

Steering wheels gripped white-knuckle tight, as drivers navigate interstates turned ice rinks. Anxious hours pacing by the window, waiting for precious family cargo to arrive. Desperate, suitcase-laden sprints through the airport like a Home Alone movie. Holiday travel is often stressful because of so many uncertain, uncontrollable circumstances; will the roads be dangerous? Will their car break down? Will my flight get cancelled? Unknowns often turn those departures into stressful endeavors.

And it's not just travel-related departures that can be stressful. Tonight, we'll depart from 2017, and journey into 2018, a new year full of uncertainties and unknowns that can make the new year a stressful departure.

But imagine how much less stressed you'd feel about those journeys if before you departed, God promised, "You will arrive safely to your destination." It would completely change your view of otherwise stressful aspects of the journey. "Yeah, I'm driving on an icy road with cars filling the ditches, but God promised." Yeah, I've only got 10 minutes to catch my connection, but God promised." "Yeah, my son's not home yet, but God promised." "Yeah, I might lose my job, or a relationship, or my health in 2018, but God promised." Trusting in God's promise, we could depart, not shackled with fear or stress, but filled with peace for the journey.

In Luke's gospel, we meet a man who had received a peace-producing promise from God. ***"There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon...it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ."*** Imagine the peace Simeon could feel, even in difficulty, knowing that his eyes wouldn't close in death before he would see the promised, eagerly awaited Messiah, with his own eyes.

And yet, we don't have to envy Simeon's peace, because it's our peace too. As we hear God's promise to Simeon, we realize that we aren't excluded, departing in uncertainty and fear. Rather, to us, the same promise has been **Revealed by God, for Peaceful Departures.**

Fresh off of Christmas, Luke's Christmas gospel is still on our hearts. We heard again the familiar account of Mary's firstborn son, born in a stable and placed in a manger; the wonder of the angel's appearance to terrified shepherds, and the good news proclaimed, "A Savior has been born to you." But after the shepherds returned to their flocks, Luke fast-forwards forty days after Jesus' birth to today's text, where we find Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem for two purposes: Purification, and Presentation.

According to the Law of Moses, a woman was ceremonially unclean for 40 days after childbirth, and therefore unable to worship at the Temple. After 40 days passed, the woman was to bring two doves to be sacrificed at the temple, to make her ceremonially clean, for purification.

Mary and Joseph's other purpose in coming was the Presentation of Jesus. According to God's command, each Israelite family was to dedicate their firstborn son for lifelong service to the Lord. However, God appointed the Levites to do his priestly temple work, so the firstborn sons of other tribes would pay a "ransom price" to release them from priestly service. Eager to follow God's instructions, Mary and Joseph dutifully came to the Temple.

Do you see the beautiful irony? Jesus' earthly parents, paying their five shekels to exempt him from priestly service; to exempt the ultimate High Priest, who would sacrifice not doves, but himself, to cleanse people from sin; the one who would pay not five shekels, but his life, as the ransom price to exempt the whole world from eternal suffering in hell. For that purpose, this child was born.

There at the Temple, we meet Simeon, the man God promised would see the Savior with his own eyes. We're told that Simeon was ***"righteous and devout... waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was***

upon him.” Simeon was a believer who devoutly lived his faith; he trusted in God’s promised Messiah, and was eagerly awaiting his arrival. But this wasn’t something Simeon figured out himself. The Holy Spirit was upon him! In these first three verses, the Spirit is given credit three different times for Simeon’s faith and actions. The truth of this promise was revealed to Simeon by God himself.

On a seemingly normal day, the Spirit moved Simeon to enter the temple courts. As he stood observing the Temple’s bustling crowds, his eyes rested upon a forty day-old baby cradled lovingly by his mother. With his own eyes, just as God promised, Simeon saw his faith realized.

Take a moment to soak in this beautiful scene. See an elderly man, rushing forward with youthful, unrestrained joy. With wrinkled hands, he scoops the baby boy out of the surprised mother’s arms, and cradles him close, eyes wide with wonder. Don’t lose sight of the unfathomable picture before us: God, who created and holds the world in his hands, gently nestled in the crook of a sinful old man’s tired arms. This is our God! This is the promise of God revealed—the almighty God sets it all aside to become “God with us” — born of a virgin, clothed in mortal flesh and blood.

And because God revealed it to him, Simeon understood what his eyes witnessed. Holding God’s Son in his arms, he worships, praising God for His faithfulness. **“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.”**

Certainly, the promise that God made him must have been a great source of peace for Simeon. But I imagine at times, it caused him to worry and wonder. As the days marched on, and death seemed more imminent, Satan must have attacked him with doubts. “Maybe you missed him. Maybe he’s not coming. Maybe God lied.” But here, as he hold and beholds God’s promise fulfilled, he proclaims certainty of peace.

Yet, you can picture the confused looks people shot Simeon’s way as he rejoiced over a baby. Even Mary and Joseph were shocked by what Simeon says about their son. There were probably hundreds of people who passed by this unassuming couple without giving their infant a second thought. Why such joy over an infant? I mean, after all, he’s just a baby.

Because of that, it’s not all that surprising that most people failed to acknowledge him. Why put your trust in a newborn? It would be like a cancer patient in the hospital, walking into the birth wing, picking up a newborn and rejoicing, “This child will one day cure cancer!” It’s a nice thought, but how do you know? How can they be certain who this baby will grow up to be? And even if he does, you won’t be around long enough to benefit from it! John’s gospel records, **“Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.”** We see that here at the Temple; in his doubting disciples; in the hateful shouts of those who crucified him. People didn’t recognize this unassuming Jesus for who he was...unless God revealed him to them.

Please don’t take for granted God’s amazing grace that he revealed Christ to you! That he’s allowed you to hear the angel’s messages to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds—proclaiming who this child is, and what he came to do. In faith, you also grasp the reality of the certain peaceful departures that are yours in Christ. And that is God’s grace revealed!

But we don’t always put that understanding into practice very well. If God kept his promise to send his Son, then I can certainly trust his promise to make all things work out for my good. And yet, when something doesn’t go according to my life plan, rather than clinging to, “Yes...but God has promised,” I forget about the miracle of Immanuel cradled in Simeon’s arms. The trouble is, we recognize Christ, but often, we fail to

remember who he really is, and don't take to heart the peace and joy that only he can give. And so my journey of life is filled not with constant peace, but with white-knuckle fear.

That's why we need God to continually reveal Christ to us. Simeon was certain of a peaceful departure, because God revealed who this unassuming infant really was. Not a role model to teach people how to earn salvation. Not a political leader, bent on restoring Israel's power, or filling people's bellies. As Simeon declares, he could depart in peace because that child cradled in his arms whom he couldn't tear his eyes away from, was "God's salvation!"

That revealed truth gave Simeon complete peace. Because God kept his promise to send that Savior, he knew God would also keep his promise to give eternal life to all who believe in him. Whether the Romans ruled, the religious leaders were self-righteous, or his life was full of troubles and uncertainty, he could depart from the temple that day certain of peace, because God promised. He would one day depart from this world in peace, because God promised. Because he saw the Savior with his own eyes, held him in his own arms, he could trust completely that God will keep his promises. And so can we!

You probably recognize Simeon's song of praise as he held baby Jesus. We call it the "Nunc Dimittis" meaning, "You now dismiss," and sing it regularly in worship. The two times we most regularly sing the Nunc Dimittis in worship are after we receive Holy Communion, where we come into contact with our Savior in his flesh and blood, just like Simeon did that day in the Temple.

We also sing it as part of Evening Prayer service, as we depart another day with praise and thanks for Jesus' grace; as we prepare to depart in sleep, trusting that God will preserve us through another night, or take us home to Heaven; departing in peace, as God once again revealed through his Word our Savior, the Word made flesh who gives us peace.

Notice, Simeon used the word "dismiss." I find great comfort and beauty in the fact that I am the object, and not the subject in the verb "dismiss." I don't depart according to my decisions. When God knows the timing is perfect for our good, having provided everything we need, God dismisses us. Dismisses us out into the world, to live for him and share the message. Dismisses us from this world to our eternal rest in Heaven. In every departure and dismissal, there is complete peace. Because our eyes have seen God's salvation, you will arrive safely at your destination. Depart in peace. Amen.