pieces of broken lives and broken livelihoods. People go back to picking up the pieces after hurricanes and wildfires and violence and disasters. People go back to fighting and arguing and attacking each other over this opinion or that viewpoint or whatever the President happened to tweet that day. Loved ones become selfish Scrooges as tempers fly and bills pile up. The depression of the winter blues sets in as winter keeps pouring on the snow and cold. The decorations lose their luster and soon you find used trees decorating roadsides. The after-Christmas song becomes a depressing dirge about the reality of sin in our lives. It's an old, familiar song that every generation has sung mourning the loss of real peace and joy in this world ever since our first parents sang its first refrains centuries ago.

This morning as we stand on the brink of another New Year, we travel back 2,000 years to hear a song that changed the world, an ancient song that is still new today. That song speaks of true peace and joy. That song flows from the lips of an old man and an old woman, yet it's a song that even little children sing. This morning let's **SING A NEW SONG IN THE NEW YEAR!**

Jesus had reached the ripe old age of 40 days. The Law of Moses required that a mother who had recently given birth had to wait 40 days before she could go to the temple to offer a sacrifice for her ceremonial purification. Since Mary and Joseph were poor, they were allowed to bring a pair of doves or pigeons to sacrifice. The Law of Moses also required parents to present their firstborn son to the Lord. In the process they set him apart for a life of service to the Lord. How true that would be of Jesus!

As Mary and Joseph walked through the temple courts, an older man suddenly came rushing towards them. The new parents stood in shock as the man lifted Jesus out of his mother's arms and cradled the infant in his own. Was he trying to kidnap their baby boy? The man named Simeon quickly dispelled their fears as he sang an unfamiliar song. ***“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*** The song sounds familiar to us, but to Mary and Joseph, that song was brand new. Simeon sang a song of peace long-expected by countless believers in the Old Testament, but never seen or heard before that day.

Simeon was no stranger to the ancient songs of the Old Testament, songs that sang of hopeful expectation for Immanuel who was coming. Simeon faithfully trusted in God's promises given over the centuries of One who would come to deliver Israel. He was familiar with the old songs of Isaiah: ***“The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it,”*** (40:5) and ***“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”*** (49:13) Simeon knew the old, familiar song about the coming Messiah when God himself said, ***“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*** (49:6)

Simeon's song came from a desire to finally see that true peace long-promised and long-expected. All Old Testament believers had hoped to see ***“the consolation of Israel”*** before their dying day. The Holy Spirit had placed that same desire in Simeon's heart, but had given him a special privilege, ***“You will not die until you***

see the Lord's Christ!" Wow! Simeon would actually see his long-expected Savior with his own eyes before he died. What else could Simeon do than sing a new song of peace?

Simeon sang of the peace we and our world need, but he sang not of world peace that only works if none of us had the stain of sin. Instead Simeon sang of a peace many would misunderstand. While handing the infant back to his mother, Simeon told her, **"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."** That Child would become a stumbling block to many because they didn't want peace with God. That Child would one day have enemies who would reject the Prince of Peace as a demon, his peace as foolishness, and his divine mission as worthless.

In spite of their opposition, that Child would bring mankind peace with God. That Child was already perfectly obeying God's holy Law through his presentation at the temple. That Child would continue to do so all his life. Suffering awaited that Child, however, since that Child would one day bear the pain of hell for you, me, and everyone else. That Child, through suffering, would finally bring us peace with God. That's why Simeon sang his new song of peace.

He knew this peace with God was not exclusive to the Jews, but as Isaiah had once sang, this peace was for all people. **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** The Lord did not hide his plan to bring true peace to our world. Instead he revealed that peace so all nations would see it, even Gentiles like you and me.

You see, that little Child cradled in Simeon's arms came to rescue you from the deadly dangers of sin and death. That little Child came to bring you peace with God, in spite of your sin, in spite of your guilt or your worry or your fear or your uncertainty. That little Child came to open your sin-blinded eyes to see the light of God's glorious peace through Jesus. That little Child came to be the splendor and delight of God's faithful people. That little Child came to bring life to the dying, so that an old man like Simeon could fall asleep in God's peace and open his eyes in glory. It's no wonder why Simeon sang a new song of peace! It's no wonder why we abandon the old depressing dirge of sin and death, and instead loudly proclaim the new song of peace through Jesus!

When we sing this new song of peace, we also sing of the joy that flows from that peace. An elderly woman named Anna approached Joseph and Mary after Simeon had left them. **"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."** Like Simeon, Anna was no stranger to the old songs of the Old Testament. She was quite elderly and a regular in the temple courts, practically living there as she worshiped day and night, hoping for the Messiah to come. When she saw Simeon rejoice at the child's arrival, she knew that that Child was the source of her hope, the source of her peace, the source of her joy. Her **"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"** became **"Joy to the World."** Seeing Jesus, Anna sang a new song of joy.

She sang because this joy lived in spite of sorrow. Anna had been a widow for many years. She had seen death in her life and would eventually face death herself. Yet that Child brought joy to her sorrow and comfort to her grief. Because that Child lived, she also would live. In that little one in Mary's arms was the hope of the resurrection. That hope of the resurrection was Anna's source of true joy. Her dirge of death became a new song of eternal joy!

Anna's joy flowed from a heart full of thanks. When Anna laid her eyes on her newborn Savior, she gave thanks to God. She knew what that little Child would accomplish. The prophets had foretold that long ago. As New Testament believers singing the same song of joy, we realize what that little Child has accomplished as the Apostle John writes, **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."** (1 John 4:9) That little Child came to die for us, so we would die to sin. That little Child came to live for us, so we would live again. Therefore our lives become a responsive song of joy and thanks for what that little Child has accomplished for us.

That song of joy is also a song to be shared. Anna shared that song of joy with everyone she met. She wanted her friends and neighbors to join her in this new chorus of joy because the long-awaited Savior had finally come for them too. We share that joy as well. We don't stop singing **"Joy to the World"** simply because Christmas and the New Year have come and gone.

We sing about the peace and joy that we have through Christ while we live in a world desperately seeking such peace and joy. We share that song of joy with our loved ones, our neighbors, our co-workers, and our classmates.

We sing to spread the news that the Savior has come to bring us real peace and joy, which will last long after the celebrations of 2017 are forgotten. In all this, we continue to keep that new song of peace and joy in our hearts and on our lips like Simeon and Anna so long ago.

As the old year comes to a close and a new year begins, we're more than happy to set aside the old Christmas classics for another year. We're more than happy to leave behind all the old sorrows and griefs and pain and tears of the old year. Yet let's keep singing the new song of peace and joy in Christ! With our Savior's help, we will not let the old, depressing dirges of sin and death destroy the true peace we share with all believers. With our Savior's help, we will not let those dirges ruin the true joy we have for all eternity. Sing a new song to the Lord, my friends, for Christ has done marvelous things! Amen.